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*Social representations and homelessness: a study on  
the construction of expert knowledge.*

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## **Declaration**

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I develop a social representational approach to understanding expert knowledge on homelessness. I relate the concept of cognitive polyphasia with Bakhtin's views on the polyphony of the person, and Herman & Kempen's concept of the dialogical self. I link dialogical epistemology and ontology to show that, (i) polyphony and polyphasia of self and knowledge are two sides of the same coin, and (ii) the inner plurality of the person is grounded in the multiple self-other relationships within which identity and knowledge are co-constituted and where different ideas and practices clash and compete. I show that our ability to position ourselves in relation to the knowledge of others explains how the meanings, practices and identities that co-exist within individuals and groups are put to use, enabling us to function in multiple relationships and contexts. The research involved a multidimensional approach comprising: (1.) narrative interviews and focus groups with homelessness professionals (HPs) working in the UK voluntary sector and (2.) participative observation at conferences, and in a voluntary agency. The research showed that homelessness is a contested and contradictory notion. Expert representational fields are simultaneously, identity and knowledge struggles, sharply characterized by cognitive polyphasia, whose contents and dynamics are drawn from the dialogues and battles between the voluntary and the statutory sector and the public at large. I conclude by suggesting that identity and knowledge are inseparable from both the multiple relationships in which they develop and from processes of self-other positioning.

**Keywords:** Cognitive polyphasia, Dialogical self, Homelessness, Identity, Social representations.

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## 1. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

### 1.1. Homeless in the UK; Current Realities.

Homelessness continues to be a pressing social problem and a major case of socio-economic exclusion in the UK. While it has received a great deal of attention since the mid-1990s from policy makers, researchers and service providers, there remains much controversy about the extent of the problem, its underlying causes, and the most effective ways to address it. These controversies are partly due to the fact that in the UK there is widespread disagreement on the definition of homelessness, which is subject to a contested variety of meanings and interpretations. This is expressed in the ongoing debate over the ways to define what 'homelessness'<sup>1</sup> is and to identify which people belong to this group. The homeless have been unanimously identified as a socially excluded group and various policies, such as the Rough Sleepers Unit, have been implemented to tackle the issue (Pleace & Quilgars, 2003). However, support and care structures are diversified across two clashing and co-existing sectors: the voluntary and the statutory, each holding different definitions and competing approaches to the problem.

The voluntary sector encompasses a wide array of organizations, which provide services such as; housing advice, training and vocational guidance, basic health provision, hostels, social services and psychological support. Despite being independent from the public and private spheres, the privatization of state social welfare and transference of its responsibility to local authorities and voluntary agencies has led to the blurring of boundaries between the voluntary and governmental sectors and the overlapping of their jurisdictions (Daly, 1997). These developments have had a pronounced impact on the nature and functions of the voluntary sector in the UK. Its former philanthropic role has evolved into the 'provider' of the statutory 'financial enabler' (Daly, 1997), which has meant a transformation towards a professional homeless industry (Warnes, Crane, Whitehead, & Fu, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that I stress the socially constructed nature of 'homelessness'. The inverted commas indicate the fact that there are not agreed objective meanings of 'homelessness'.

Despite these increased interdependencies, there is a general lack of agreement between sectors on the definition of homelessness. This creates a number of practical problems, ranging from difficulties in estimating the total number of homeless people and the different categories among them. It also has consequences at the level of provision of services, models of intervention and policy design. While state estimations indicate a decline in numbers (see ODPM, 2006), sources from the voluntary sector reveal that there is a vast number of homeless people that are not included in these statistics (Crisis, 2006) because they do not fit within statutory definitions or because they belong to so-called 'hidden' populations (i.e. those sleeping on a friend's sofa). The contested nature of definitions about homelessness makes it difficult to achieve consensual estimations (Hutson & Liddiard, 1994) and impacts negatively on the social, psychological, structural and health needs of those who are not officially considered homeless by statutory definition (Crane & Warnes, 2001).

Like most problems of social exclusion, homelessness is constructed through networks of unstable and contested meanings (Anderson, 1997). Tackling the problem effectively requires a clear understanding of how the issue is framed by different stakeholders and social actors motivated by competing interests. Such knowledge of the socio-political context in which homelessness is constructed and addressed has not been enabled by British Homeless research (Jacobs et al., 1999). The nature of welfare policies, care-related practices, the interventions deemed appropriate to prevent and respond to homelessness, and how the homeless person is treated are all based on meanings and definitions of homelessness. As Pleace and Quilgars (2003) concluded in their examination of British homeless research, there is an urgent need for academics of the social sciences to explore the socially constructed nature of homelessness in the UK from a de-politicized framework; one that is neither led by government funding or by that of voluntary advocates. The social construction of homelessness is an important focus of inquiry since it participates in the marginalization of this social group (Pleace & Quilgars, 2003). It permeates policies, interventions and the matrix of relationships within which the homeless person lives.

In this thesis my purpose is to contribute towards this understanding, by examining social psychological dimensions and their link to socio-political contexts, involved in the constitution of homelessness. These play a central role in the living conditions, the framing of interventions and the production of subjectivities and health of the homeless. I focus on how professionals working with homeless people in the voluntary sector (from now on HPs<sup>2</sup>) produce knowledge about homelessness. HPs offer a privileged entry point for understanding processes of social construction of homelessness due to their positioning as key social actors at the interface between the homeless, the statutory sector, policy makers and society as a whole. HPs are *experts in context*: mediators, translators and integrators of beliefs, meanings and images of homelessness circulating in the UK. Definitional disagreements and conflict of approaches with the statutory sector are core dilemmas with which HPs have to cope in their everyday practices and relationships with clients and other social actors.

Drawing on the theory of social representations (Jodelet, 1989/1991; Moscovici, 2000) and the concept of cognitive polyphasia (Jovchelovitch, 2002, 2007; Moscovici, 1961/1976) and from a Bakhtinian approach (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984a, 1986), I argue that HPs' knowledge production is a plural phenomenon. It is shaped by the definitional clashes and competing approaches that characterize the context of service provision. It is constructed in relation to dialogical<sup>3</sup> others; moving between the streets, hostels and meetings with statutory agencies, and accommodating their experience-based knowledge and ethos to the definitions and models of intervention of statutory agencies. HPs are in a continuous state of negotiations and resolutions about homelessness, and it is through the struggle between adjusting to and contesting others' perspectives on homelessness that their knowledge and self are co-constructed. Understanding how they make sense of the problem and develop practices to deal with it is an important task for a social psychology of homelessness. It can produce valuable insights into the intricacies involved in defining homelessness in the UK and contribute to improving the care and support services

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that with the term 'HP' I am *only* referring to those professionals working in the *voluntary* sector.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the thesis I use 'dialogue' both ontologically and epistemologically to refer to self-other communicative practices through which human beings come to being and systems of knowledge are constructed.

needed by homeless people. Which representations emerge from HPs' relations with others along their different positions in the social landscape? How do their constructions of homelessness represent who the homeless person is and how should she be treated? And how can their knowledge help us to understand the way the clashes between different forms of knowing in contemporary public spheres impact on the definition and resolution of social problems such as homelessness?

### **1.1.2. How Do You Establish Which Elements Constitute Someone as 'Homeless'?**

Definitions of what constitutes homelessness as a social problem are highly unstable and subject to conflicting pressures and debate (Jacobs et al., 1999). Clear unanimous concern about the importance of a meaningful and comprehensive approach to homelessness has not dissipated widespread disagreements about what homelessness means, who belongs to this group, and what are the best solutions to combat it. At the heart of these disagreements is the very context of service provision for the homeless in the UK, which is based on both statutory (public sector, state controlled) and non-statutory (voluntary sector) agencies. Clashes and ongoing struggles between these two sectors are common. These are framed by different definitions of homelessness, diverging understandings of its causes, competing approaches and disagreements in relation to the intentionality behind homelessness and the priority given to the needs of certain groups (i.e families as opposed to individuals). Defining to which extent the homeless person is intentionally causing the homelessness situation sharply differentiates the approaches between statutory and voluntary agencies and constitutes a site for substantial conflict and negotiation between sectors. At the root of these differences are more profound social psychological and political dimensions related to the role of the individual and the social in the construction of homelessness and in the attributions of responsibility for it.

The general approach of the statutory sector is based on access to housing, the intentionality of the individual person in causing the situation of homelessness and her 'priority need'. Homeless people are narrowly defined in terms of

unintentionally lacking secure or permanent accommodation (Warnes et al., 2003). Once assessed to fit within criteria of eligibility for aid and basic categories of priority need, people are channeled into the official procedures for the provision of accommodation and referred to welfare services. The absence of coordination and comprehensive joined-up strategies between housing and other specialist public services (CESI, 2005), and the lack of a more comprehensive, flexible and responsive approach, which offers continuity and assists the emotional and social needs of the homeless have constantly led to the recurrence of episodes of homelessness. Statutory responses tend to be short-term and *ad hoc* by nature, thus leaving a lacuna in services that are left to be filled by the voluntary sector (Daly, 1997). As various commentators have pointed out (Jacobs et al., 1999; Warnes et al., 2003), in adopting very narrow eligibility criteria to establish the boundaries of its target population and to frame its responses, the statutory sector deals with very restricted dimensions of homelessness, reducing the phenomena to a problem of a 'lack of roof over one's head'. The statutory definition of homelessness is ideologically<sup>4</sup> loaded as it constructs 'homelessness' as attributable to internal causes, implies moral assumptions about the person, and reduces the homeless experience to an issue of lack of housing. The way homelessness is defined is critical since it has practical consequences such as the symbolic and structural marginalization of groups that are in real need. It might have implications on the consideration of the importance of this social problem and the policy response to it (Hutson & Liddiard, 1994). Constructions of 'homelessness' based on intentionality locate responsibility in the individual. Thus, they serve to legitimately sustain certain patterns of welfare action to the exclusion of others, concealing the heterogeneity of the group and the intricacy of the problem, thus justifying state lack of assistance.

Policies have constructed two different groups of people: those who are homeless not as a result of individual choice and are therefore considered statutory and those who are intentionally homeless. This criterion of eligibility has in turn

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of ideology is highly contested and is open to multiple interpretations. When used, I refer to Thompson's (1990) definition of ideology as the operation of symbolic forms, which through legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation and naturalisation, serve to sustain existing relations of domination. Ideology in this sense, refers to the way meanings are used in the social world in order to uphold the identities and projects of those in positions of power and to limit the pursuance and realization of others' interests and ontologies.

generated two groups of people: the deserving and the undeserving; those who are regarded as unintentionally homeless and therefore deserve state welfare services and support structures, and those who are deemed homeless through conditions of their own individual choice and therefore do not deserve the assistance of statutory services (Clapham, 2003). The latter group is not officially regarded as homeless and has no legal rights to housing, state support services, or benefits and are left to seek assistance from the voluntary sector. Therefore, the voluntary sector assists the needs of those who are symbolically and materially marginalized by government policies and services.

The hallmark of the voluntary sector's definition of homelessness is that it does not include the criterion of intentionality. It defines homelessness in broader terms and comprehensively understands it as a multi-faceted phenomena that affects all aspects of one's life. It recognizes that beyond 'roofless-ness' there are multiple forms of homelessness, and takes into account the heterogeneity of the homeless population as well as the intricacy of the social and emotional support needs that exist alongside the lack of housing. Their interventions are not restricted to the alleviation of a specific situation or crisis (i.e. through outreach work), but are also motivated by an agenda of prevention and continuity of assistance along their pathway of services towards independence (i.e. advice and tenancy support, training). The aim of voluntary services is to comprehensively tackle the diverse and intertwined dimensions of homelessness, deal with its underlying causes and enable clients to rebuild their lives. This is pursued through an individualised and responsive approach based upon flexibility, creativity and accessibility (Daly, 1997). However, these attributes and the autonomy of the voluntary sector to put into practice its own agenda, are threatened by dramatic transformations of the welfare system. Increased dependency on government funding, greater governmental contract and partnership work, has meant being subject to its competitive bidding to decide which voluntary agency is awarded short-term state funding. This has proved a double-edged sword for the voluntary sector, which though nominally independent from central government, is having to increasingly adapt to statutory practices, bureaucracies and paradigms of 'homelessness'. The wide gap between both sectors in the definition and framing of homelessness, continuous to be at the core of the difficulties confronted by those working with the homeless. The government's emphasis on

stability, control, order, accountability and cost-cutting, jeopardizes the voluntary sector's approach and ultimately the clients' interests, since voluntary agencies are compelled to conform to the rigid agenda of statutory bureaucrats as a condition of funding (Daly, 1997). Within this context the essential role of the voluntary sector in response to homelessness is seriously at threat, and critically needs to be funded and recognized by the Government (Daly, 1997).

The ongoing debate around issues of homelessness and disagreements about what are the best practices for the improvement of the living conditions and resettlement of homeless people are underpinned by dualism between individual and social dimensions. British research and policy discussions have been framed in terms of minimalist or maximalist constructions of homelessness (Clapham, 2003; Jacobs et al., 1999). Minimalist definitions locate the causes of homelessness on the individual, have led to the dichotomy between deserving and undeserving homeless producing policies and interventions designed to deal only with individual factors (Clapham, 2003). Maximalist definitions construct homelessness as the outcome of social-economic shortcomings and emphasize the role of policy as the key solution to end homelessness (Clapham, 2003). These definitions stress the importance of either social structures or psychological and personal factors, but neglect the connections between them (Clapham, 2003). Both frame how homelessness is constructed and dealt with in the public sphere, and provide the backdrop against which policies and responses to homelessness take place. Working in such a contested and contradictory context and operating within increased interdependency from the government, HPs face the challenges of sustaining and putting into practice their approach and conceptualizations while simultaneously dealing with the pressures and requirements of the statutory sector.

This has not dissipated the voluntary sector's role as a watchdog of the government and also advocate of the homeless in its campaigning to educate the public and to contest homelessness policies. Indeed, it performs a pivotal task in communicating and explaining 'homelessness' to the public, politicians and the media (Hutson & Liddiard, 1994). However, despite voluntary agencies' concerns with the need to broaden the limited representations of homelessness, in their advocacy and fundraising role they also use victimizing constructions, since this is

the most effective way to secure funding (Jacobs et al., 1999). Hodgetts and colleagues (2005) have shown that when accessing British television media in order to fit public representations, charity representatives use victimizing characterizations that emphasise the needs of homeless people.

It is against the socio-political context and network of relationships described above that HPs construct knowledge and practices related to homelessness. Considering the social position of these professionals and the matrix of inter-relations that frames their daily experience is key to understanding the nature of their knowledge and the practices they develop towards the homeless person. Understanding their knowledge is important since professionals working in the voluntary sector are well located for the exploration of the different values, meanings and practices that configure how homelessness is constructed and dealt with in the public sphere. Within the context of homeless service provision HPs' knowledge plays an invaluable role in the drawing up and implementation of strategies. They have unsurpassed experience and critical understanding of the breadth of problems faced by homeless people, of the scarce welfare resources and of effective working methods. As a group, they have expertise, which combines theoretical and practical knowledge of homelessness, that no statutory agency has (Crane & Warnes, 2001). The value of HPs' knowledge will be further explored in section 1.4.

## 1.2. Research on Homelessness: Towards a Socio-psychological Understanding of 'Homelessness'.

Academic interest on the homeless commenced in the 1980's, and in 1994, it was claimed, that the homeless population was one of the most popular areas of study since the mid eighties (Snow, Anderson, & Koegel, 1994). Since then research has predominantly focused on either characteristics of individual homeless such as health factors or alternatively on the structural elements underlying homelessness (i.e. housing) (Clapham, 2003). Within the UK, much of the research comes from the field of housing, sociology (e.g. Fitzpatrick, Kemp, & Klinker, 2000; Hutson & Clapham, 1999; Jacobs et al., 1999) and policy studies (e.g. Somerville, 1999). Housing research is dominated by an interest in issues such as homeless law (e.g.

Bramley, 1995; Fitzpatrick & Stephens, 1999), provision and homeless persons' admission to accommodation, and access to housing (e.g. Anderson, 1994; 1999). Within this literature there has been a considerable contribution to developing the concept of homelessness as a social construct (e.g. Hutson & Liddiard, 1994; Jacobs et al., 1999). Nonetheless, a large volume of research has concentrated on socio-demographic characteristics and on homelessness statistics (e.g. Burrows, 1997; Fisher, Turner, Pugh, & Taylor, 1994; Pleace, Burrows, & Quilgars, 1997).

Even though there is a great contribution of homelessness theoretical and empirical research from a number of disciplines, this remains compartmentalized (Anderson, 2003; Christian, 2003; Pleace & Quilgars, 2003). Consequently, theoretical explanations are conflicting and do not offer an integrative and multi-disciplinary approach to homelessness (Anderson, 2003). Except for few comprehensive studies from the field of social psychology (See Hodgetts, Hodgetts, & Radley, 2006; Hodgetts, Radley, Chamberlain, & Hodgetts, 2007; Radley, Hodgetts, & Cullen, 2006; Radley, Hodgetts, & Cullen, 2005), generally research in the UK has not questioned the interwoven relationship between socio-political contexts and material, symbolic, relational and psychological dimensions of homelessness. In general, research can be classified in two groups, namely: the situationist and person-centred research (Clapham, 2003; Fitzpatrick et al., 2000). The former is focused on the context and structures in which 'homelessness' emerges (i.e. lack of housing, cuts in social benefits) and searches for patterns and common themes. The latter, focuses on the characteristics of homeless individuals in order to identify risk factors (i.e. unemployment, physical/sexual abuse) (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000). It takes the 'homeless' individual as the only focus of inquiry (Christian, 2003), abstracting it as an entity and detracting attention from the matrix of relationships and contexts among which she moves. It is certainly within these contexts and relationships where meanings of homelessness circulate, defining practices and interactions, and shaping the homeless person's subjectivity and experience. Adopting a framework marked by the sovereignty of either structural or individual explanations is overly reductionistic (Clapham, 2003; Fitzpatrick et al., 2000) and has prevented British research from contributing to a wider understanding of the dialectics between the interwoven dimensions of homelessness- the personal,

socio-cultural, political and symbolic dimensions, as well as the material conditions and matrix of relationships in which the homeless live.

With the exception of few studies (See Hodgetts et al., 2006; Hodgetts et al., 2007; Radley et al., 2006; Radley et al., 2005), the general marker of the largely absent socio-psychological research in the UK, has been the lack of exploration of the interwoven dimensions of homelessness. The focus of inquiry of some of these studies has been the measurement of attitudes and self-categorization variables (social identity) through item-based questionnaires in order to predict peoples' intentions and behavioural uptake of support services (Christian & Abrams, 2003; Christian & Armitage, 2002). For instance, in order to construct a model for the prediction of access to services, one of these studies used quantitative questionnaire techniques to measure homeless people's attitudes to institutional authority and towards their own participation in the service, together with self-categorization variables (as homeless and as service user) (Christian & Abrams, 2003). The results of this limited social psychology of homelessness are disappointing. Strong emphasis is put on the psychological component (i.e. individual's perceptions, motivations, choices and attitudes) as a predictor of service uptake, and the methodologies used fail to appreciate how the behaviour and subjectivity of the individual are inextricably linked to the meanings and relationships of the socio-political and cultural context in which the persons lives.

Attempts to understand intentions and behaviour through these theoretical frameworks are limited. Decades of research on the attitude-behaviour causal link argued by Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) have shown that it does not exist as such (Wicker, 1969). Attitudinal research is grounded in cognitive determinism (Gaskell, 2001) and is unable to account for the wider socio-cultural processes involved in the behaviour (i.e strategies of survival) and subjectivity of individuals (i.e identity, sense of self-worth). Indeed, other fields such as health psychology, have shown how health promotion strategies designed on the assumption of the predictability of the attitude concept have not been successful in their attempts to change health-related behaviours (Crossley, 2000). The reason is a failure to take into account the symbolic and relational dimensions (i.e dialogical identity) of health-related behaviours and

their complex connections to socio-economic, and moral environments where social actors find themselves (Crossley, 2000).

Homelessness does have a psychological component (Christian, 2003), however, it is important to take into account how this is interwoven with the relational, symbolic and socio-political, since all contribute to the production of the ontology of the homeless individual. The relationship between these dimensions has been explored through research on homelessness cultures, which has used a blend of methodologies; narrative interviews, photo-production methods, photo-based discussions and qualitative narrative analysis of media coverage (Hodgetts, et al., 2007; Radley et al., 2006; Radley et al., 2005). Such research has studied media representations of homeless people in the UK (Hodgetts et al., 2005) and has documented how homeless people actively use these mediated representations in order to develop a sense of self and of one's socio-psychological and material experience as homeless (Hodgetts, et al., 2006; Radley et al., 2006; Radley et al., 2005). Hodgetts and colleagues (2006) show how homeless people are aware of the symbolic power of media institutions to influence their subjectivities and engagement with the social world through characterizations of themselves that constrain their participation in the community and their development of a sense of dignity. Symbolic meanings of homelessness circulating in British society percolate the homeless experience and are actively re-negotiated by the person when making sense of her self and when taking decisions about everyday practices (Hodgetts et al., 2006; Hodgetts et al., 2007; Radley et al., 2006; Radley et al., 2005). This body of work has offered a useful framework for the interpretation of how homeless people make decisions about accessing services, engaging in health-related behaviors and participating in mainstream domiciled society. It demonstrates the need to consider the social and symbolic environment in which homeless people live in order to understand their lived-experiences, actions and ontologies.

### **1.2.1. Homelessness ontology: relational and representational dimensions.**

Increasingly, researchers are recognising the intricacy of the multiple factors at play influencing homelessness (Hodgetts et al., 2007; Clapham, 2003). Certainly,

late conceptualizations have moved towards a dynamic understanding of homelessness as a socio-psychological, relational and physical 'process' dependent on larger socio-political, symbolic and material living conditions (Clapham, 2003; Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Radley et al., 2005). It is suggested that a conceptual research framework focused on pathways in and out of homelessness offers an innovative opportunity to consider the complex link between symbolic (i.e. policy definitions, discourses embedded in services), relational and personal dimensions (i.e. agency) of homelessness (Clapham, 2003). An expanded understanding of these interwoven dimensions makes visible the connections of homelessness with socio-political and cultural contexts showing that material deprivation and social exclusion have direct impact on the experiences of homeless people. Relationships with domiciled and homeless others and the discourses held by others about one's self or social group, which penetrate these relationships, impact directly on their identity, psychological and physical experience (i.e. capacity to engage in health related practices and decisions about seeking support). Stigma, coping strategies, neglect, low sense of self-worth and substance abuse, all emerge through relational processes between the homeless and the social world, which are permeated by meanings of homelessness.

The conceptual framework advocated by Clapham (2003), points at the importance of the relational and representational dimensions. He argues; 'Each homeless person does not construct their life in a vacuum, but is influenced by the way they are treated by their family and others they come into contact with, as well as their projection in the media, and their treatment by professionals and public services they interact with. Of course homeless people themselves reinforce or challenge these discourses through their individual words and actions as well as collectively through organizations lobbying on their behalf.' (Clapham, 2003, p.123). He puts special emphasis on how the discourses of the homeless that frame service provision and staff interaction with clients, are central to how homeless people respond to interventions and construct a sense of self (Clapham, 2003).

This is corroborated by studies on the importance granted to meaningful personal relationships by the homeless and on the impact that meanings of homelessness that inform relationships have on the homeless person. Tosi (2005) found that homeless people consider the relational dimension of service provision

and the personal character of their relationships with HPs, a fundamental resource for their material and emotional support, for reintegration and for re-establishing equilibrium in their lives. Zufferey and Kerr (2004) found that marginalizing representations inscribed in homeless agencies' institutional controls made clients feel they were judged negatively by workers (i.e. as deviant) and was translated into challenging behaviours, refusal to engage with staff and to access services. Other studies also showed how homeless people's resistance to take up services, constituted a responsive reaction to stigmatizing representations of themselves held by staff and other service users (Randall & Brown, 1995 ). Certainly, homeless people live in dialogicality with the excluding representations held by the 'domiciled' other. Hodgetts and colleagues (2007) have shown that otherizing processes, mediated or communicated through social relationships with the domiciled other and through the regulation of social spaces- that construct deviance and separation from mainstream society- are materialized in the body of the homeless producing ill-health and a reduced sense of social worth and self-esteem.

These dimensions make clear that symbolic constructions circulating in society lead to particular practices, penetrate relationships shaping the identity and experience of the homeless and crystallizing in behaviors that can undermine their health and place them in a situation of increased risk. Within this context, the processes whereby the knowledge of experts working in the voluntary sector define the experience and the self-understanding of the homeless person are an important focus of inquiry since they shape interventions and inform the relationships with clients. HPs contribute decisively to the social construction of 'homelessness' and in consequence to the self-understanding of homeless people. The meanings that HPs' knowledge project onto the experience of homeless people determine whether services are lived by the person as either 'spaces of care' or 'spaces of fear' (Johnsen, Cloke, & May, 2005). The former provide refuge and therapeutic shelter to the user and constitute a source of stability and security (Johnsen et al., 2005). The latter, constitute a context of estrangement (Radley et al., 2005) which subject the person to institutional regulations, telling her about her deviance and need to be socially controlled (Johnsen et al., 2005, p.806).

I hope I have made clear why understanding how the community of HPs makes sense of homelessness is far from being trivial. HPs' knowledge constitutes an important symbolic environment that shapes the very experience and subjectivity of those it refers to, and thus the need to investigate how their notions of homelessness are constructed. I believe that without this understanding, policy would remain partial and disconnected from what happens on the ground. Focusing on their knowledge means engaging with the wider socio-political environment of homelessness, thus implying an engagement with a form of 'psychopolitics' (Hook, 2004) of homelessness. This refers to the practice of drawing upon the political within psychology in order to understand how the psychological is intimately interwoven and framed by the socio-political forces of its context (Hook, 2004). To my knowledge, there is no socio-psychological research that specifically explores HPs' knowledge of 'homelessness'.

I have discussed the question of the centrality of meaning. In the following section, I will unfold the argument of why the symbolic domain is important in the construction of 'reality', and in particular its centrality to the phenomena of 'homelessness'. Before I engage in a discussion of the importance of social knowledge, I would like to be explicit about one issue. I do not seek to ignore the material and physical elements of the reality of 'homelessness', yet I shall emphasise, in the following section, that the symbolic realm comes to constitute the material as well as psychological experience of homelessness, and thus needs to be granted importance.

### 1.3. Beyond Material Aspects: The Symbolic Meaning of 'Homelessness'.

#### 1.3.1. The Symbolic Construction of Reality.

In section 1.1, I have discussed how homelessness is constructed through networks of contested and contradictory meanings. Definitional clashes and competing approaches between voluntary and statutory sectors characterize the very nature of service provision contributing to the formation of the social fabric that

underlies HPs' symbolic construction of homelessness. I have highlighted the importance of HPs' knowledge of homelessness in framing understandings of homelessness and consequent policies. In section 1.2, I have suggested that symbolic knowledge is an important social psychological dimension to be taken into account since it is involved in the constitution of homelessness and it plays a role in the identity, living conditions and health of the homeless. In this section I delve into the essential role of the symbolic realm, which is at the heart of our experience of the world. The exploration of the importance of symbolic practices in the experience of 'reality'<sup>5</sup>, is necessary to the delimitation of my research problem, this being social knowledge of 'homelessness' and the processes whereby this knowledge is brought about.

In the following pages I shall draw upon social constructionist theory, in order to unfold the argument that, it is within symbolic practices that social knowledge of the world is produced, is taken for granted as the 'truth' permeating the constitution of things and crystallizing in the ontology of individuals and groups. To understand this, it is necessary to problematise traditional approaches to 'reality'.

There is an essential dispute between the conventional Cartesian conceptualisation of 'reality', which underpins mainstream psychology and psychological forms of social psychology (Farr, 1996), and the 'reality' that social constructionist approaches advocate. The former implies that there is a real 'world out there' in which things exist with their real material characteristics and meaning, and that representations<sup>6</sup> come after them. This implies a separation between the individual with her representational practices, and 'the world out there'. On the contrary, the latter, which is the one I propose as the underpinning theoretical framework for my investigation, refers to a conceptualisation of the production, circulation, and transformation of meaning as 'entering the very constitution of things' (Hall 1997, p.5). It recognizes the centrality of symbolic practices, together with the material and structural ones, in the constitution of 'reality'. Through an

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<sup>5</sup> Inverted commas indicating something that is standing in for the object, substituting reality.

<sup>6</sup> Representations are understood as symbols invested with meaning that stand for 'reality'. They are the source of symbolic knowledge, and permeate our reality so powerfully that they eventually come to constitute what is 'reality' for us.

emphasis on symbolic practices, one is able to overcome the dualism embedded in the empiricist and rationalist tradition and to understand the nature of what counts as 'reality' for us (that is, as 'truth' facts). I will, at this point, introduce the basic tenets of Social Constructionism and explore its central role for critically engaging with the world.

The basic underlying idea that underpins Social Constructionism is the argument that reality as such does not exist. It is its symbolic construction that is taken for granted as 'reality'. This thesis is underpinned by the assumption that human nature has the essential need to make sense of the chaotic avalanche of information that is encountered in the world. 'Reality' is accessed through communicative processes of symbolic construction between social agents. It is through processes of re-presenting reality that we are able to communicate with each other, and understand the events, people, and things in our everyday lives, whilst co-developing the self. Hence, the central tenet of constructionism is that things and persons only acquire meaning within representational systems. 'Reality', is not so much a set of things out there, as a set of representational practices that take place in dialogical processes with others. Primarily, 'reality' refers to the production and circulation of meanings between people, which is the source for the production of social knowledge and ontology. The production of meaning is the principal focus of social constructionist's body of thought (Gergen, 1985).

The individual is conceived as an active agent in the struggle to construct the world through the multiple social relations with others. Berger and Luckmann (1966), argue that the life of an individual is characterized by an ongoing dialectical relationship with her socio-cultural environment, through which she constructs both herself and the social order. They challenge the monological tradition of Descartes by arguing that all that is human in nature is a social enterprise, including meaning production. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). 'Reality' is not something that is located in the individual psyche or in 'the world out there', instead it lives in the inter-subjective space, in the dialogical relationships between individuals. Many have pointed out the dialogical nature of representations (Hall, 1997; Jovchelovitch, 2007; Marková, 2003a) and ontology of the person (Bakhtin, 1986; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Marková, 2003a). As Gergen (1985) has put it: 'From the constructionist

position the process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of *persons in relationship*.' (p.267, emphasis added). Relationships between self and others are the very basis of knowledge, selfhood and social life (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Therefore, the 'texture' and dynamics of representational systems express dialogic processes between individuals and groups struggling to make sense of the world.

The fact that we *interpret* the world around us through constructing systems of meanings that stand for what is re-presented, is what makes unfeasible an objective reflection of reality (Gergen, 1985). The existence of a 'reality' (as an entity) that can be objectively grasped, as argued by Cartesian approaches, is problematised, since its very nature implies the inescapable fact of co-authorship of multiple social actors in communication and dialectical relations with the world. The social constructionist approach moves beyond the utopia of positivist-empiricist tradition, which has wrongly assumed that objective knowledge is the outcome of accurate mapping of reality by a knowing subject separated from the world of others. It is the *meaning* that we confer to our experience of the world what constitutes our knowledge and what we take for granted as 'reality'. Hence the Cartesian duality can be overcome if we think that 'meaning is not in the object or person or thing, nor is it in the world. It is we who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable.' (Hall, 1997, p.21).

At this stage I would like to stress that I am neither denying the existence of the physical world and the power of social structures, nor I am granting sovereignty to the symbolic realm. Instead, I highlight the centrality of representational practices as the counterpart of the material world. Far from neglecting the fact that things have a real, material existence in the world out there, it is claimed that what counts for human beings as 'reality' is the meaningful aspect of it, that is, the symbolic knowledge that is produced in our everyday lives and that penetrates the very materiality of things and physicality and psychology of subjects. As I will later discuss (section 1.3.2.), this relationship between subjective and objective processes, between symbolic and material conditions of human life, is at the heart of the theoretical framework of this thesis; the theory of social representations (Jodelet, 1989/1991; Moscovici, 2000).

'Reality', that is, the set and processes of symbolic representation that emerge in order to make sense of our experience of the world, has practical consequences for our everyday practices and rituals. Symbolic knowledge stands for the reality it re-presents and as such has a central role regulating social life. The meaning constructed in the inter-subjective space between people, whilst not being something that's veracity can be checked against an external reality and proved to have complete validity, constitutes what is 'reality' for us. For social reality is socially constructed, and put into action by people in everyday life. Actions always carry meaning (Kenwood, 1999) they are the enactment of our symbolic constructions. Likewise, these constructions have material/physical effects, enter to constitute our 'reality', being crystallized into our ontologies and relationships. The knowledge of the world is so much ingrained in our everyday experience and relationships, that it has consequences for people and for the unfolding of social life.

For social constructionism, the wholesale rejection of an objective reality has a yet further implication; the fact that there is not a unique 'truth', since this, is socially constructed. What we find in the world, and particularly in contemporary times, is a multiplicity of voices in conflict and divergence between their different versions of reality claimed to hold the unique 'truth'. Inasmuch as meaning is not an inherent, constitutive (permanent) quality of the objects in the natural world but the product of social processes of representation, it can never be completely established (Hall, 1997) or finalized (Bakhtin, 1984a). Different groups of people would claim different versions of 'reality' and different symbolic knowledge that is taken for granted as unquestionable 'truths' and in this way they protect particular interests over others. In other words, this involves the battle to seal meaning, which is at the core of our social life.

The concern is not only that meanings are naturalised, and taken for granted as being the constitutive fixed qualities, of objects, subjects and events in the natural world, but the fact that there is an unequal distribution of symbolic power between groups to direct processes of social construction. This is understood as the 'power of constructing reality' (Bourdieu, 1991, p.166), which is exercised through perpetuation over time, of one's versions of reality, as holding the unique truth. As

Foucault (1980) has claimed, there will always be relations of power in the dispute over who owns *the*<sup>7</sup> meaning. Certain forms of knowledge are predominant and widely accepted as the truth, not because their 'empirical validity', but because of their communicative processes of defending one's version of reality and challenging others (Gergen, 1985, p.268). Acquiring the power to install 'the truth' depends on the authority that one holds and the social position that one occupies to direct social processes of meaning making. This authority is granted to certain 'expert' groups in society, whose knowledge enjoys high prestige as establishers of 'reality'. The concern is with how symbolic practices are used to support particular interests over others, thus maintaining the status quo and perpetuating the inequality of marginalised groups.

The line of argument of social constructionism, is an adequate theoretical underpinning for this research and has important implications for the conceptualisation of knowledge, since:

(a) It demystifies the authority of certain forms of knowledge and debunks the idea of the existence of a unique 'truthful' knowledge that is the outcome of empiricist and objective processes. Hence, in adopting a social constructionist perspective to the study of social knowledge, I have to be aware of the confusion that comes when an individual meets a member of another group, that is, when the different types of knowledge that people produce meet. These encounters imply the arena of how within 21<sup>st</sup> century, plurality of meaning gets institutionalized and thus imposed as the dominant legitimate way of understanding reality. This is ingrained in the hierarchical representation of knowledge (Jovchelovitch, 2007), which establishes what is considered to be the most valuable, right and true knowledge of reality. Meaning bears the antagonistic quality of being both a creative opportunity and a constraint for the exercising of power. The concern here is that those groups situated in the lower levels of the hierarchy may find it difficult to resist the meaning imposed by the representations of those at the top-end (Jovchelovitch, 1997). Relations between different forms of knowing embed possibilities for contestation and critique. However, there is a tendency to maintain the status quo of those in higher levels of the hierarchy of knowledge because they

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<sup>7</sup> My own emphasis denoting positivist wrong assumption of the existence of a unique true meaning.

enjoy a privileged position to access the public sphere of debate and critique (Habermas, 1989). Hence, the diversity of knowledge is subjugated to that knowledge considered to be rational, which legitimates certain versions of reality, practices and ontologies whilst discrediting others.

(b) It maintains a perspective on common-sense knowledge, as being significant and valuable. Accordingly, it calls for the need of a critical approach to the study of knowledge. This implies an engagement with the knowledge of those symbolically and socio-economically excluded in society and a distrust of dominant forms of knowledge. This involves the double task of focusing on; (1) neglected and marginalised forms of knowledge and, (2) how these symbolically and thus materially marginalised people negotiate, accommodate, and contest dominant forms of knowledge.

A social constructionist approach is an important critical tool that enables one to sceptically distrust what is legitimately instituted as a unique 'reality'. This is indeed the starting point of my thesis; social constructionist's questioning of social knowledge that is taken for granted as the 'truth'. Indeed, in the case of 'homelessness', there are spheres of knowledge, which have acquired widespread authority to impose their social construction of 'homelessness'. The concern is that those with a privileged position for the fixing of knowledge are, through their symbolic power, governing and regulating social life and social practices around 'homelessness'. Hence, perpetuating certain meanings of 'homelessness' that might be ideological, in Thompson's sense (1990), because of naturalising and legitimising socio-economic exclusion. I believe that a constructionist approach would invite us to understand 'homelessness' in alternative ways, to re-consider it as a socio-psychological process, to raise interesting questions about the function of certain constructions of 'homelessness', and how when brought about in social practices, these are responsible for the sustaining and exclusion of certain knowledges and ontologies. Constructions about homelessness have a direct impact on the definition of interventions, the design of policies, the production of practices towards the homeless, and the identity of the homeless person.

I conclude by arguing that social knowledge is a strong element in understanding any contemporary phenomena. However, an act of mapping the meanings that constitute the content of a particular social knowledge would not be a powerful critical tool unless it does enable a wider analysis of the dynamics of symbolic power and possibilities of contestation and critique. The concern is not only with how meaning is produced through representational practices, but it needs to be, with how dialogical processes of knowledge production are a means for the exercise of power to impose constructions upon others or to contest these representations. This power does not simply involve the attempt to cement and ingrain in our everyday experiences and identities, particular meanings as truthful representations of the world. It also refers to possibilities for questioning and rejecting ideological symbolic forms that constrain our identities knowledges and projects (Thompson, 1990 ). Therefore, we need to study those social processes of negotiation, conflict, contestation, and assimilation of meaning that are at the heart of the warranting and challenging of particular versions of 'reality'. This involves studying those social constructions in the social practices in which they exist focusing in the interactive relations between different forms of knowing.

In the light of these issues I call for a critical engagement with the symbolic construction of 'homelessness' and an analysis of the battles to institute meaning of 'homelessness'. I will examine in the following section, the specific social constructionist approach within social psychology that I have adopted to approach the object of my investigation.

### **1.3.2. A Critical Social Psychology of Homelessness: The Relevance of Social Representations.**

An adequate social constructionist stance in which I locate in order to approach the object of my investigation, is that of the theory of social representations (Moscovici 1961; 1973; 1984; 1988; 1998). Firstly, and this is central to the present research, this is a powerful socio-psychological theoretical framework for the conceptualisation of processes of social knowledge, its production and circulation (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990; Moscovici, 2001). It has its foundations in Durkheim's

(1898) concept of collective representations, which Moscovici renovated into a more flexible, dynamic, social phenomenon stating that it should be social psychology's fundamental object of study (1984b). It is through social representations theory that the interplay between cognitive, cultural, and social processes in the construction, progression and change of social knowledge can be best understood. This is a key conceptual approach to social phenomena within social psychology, which provides an understanding of the dialogue between the individual and society (Jovchelovitch, 1996) and between the representations of self and others in the co-construction of knowledge and identity. The concept of social representations allows one to restore a connection between psychological processes and the social, thus providing the means for studying social life as an influential element in the psychology of the individual. In general, according to Moscovici (1984b), a socio-psychological approach directs attention towards the interactions between the individual and society, specifically, towards how groups and individuals socially construct their reality- the process and content of social representations.

Secondly, social representations are the symbolic constructions (content and processes) that stand for the object, and hence, re-present 'reality'. As a form of social knowledge, the social representations shared by a particular group, are the common symbolic resources, through which that collectivity make sense of their social world (Moscovici, 1984b). They are symbolic resources through which people give meaning to social structures, experiences and material circumstances.

'system (s) of values, ideas and practices with a two-fold function; first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history.' (Moscovici, 1973 p.xiii ).

Social representations act as the catalyst of behaviour and all social phenomena, and thus, all behaviour has a symbolic nature (Moscovici, 2000). Reality is mediated through social representations, which have the symbolic power of affecting behaviour and communication. This symbolic activity is the way through

which the meanings embedded in social representations operate in social life. How meaning is produced and transformed and how symbols relate to meaning are all aspects linked to the process of social representations.

This approach does not seek to reify the power of the symbolic realm. Whilst, a preoccupation with meaning is central to the study of social representations, material elements of the world are not ignored within this theory. Social representations emerge and are developed as the symbolic devices through which people give meaning to social structures, experiences and material circumstances. It is not the case that social representations ‘stand in’ for the object in the literal sense of the word to the point that material circumstances do not affect our everyday lives. Instead, what the theory does is emphasise the power of social representations to inform and permeate social/institutional practices, relationships and structural arrangements, all of which are inscribed with meanings. Hence, social representations, imply the existence of material structures that we make present and thus meaningful in the process of re-presenting them. Symbolic phenomena and material practices ‘feed-back’ each other and co-exist in a form of symbiosis.

Thirdly, this theory has the potential for exercising critical psychology (Howarth, 2007) and it is to this element of the theory to which I seek to contribute to through my investigation. At the very heart of the theory is its potential political role in criticising ideological constructions of reality that sustain unequal relations, yet only few studies have empirically demonstrated it (Howarth, 2007). The theory is a useful critical and political tool to explore the ways in which relations of power function in society, and how these may be fought over by those whose position is marginalized and whose knowledge and identity potentials are constrained. Social representations not only are means through which we make sense of the world and propose a particular version of the social order, they also have an ideological and anti-ideological role in the attempt to fix or contest hegemonic constructions of reality. Indeed, there are always values and interests at stake underpinning social representations, which are sought to be protected and defended (in rejection to others), through the representational act (Howarth, 2007)

Hence, these are the two sides of representations, namely; (1) the 'positive' or liberating, which refers to the potential of social representations to contest ideological meanings, and (2) the 'negative', which relates to how its taken-for-granted nature may lead to the hegemony and perpetuation of particular constructions of reality that might justify the status quo. On the one hand, social representations can function ideologically to, support the social status, social relations and legitimized versions of reality of a particular group. These representations lead to the naturalization of a particular social order and institutional practices that benefit certain groups, but disfavour others leaving them under unequal circumstances. On the other hand, representations also have the potential to challenge the social order and critically engage with inequalities. At the heart of the theory is the argument of the polyphasia of knowledge (Jovchelovitch, 2002, 2007; Moscovici, 1961/1976), which refers to representations as phenomena that, due to being grounded in different socio-cultural contexts, contain both in themselves plurality and contradiction. Possibilities for negotiation and contestation are to be found in the conflictive and tensional dynamics that occur between interactive forms of knowledge within polyphasic representational systems. It is the way a representation is *used* within polyphasia what determines which of its sides is enacted.

For these reasons, I do not aim to merely use this theory as a descriptive tool for the mapping out of the content of social knowledge of 'homelessness'. This has the potential danger of consolidating social inequalities, as it would not critically engage with the disentangling of ideologies and with the context of the production of homeless subjectivities, thus not allowing for social change. I strongly agree with Howarth (2007) that there is a need for a development of the critical potential of the theory. Through my research, I seek to make a progress in the understanding of the relationship between processes of legitimization of knowledge and the possibilities of contestation to reify knowledge systems. I also aim to define the role of the construction of social identity in the mediation of these processes, since social representations are put to use in order to confirm, negotiate or resist versions of reality that clash with our standpoint in the world (Howarth, 2007). These are two points of the theory that need to be further re-defined in order to develop the critical potential of the theory (Howarth, 2007). In my investigation I hope to do so through further developing a central element of the theory; the concept of cognitive

polyphasia. Particularly, I hope to advance the conceptual explanation of how the eclectic *use* of representations in the dialogue that occurs between interacting forms of knowledge within processes of cognitive polyphasia, is mediated by processes of identity construction. In doing so I hope to provide the means to theorize how social representations are used in order to impose or contest power in the relation between different and competing forms of knowledge that meet in the dialogical co-production of knowledge and identity. Social representations theory has certainly the potential as a conceptual tool for engaging in this type of critical research since it believes on human agency to actively re-construct reality through critically responding to dialogical others' worldviews and practices.

My research is focused on the social knowledge of 'homelessness' held by HPs and the processes whereby their representations are brought about and put to use to support different interests and values whilst co-constructing their identity. The focus is on how in sustaining and defending their own versions of 'homelessness', they contest versions that contradict their knowledge and professional identity. Through a critical analysis of how HPs re-negotiate co-existing and competing knowledge systems that fight in the struggle over meaning of homelessness, I hope to elucidate the dynamics of reification and contestation of knowledge. That is, how do they re-produce or critique forms of knowledge that enjoy more power to direct the definition of homelessness and thus to institute the types of being that homeless people are. In the following section, I discuss how HPs are in a privileged position to explore processes of social construction of 'homelessness' due to their location in the intersection between the different social spheres.

#### 1.4. The Privileged Position of Homelessness Professionals (HPs) Working in The Voluntary Sector.

The relevance of the role of voluntary agencies to the problem of 'homelessness' has been highly acknowledged (e.g. Beacock, 1979; Daly, 1997; Hutson & Liddiard, 1994). The voluntary sector is valued because of its approach to homelessness and local understanding of the issue (Daly, 1997). HPs working in the

voluntary sector contribute decisively to the social construction of 'homelessness' and consequently to the self-understanding of homeless people. Acknowledging that issues of homelessness are grounded in the way homelessness is represented helps to understand why it is important to investigate HPs' knowledge and integrate it into the design of policy, decisions about welfare systems and models of intervention. This section discusses the importance of focusing on HPs' perspectives.

There are two main reasons that explain the value of HPs' knowledge:

- (1) Their alternative ethos, comprehensive definition and approach to homelessness.
- (2) Their privileged position in the construction of 'homelessness' and their movements from the front-line of homelessness to the spheres of policy making and the public, which provide the resources for HPs to make sense of homelessness and construct the multiple contents and dialogues that form their knowledge.

(1) While both statutory and non-statutory bodies provide services they differ in their definition of homelessness, degree and quality of their involvement. The response to 'homelessness' in the UK largely comes from the voluntary sector. Voluntary agencies' services are less constrained by legal responsibilities and their work is not so controlled by governmental bureaucracies. HPs adopt a responsive and individualised approach, which seeks to comprehensively attend to the emotional, social and structural needs of the homeless. They are valued for their flexibility, adaptability, ample and innovative range of services (Daly, 1997). Their definition of those eligible for aid is broad and not marked by the criteria of intentionality. Neither do they reduce 'homelessness' to a limited number of categories. In addition, in comparison to professionals from statutory services, HPs' relationship with their clients is closer to the Rogerian type of helping relationship (Rogers, 1995).

It has been acknowledged the effect that the highly bureaucratized nature of welfare public agencies has in the interpretation of clients (Lipsky, 1980). In seeing them as a category, they disregard their uniqueness as an individual with a history and personal experience. Service users may perceive statutory agencies as less

approachable and more bureaucratic than voluntary agencies, which are non-judgemental and less constrained with having to meet statutory duties (Wigglesworth & Kendall, 2000). A bureaucratisation of statutory services might prevent professionals from interpreting and tackling 'homelessness' comprehensively reducing the wholeness of the socio-culturally situated individual 'homeless' to a mere issue of lack of housing, mental health, drug misuse, and so on.

Currently, voluntary agencies are working in a contract culture characterized by increasing government cost-cutting. Within this context the value of the voluntary approach and its attributes are threatened (Daly, 1997) and HPs live in a continuous struggle to define the problem and provide support and care to the homeless. This is partially due to the fact that despite policies (i.e. Homeless Act 2000<sup>8</sup>), emphasising the importance of joint-work between statutory and voluntary agencies across different welfare services<sup>9</sup>, HPs are sometimes downplayed by statutory experts. There are between HPs and professionals from statutory agencies power inequalities in the constant debate over issues of 'homelessness'. While HPs play a capital role and have incomparable experience and understanding of homeless people and their circumstances, their statutory counterparts may have uncertainties about the legitimacy of their expertise. Such uncertainties arise because in many cases HPs do not have an academic degree <sup>10</sup>(i.e. social work, mental health) that grants them with an authoritative expertise. Theirs is an expertise that comes from the day-to-day experience with homelessness and not from the sphere of science and academia. Hence, their versions of 'homelessness' might be often contested and fought over by those experts working in the statutory sector (i.e. doctors, psychiatric nurses from the NHS). In section 1.3 I drew attention to the discussion of how in contemporary times what counts as a truthful representation of 'reality', and thus widely trusted, is scientific/academic 'objective' knowledge. Although statutory professionals' knowledge and skills to deal with 'homelessness' can not be equated to those of HPs',

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<sup>8</sup> See extracts of British government policy announcements.

<http://www.housing.odpm.gov.uk/information/homelessness/response/>

<sup>9</sup> See extracts of British government policy announcements.

<http://www.housing.odpm.gov.uk/information/homelessness/response/>

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note here that a large extent of professionals working in the voluntary sector have a background of many years of experience as volunteers that later enabled them to get into their first job in the sector. Some HPs have degrees, but there is not a specific degree on homelessness as there is in psychology, policy, or social work.

the mere fact of having an academic degree that specialises them in their fields, bestows them with a greater authority as experts. This limits HPs' power in pragmatic decisions, and in the designing of interventionist models. Thus, it affects the coordination and the provision of integrated support services to 'the homeless', who are the ultimate losers in this situation.

(2) HPs enjoy a central position in the symbolic construction of 'homelessness' since they are in contact with both sides of the divide; the inner reality of 'homelessness' and the outside audience where they engage in dialogue with multiple social actors. From the inner reality of homelessness, to the government and policy, across the media and the public, HPs are positioned at a multiplicity of interfaces and relationships with others who co-participate in the construction of their knowledge. As professional practitioners, who hold both practical and theoretical knowledge, they act as 'vectors' between various social spheres, being important carriers and shapers of social knowledge and public images of their clients (Morant, 1997, p.82). They have to implement both policy and expert theoretical knowledge, integrate it into their practices, inform the public offer feedback to policymakers and raise funds. As *experts in context*, HPs hold the central role of translators and integrators of beliefs, meanings and images of 'homelessness' in the interface between the different social spheres. They perform a pivotal task in communicating and explaining the issue of 'homelessness' and their clients' experiences to the public, politicians and the media (Hutson & Liddiard, 1994).

All these features define HPs as *experts in context* and make them an interesting case for the study of processes of construction of polyphasic knowledge. HPs' knowledge integrates elements from diverse spheres, and through dialogical conciliations and negotiations translates them into their daily practices. Studying their knowledge and the interacting dialogue between its constitutive elements provides an insight into the relationship between the different forms of knowledge of 'homelessness' circulating in British society. Their representations are key indicators in the process of understanding homelessness and its consequences in the living conditions and experience of the homeless person.

In proposing their versions of 'homelessness', HPs might dialogically negotiate, challenge and/or contest the meaning of 'homelessness' held by other interest groups with whom they intersect. Some of these enjoy a higher position in the hierarchy of knowledge in society (e.g. statutory professionals). Of particular interest is HPs' potential political role to question and contest reified forms of knowledge (e.g. policy definitions, mental health workers' views on a particular client). However, it is not the case that through focusing on HPs' knowledge as a form of expertise this is regarded as an objective and value-free portrait of the reality of 'homelessness'. Knowledge is never neutral and involves interests and intentions of many kinds. Whichever form of knowledge is being considered, its analysis discloses the relationship between reproduction of and agency to contest ideological constructions.

At worst, some would argue that by omitting to provide an account of homeless people's own experience, their voice is marginalised and neglected in the present research, and thus there is a risk of perpetuating relations of power in society. At best, focusing on HPs' knowledge would critically provide and disclose processes of social knowledge of 'homelessness', which constitute the context where the life conditions and identity of the homeless are grounded. Their position in the intersection between the different knowledge spheres is the best for the exploration of the dynamics of clash, negotiation, reproduction and contestation of conflicting meanings in the encounter between different knowledge systems. Therefore, it is essential that the subject of this study is not misread here. It is for all the reasons discussed above why, I believe that, amongst the many possible paths to access societal understandings of 'homelessness', it is important to engage in an exploration of HPs' knowledge.

### 1.5. Aims of The Study: Research Questions.

The aim of the research is to engage in a socio-psychological exploration of HPs' knowledge of homelessness and the processes through which this is brought about and constructed. It is hoped that the investigation of their knowledge processes

can disclose some important elements of the link between psychological, socio-political and structural elements of 'homelessness'. What I suggest is a social constructionist approach to explore dialogical and polyphasic knowledge of 'homelessness' from the perspective of *experts in context*. Although this research hopes to be an opportunity to widen the ways in which this issue is understood, it is important to note that I do not seek to propose a theory of professional knowledge of homelessness.

Reflecting on homelessness issues involves confronting an important social problem, which calls for a critical social psychology, attentive to the symbolic and relational context of the production of social structures and practices that limit the experience and identity of homeless people. My study hopes to critically engage with homelessness at three levels. Firstly, exploring HPs' representations of homelessness is an attempt to bring to light the symbolic mechanisms that permeate interventions and sustain certain social structures, which potentially, constrain social justice and thus should be questioned and open to change. Secondly, I investigate how within the context of definitional clashes and conflicting approaches, HPs develop a critical engagement with relations of power around them in their everyday work practices, those of the legitimate authority of statutory agencies. In other words, the focus is on how HPs struggle to engage other social actors with their own frameworks manifesting agency to contest their reified and commonsensical forms of knowledge and excluding representations and finding ways to put into practice their own agenda and definitions of homelessness. Third, at the theoretical level I hope to contribute to the development of the critical potential of social representations theory. This is done through a Bakhtinian approach to the polyphasic use of knowledge and the co-development of the self in the dialogue with others. Through such a conceptual development I hope to explain how in the plural and dialogical process of knowledge and identity construction, people put to use representations in order to criticize, question, reject or reproduce others' knowledges, values and practices. This would provide an understanding of the interactive dynamics between the diversity of forms of knowledge *within* the self and *circulating in society in the encounter between* groups, communities and social actors holding different world-views, cultures, agendas, levels of expertise and positionings in the social fabric.

### **1.5.1. Objectives.**

The central empirical task is to explore the knowledge of HPs working in the voluntary sector in London. This involves a double task: (1) examining the content and processes of construction of polyphasic knowledge, and (2) how processes of identity construction might mediate the dialogical dynamics of negotiation, argumentation and contestation of the meaning of 'homelessness' held by other interest groups with whom they intersect and they co-construct knowledge. There are three objectives to examining their knowledge:

- To understand the content and process of HPs' representations of 'homelessness'. Particular attention is paid to the dialogues that form their knowledge and how its constitutive elements interact with each other, co-exist within the representational field and are eclectically put to use. This involves the two-fold task of exploring processes of representing homelessness and constructing a sense of self. This study attempts to investigate how HPs co-construct knowledge about homelessness and themselves, through debating with dialogical others' representations, whilst struggling for social significance and recognition of their voice.
- To engage in an exploration of a somehow neglected, yet highly valuable form of knowledge in the framing of understandings of homelessness and consequent policies.
- To inform policy makers, statutory professionals and other relevant actors in the homeless sector, in order to move further the state of the homeless debate. To contribute to more efficient solutions, and to provide elements for reflection on the obstacles to the realization of partnerships between statutory and voluntary sectors.



## 2. THEORISING PROFESSIONAL PRACTITIONERS KNOWLEDGE.

The central aim of this chapter is to present the theoretical model that has been used to approach the object of investigation, namely, professional practitioners' knowledge of 'homelessness' amongst HPs from the voluntary sector. Building on the general discussion in Chapter 1 of the socially constructed nature of knowledge, I introduce the theory of social representations focusing on the concept of cognitive polyphasia, and discussing lines within the theory that need further elaboration. I argue that there is a lacunae in social representation's model of polyphasic knowledge. This needs to be further developed, in order to critically explain the dynamics of the *use* of representations within knowledge systems, characterized by the co-existence of different and contradictory styles of thinking.

Drawing on the concept of social positioning (Harré & Langenhove, 1998b) and using it in order to conceptualise the relationship between social identity and social representations, I present my argument on how the theory can critically account for the *dialogical use* of polyphasic knowledge. I reformulate the 'dialogical triad' of knowledge through the inclusion of social positioning as a possible mediator in the intricate dialogue between interacting forms of knowledge in the use of representations. This elaboration, involves a conceptualisation of the link between processes of knowledge and identity construction. My argument is on how in adopting different social positionings towards the dialogical other, people alternate and draw on diverse, dilemmatic and contradictory modes of thinking, whilst at the same time co-develop the self. Social positioning has the potential to explain the inter-relations between different co-existing forms of knowledge and how within dialogue people eclectically use them at different times. In offering theoretical progression on the *dialogical use* of social representations, I propose a path for furthering the understanding of cognitive polyphasia, which has been left behind for a long time within the theoretical body of social representations. In this way, I hope I contribute to the progression of those aspects of the theory that, as Howarth (2007) has argued, need further elaboration in order to develop its critical potential.

I draw on two key ideas of the theory: (1) the dialogical and dynamic nature of knowledge; and (2) the phenomena of cognitive polyphasia. I present social representations theory's conceptualization of knowledge, as a symbolic practice contained in the dialogical triad Ego-Alter-Object (Marková, 2003a). Through social representations theory, I propose the fact that knowledge is dialogical and does not refer to a system of contents and theories that exist in the mind of the individual. Knowledge is something that people 'do' and 're-do', instead of hold, in interdependence with dialogical others. It is within this dialogical social context, that knowledge is open to reformulations and transformations.

I shall start by discussing the social, dialogical and communicative nature of social representations, and thus, the inevitable plurality and contextuality of the phenomena of knowledge. I shall continue by exploring the complexity of the dialogical relationship between different forms of knowledge, which will be done at two levels. Firstly, I shall examine the development and transformation of social representations that occur at the macro socio psychological level, within the relationship between the different spheres of knowledge. Secondly, I shall explore how the notion of social positioning can explain the dialogical use of representations and the relationship between different co-existing forms of knowledge at the micro socio psychological level. I shall explain the dialogical genesis of representations within self-other relations through spelling out the 'dialogical triad' of knowledge and I will claim its value as a conceptual tool for the study of the formation of knowledge. In section 2.2.2, I will make the case of renovating it through the inclusion of social positioning as a possible mediator in the dialogicality of knowledge, that is, in the *use*, and ultimately, in the transformation of social representations. I discuss how through the incorporation of social positioning, the model may gain strength in its ability to conceptualize the dynamics of knowledge, and the explanation of the way social identity processes are intertwined with the particular dialogical use of plural and contradictory ways of thinking. Such understanding might open ways to conceptualise the processes of emergence and change of social identities that occur alongside dialogical processes of knowledge in the encounter between the different representational systems of self and other. Indeed, the essential dialogical nature of human beings implies the inevitably co-occurrence of co-construction of knowledge and co-development of the self (Marková, 2003b).

Having made the case for the renovation of this model of social representation into a model of the *dialogical use* of social knowledge, the last section will turn specifically to the world of professional practitioners' knowledge.

## 2.1. The Theory of Social Representations, a Theory of Social Knowledge.

The theory of social representations made its entrance into the field of social psychology of knowledge in the 1960s through the work of its originator, Serge Moscovici. Moscovici developed the concept of social representation largely in his first work about representations of psychoanalytic science within French culture, *La Psychanalyse, Son Image Et Son Public* (1961/1976). He found as a source of inspiration for the development of the concept, the work of a diverse group of thinkers; the sociologists Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl, the social psychologist, F. Bartlett (1932), and developmental psychologist J. Piaget (Moscovici, 1998). In addition, the progress of his concept came later in his career inspired by the work on cultural and historical development, by a second developmental psychologist, L. S. Vygotsky. It is from him that Moscovici inherited his inclusion of society and social phenomena into the study of the psychological.

Moscovici's theory of social representations has to be considered important for the social psychology of knowledge due to his particular conceptualization of the nature of knowing as dialogical, social, and polyphasic. I have summarized it here in three points.

(1) Firstly, central to the theory of social representations (Moscovici 1961; 1973; 1984; 1988; 1998) is the proposition that knowledge is social in origin and founded on dialogue with the other. The theory conceptualises knowledge as a group's common means of socially constructing the world in order to re-create it (make it understandable), and in this way, it constitutes the group's shared reality (Moscovici, 1990). This conceptualisation of knowledge achieves an excellent reformulation of the polarity of individual-society as inter-dependent, and not as independent interacting entities. The theory, moves beyond this type of monological

ontology<sup>11</sup> proposing instead an ontology within which individual-society exist in dialogical interdependence and constitute the other. Hence, it overcomes not only individualism, but also what Farr (1996) called the ‘individualisation of the social’. Such dialogical essence of the human being extends to its basic activities, that is, thinking and communicating. I discuss, the issue of dialogicality in the next section, in the light of Ivana Marková’s work.

Key to Moscovici’s social psychology of knowledge is the concept of social representations (2000), which are both thought structures and social practices. The concept has a double meaning:

On the one hand, they are conceptualised as inter-subjectively co-constructed shared ‘theories’, systems of knowledge that function as frameworks that orient people in the world. Hence, social representations refer to the common stock of knowledge in the form of thoughts, iconic images, metaphors, symbols, beliefs and social practices, that are rooted in a particular milieu and are shared by its members in order to make sense of the world. Further, they act as behavioural guidelines, or ‘models of action’ (Moscovici, 1998, p.244) that inform and permeate social practices influencing the life of individuals and groups.

On the other hand, the term also refers to the dialogical socio-psychological processes of communicating and meaning making, through which social representations emerge, develop and change. In this sense, social representations are fluid and dynamic ‘theories’ of social phenomena, things, individuals and groups in the world (Moscovici, 1998). They are ‘more or less loosely tied together’, constituting a ‘network’ (Moscovici, 1998, p.244) and rooted in the socio-cultural context and history of individuals and groups. Therefore, social representations concern both the symbolic content of the knowledge shared by a collectivity, and the communicative processes through which different elements that constitute this content emerge, circulate, and are put to use in different situations. Social representations are at the heart of the constitution of the social life of groups, either

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11 The term ‘ontology’ is used here to refer to the essence of human beings, that is, to human existence; to how humans come to being.

as symbolic resources that mediate our understandings and our behaviours, or as socio-communicative processes of constructing meaning.

The theory of social representations links the dialogicality of being to the process of thinking and argues that social representations exist, circulate and are transformed in dialogical communicative processes. They exist in the inter-subjective space of mediation (Jovchelovitch, 2007) of relations between co-producers of knowledge and the object of knowledge. It is within this dialogical context where due to their creative power, they are open to reformulations and transformations.

(2) Secondly, *potential for change*, is at the heart of social representation theory of knowledge. Moscovici's work is crucial since it brings together the concept of communication and change to the centre of social psychology and presupposes that processes of social knowledge are dynamic phenomena open to change (Marková, 2003a). Inasmuch as social representations are dialogical and exist within communication and language, they are subject to debate, resistance, re-evaluation and change. Indeed 'communication, by definition, involves movements of thoughts, transformation of meanings and contents of knowledge.' (Marková, 2003a, p. xiv). The dialogical nature of human thinking, which presupposes a reactive, *responsive* mind (Marková, 2003a) explains the dynamic and emergent nature of knowledge. The dialogical process of knowledge contains in itself, the potential for challenge and contestation of the meanings brought by interlocutors to the dialogical encounter. It involves both the production and re-construction of social representations. Knowledge changes in tune with new social phenomena that need to be accessible so that individuals are able to cope with the unfamiliarity of new problems and unusual events within society. These elements constitute a break in the stability of the usual and familiar and thus provoke uncertainty and uneasiness, and in order to mediate them, new representations emerge. (Moscovici, 1998).

Moscovici's vision of social representations was shaped by the encounter with Durkheim's seminal work on *The elementary forms of the religious life* ([1912]1995) and his concept of 'collective representation'. However, Moscovici moved beyond Durkheim's 'collective representations' since it could only be applied to traditional societies characterised by stability, collective thinking and the

inexistence of science (Moscovici, 1998). Therefore, in drawing on the concept, Moscovici renovated it into a more dynamic concept in order to be able to apply it to the study of modern societies, and gave it the name of 'social representation'. Moscovici maintained the social character of representations, yet, in stressing their dialogicality he succinctly built a bridge between individual and social processes. Whilst collective representations have both a fixed and a homogeneous nature, Moscovici regarded social representations as phenomena confined to groups within society, more hybrid and open to change accordingly with variations in the socio-cultural context. Indeed, whilst collective representations are 'impermeable to experience or contradiction, and leave little scope for individual variations' (Moscovici, 1998, p.226), social representations 'are more fluid, pragmatic, amenable to the proof of success or failure, and leave a certain latitude to language, experience, and even to the critical faculties of individuals.' (Moscovici, 1998, p.226-227). Different groups of people produce different social representations within a society that is characterised by the variety and heterogeneity of different forms of knowledge.

(3) Thirdly, as a consequence of the dialogical encounter between different forms of knowledge circulating in society in the making of representations, the nature of knowledge is plural, hybrid and characterized by the co-presence of multiple contents and modalities of thinking (Jovchelovitch, 2002; Jovchelovitch, 2007). The consequence of this contextuality of knowledge is that there are diverse forms of rationality and meanings in the construction of reality (Jovchelovitch, 2002). Central to this conceptualisation of knowledge is Moscovici's concept of cognitive polyphasia (Moscovici, 1961/1976). Cognitive polyphasia refers to the polyphasic nature of knowledge, by which differing and conflicting styles of thinking, practices and meanings of the same phenomenon, person or object, co-exist in the same individual, institution, group or community. The notion captures the dialogical dynamics of knowledge production that are characterised by the clash of multiple and conflicting styles of thinking of self and others. Thus, it provides an understanding of the plurality of voices of dialogical others that speak through individual subjects and within social fields.

On the one hand, in the dialogue between co-producers of knowledge, there is a clash and debate of different modes of thinking and points of view. On the other hand, at the same time individuals within dialogical relationships are able to draw on multiple thinking modes since their knowledge is characterised by the simultaneous co-existence of different meanings and styles of thinking. They are able to diversely draw on a particular one depending on cultural norms, communicative aims intended to be accomplished through the communicative act, and the communicative goals (Moscovici, 2000). Hence, the concept provides the means to study the problem of the dialogical debate between forms of knowledge that differ in their degree of symbolic power. Particularly, how within plurality, individuals take different social positions, mediate the contradictory contents and modes of thinking at their disposal and use representations negotiating, reproducing or contesting, the diversity of forms of knowledge circulating in society.

### **2.1.2. Knowledge as a Social Communicative Practice.**

The theory of social representations is seriously dedicated to the study of processes of social knowledge through which people represent the world and thus make sense of it. It proposes a constructivist view of social knowledge. Having as its core representations and communication, it seeks to 'elucidate the links which unite human psychology with contemporary social and cultural questions.' (Moscovici, 1998, p.241). Knowledge is conceptualised as the social representational system that arises as a product of people's participation in social life. Knowledge is constitutive of social communicative practices (of linguistic and non-linguistic kinds); it penetrates them, and is transformed through them. Hence, in this way social representation theory is not a psychology of knowing about social life as a separate entity from the knowing subject. Social representations are mediating 'agents' (Jovchelovitch, 2002; Jovchelovitch, 2007; Moscovici, 2000) of relations between subjects, and between the subject and the object world. The 'social' of social representations refers to; their life within dialogical social processes, their sharedness amongst a group of people, and the fact that they re-present social phenomena and enable social life and communication. In so far as representations re-present the

non-immediate world in order to give meaning to our experience of it, knowledge enters the symbolic realm.

This conceptualisation of knowledge, resolves Cartesian dualism since it assumes an interdependent dialogical relationship between the object of knowledge and the knowing subject (as well as between subjects). Indeed, Moscovici (1998) argues that 'People who share a common knowledge in the course of their ordinary life do not 'reason' about it, and could not place it in front of them like an 'object', or analyze its contents by placing it at a distance to 'observe' it, without themselves being implicated in it.' (p.238). This brings us to the heart of the matter, the fact that Moscovici's conceptualisation of knowledge is constructivist, not only in the sense that representations re-present and construct things, persons, groups and events in the world in order to give meaning to them, but in the sense that they are so embedded in social life and action that they also constitute it. Our existence in the world consists of continuous re-presenting. Social representations thus become part of the reality of those that construct and hold them, and in so doing, they penetrate and affect their social practices<sup>12</sup>. As Moscovici (1998) has noted: Representations '[...] evoke what is absent from this world, they form it rather more than they simulate it. [...] That is to say that shared representations, their language, penetrate so profoundly into all the interstices of what we call reality that we can say that they constitute it.' (p.245)

Knowledge thus exists not inside our heads, but in dialogue with others about the object of knowledge, and is objectified in practices, institutional rituals, iconic images and so on. Hence, a social psychology of knowledge is focused on 'symbols, social reality and knowledge, communicating about objects not as they are but as they ought to be, so what comes to the fore is a representation.' (Moscovici & Marková, 2000, p.233)<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the constructive nature of social representations refers to its function in the social construction of reality and its constitution of social life at the same time (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990). Social representations are not reduced

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'Social practices' refers to the complex of routines and rituals that are bound up with material factors and that constitute the life of individuals and groups in society.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that representations are approached as 'knowledge', 'theories', 'versions', 'visions' of reality, which enable individuals and groups to interpret and master that reality' (Jodelet, 1989/1991, p. 12).

to thoughts, they are also ontological processes and social communicative practices that exist in the actions of people (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Hence, knowledge refers to both ways of thinking, acting and being in everyday life.

This has been made clear by Jodelet's study of social representations of madness within a small French community (1989/1991). She has shown that social representations take root in the everyday life and practices of people. Iconic images and thoughts about 'madness' were fused with social practices (i.e. lay people's interactions with mentally ill people, professional practices) developed in the course of everyday life. She argued that social representations are 'crucial for the explanation of social functioning' (Jodelet, 1989/1991, p.9). They are at the centre of the production of meaning and social practices, and are critical for the participation in social life. They are at one and the same time the representations of reality, and the constitution of reality.

Their function is to render the strange knowledgeable, to familiarize with the alarming and unfamiliar (Moscovici, 1984b, 1988b, 2000), through social construction processes of meaning making and in this way, allow communication between people. As Moscovici (1998) has noted; 'Every deviation from the familiar, every rupture of ordinary experience, everything for which the explanation is not obvious creates a supplementary meaning and sets in motion a search for the meaning, and explanation of what strikes us as strange and troubling.' (p.141). This sense making process is achieved through the double functioning of social representations; anchoring and objectification. These are the two basic 'mechanisms of a thought process' (Moscovici, 1984b, p.29), which are mutually dependant (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990). They lie at the heart of the constructive dialogical process of social representation. Anchoring functions to '*anchor* strange ideas, to reduce them to ordinary categories and images, to set them in a familiar context' (Moscovici, 1984b, p.29, emphasis in original). It consists of a process of naming and classifying through which the foreign and extraneous are comprehended and integrated into our common knowledge and common categories, which are shared by all the members of a social group. In apprehending the unfamiliar and bringing it to a commonplace context, the disturbing unknown is categorised and bestowed with a name, and thus understood (Moscovici, 1984b). Hence, anchoring involves identifying and making

sense of something in the light of existing categories and representations in our mind, which in this process are open to transformations (Moscovici, 1984b).

Objectification, is the process whereby representations are used in order to concretize the abstract giving it an iconic quality. To objectify the abstract is to 'transfer what is in the mind to something existing in the physical world' (Moscovici, 1984b, p.29). It is through symbols such as metaphors, images, and physical representations that the abstract is *constructed* and thus given a real 'tangible' existence in the world (Moscovici, 1984b). Whilst anchoring has an inward direction, in the sense that it draws upon an existing knowledge base in order to lessen the novel to 'ordinary' everyday images and commonsensical classifications, objectification is directed outwardly (Moscovici, 1984b). Once objectified, the abstract becomes communicable, penetrates social life, and pervades social practices.

In conclusion, within this context, knowledge is; (1) bounded to *history and culture*, because by anchoring and objectifying, individuals bring other representations and knowledges, (2) *relational*, because it is social in nature and originated in dialogical relations, (3) *dynamic*, because the tension created by the threat of the unknown allows for the transformation of the old representation and the emergence of a new one. Indeed, there is never an absolute finalized knowledge since there are always dialogical contextual re-formulations. As Moscovici (1998) notes, knowledge 'cross-breeds' and 'is not exhausted by any particular usage, but constantly be refined and determined with the help of the context' (p.238).

In summary, three core themes underpin social representation theory's treatment of knowledge:

1. Knowledge is understood as a system of social representations, which dialogically mediate both the relationships between subjects, and between subject-object. They sustain our relationships and make possible social life (Jovchelovitch, 2007).

2. Knowledge production is a constructive process that occurs within dialogical relationships between individuals and groups. This genetic process is interpreted broadly as one of anchoring and objectification.

3. Due to its contextuality and dialogicality, knowledge has a dynamic, creative and plural nature. Knowledge construction involves both conflict and cooperation between self and others (Moscovici, 2000). Thus, in our everyday making sense of the world, representations are re-evaluated and as a consequence, are either validated, re-defined or contested.

4. Knowledge in this sense is hybrid and heterogeneous, it varies corresponding to different constellations of context (Jovchelovitch, 2002) and self-other relationships where it is constituted. Different and often contradictory modes of thinking co-exist together and are diversely used by people in their everyday lives.

In the next section, I illustrate the relationship between the different social spheres in the genesis and circulation of knowledge. I discuss the dialogicality of knowledge, and work through the concept of cognitive polyphasia. I argue the vagueness of the theory in critically accounting for the eclectic way people make use of representations. Finally, I make the case for the inclusion of the notion of social positioning to the dialogical triad of representation in order to be able to explain the link between processes of representation and identity construction.

## 2.2. The Social Process of Emergence and Development of Knowledge: Representations in The Making.

In the foregoing I have discussed the ways in which the theory of social representations has conceptualised the notion of knowledge as a modifiable and plural phenomenon. Now, one could ask, how do representations actually circulate and change within society? The present section focuses its attention on the emergence and circulation of knowledge within contemporary society. I examine how the concept of cognitive polyphasia (Moscovici, 1961/1976) conveys the dynamic dialogue that exists between different spheres of knowledge and expresses the inter-relations between the multiplicity of meanings circulating in the social world. Cognitive polyphasia plays a central role with respect to studying processes of social knowledge in globalised societies where new and plural communicative forms offer increased opportunities for encounters between diverse and competing

knowledge systems. I further develop the concept of cognitive polyphasia in order for it to be able to account for the dialogical use of forms of knowledge that are conflicting and differ in their degree of symbolic power. That is, how within the plurality of knowledge, individuals adopt different social positions, mediate the eclectic and contradictory contents and modes of thinking and put to use their social representations. Expanding our understanding of this issue is particularly crucial in contemporary times, in which certain forms of knowledge are reified and so legitimized whilst others are disrespected.

The phenomenon of the emergence and development of knowledge is a central topic to the theory of social representations. It was the main source of inspiration for Moscovici and stimulated him to develop his social psychology of knowledge. He was interested in the emergence and circulation of knowledge in modern times, since this period was characterised by the appearance of science and rapid development and transformation of new technologies. Indeed, the phenomena of science, its circulation and spread across society, were at the basis of his ideas on social representations (Moscovici, 2000). His theory of knowledge had two important contributions to the social psychology of knowledge.

Firstly, his work constituted a counteraction to the generalized mistrust of commonsense knowledge, which was the trend at that time amongst both the Marxist and the Enlightenment movements. Common sense knowledge was regarded as inferior and flawed. In contrast, science, was prioritized and considered as a real dogma that needed to be followed by ordinary people. Moscovici's work brought attention to commonsense knowledge, and defended its value as a rationality in its own right, amongst the multiplicity of rationalities that co-exist within the plurality of knowledge. He emphasized the centrality of the knowledge, culture and social practices of lay people. Moscovici (2000) notes that he reacted in response to the prevailing scientific discourse and; '[...] tried to rehabilitate common knowledge which is grounded in our *ordinary experience, everyday language and daily practices*.' (p. 228, emphasis my own). The importance of such argument is that it highlights the social and the everyday experience-based nature of knowledge. It is here that one has to recognise the relevance of using this theory due to its conceptualization of knowledge and reaffirmation of the centrality and the value of

everyday experience and communication. Secondly, Moscovici asserted that *all* types of knowledge are constructive in nature, and *all* are a type of social representation. This means that scientific knowledge shares with common sense knowledge the same constructive processes of emergence and circulation within society. Anchoring and objectification remain at the base of all knowledge production processes.

Moscovici never reduced social representations to the realm of lay people's knowledge nor did he neglect the socio-cultural construction of scientific knowledge and other non-commonsensual modes of thinking, as some theorists within the social representational framework have wrongly assumed (e.g., Bangerter, 1995; Purkhardt, 1993). When talking about science and common sense he refers to both of them as 'a system of representations' (Moscovici, 2000, p.233). He notes; '[...] all forms of belief, ideologies, knowledge, including even science, are, in one way or another, social representations.' (Moscovici, 1998, p.234). All are forms of representation of the world of a particular logic linked to the context within which they are produced. Furthermore, in his model, which is underpinned by a constructivist view of all social phenomena, Moscovici proposed a two-way influence between the world of commonsense and the world of science. Moscovici (1998) noted that 'The changes and transformation take place constantly in both directions, the representations communicate among themselves, they combine and they separate, introducing a quantity of new terms and new practices into everyday and 'spontaneous' usage. In fact, scientific representations daily and 'spontaneously' become common sense, *while the representations of common sense change into scientific and autonomous representations.*' (p.235, emphasis my own).

He proposes a dialogue, in which the movement of knowledge occurs in all directions. Within this dialogue, representations from the different spheres of knowledge clash and compete with one another in the struggle over meaning whilst co-existing. These dynamics are indeed enshrined in the concept of cognitive polyphasia, which Moscovici introduced in his early work (1961/1976). Cognitive polyphasia refers to the 'diverse and even opposite ways of thinking' (Moscovici, 2000, p.245) that exist simultaneously within the individual and the group, and within the dialogical relation with others. In his study of psychoanalysis, Moscovici found how diverging and conflicting modes of thinking about psychoanalysis lived

together amongst and within groups, and within individuals. It is through this concept that he unveils the dynamic, dialogical and plural nature of knowledge and the continuous relations between the different spheres of knowledge, within which social representations emerge and are transformed. Indeed, Moscovici (2000) has argued that it is in the clash of different modes of thinking; what he calls 'a battle of ideas' (p.275) where the formation of social representations occurs.

Hence, this concept allows for an understanding of knowledge as a plurality of co-existing and at times conflicting forms of thinking, meanings and practices proceeding from the different spheres of knowledge and living side-by-side in the same individual, institution, group or community. It clearly shows that knowledge formation is a battleground between different and competing knowledges where there is no linear development from 'inferior' commonsensical forms of thinking to 'superior' scientific knowledge. Indeed, Moscovici (2000) has asserted that '[...] cognitive polyphasia, the diversity of forms of thought, is the rule, not the exception.' (p.242). He notes: '[...] even professional scientists are not entirely engrossed in scientific thought. Many of them have a religious creed, some are racists, others consult the 'stars', have a fetish, damn their experimental apparatus when it refuses to work, [...], they even make use of Aristotelian physics instead of the Galilean physics they learnt at school and which they trust. If these various, even conflicting forms of thought did not coexist in their minds, they would not be human minds, I suppose.' (Moscovici, 2000, p.241-242). Because as well as being scientists they are lay people, they also have commonsensical knowledge that enables them to make sense and experience the world. Indeed, although they are commonly believed to be rooted in 'incompatible' rationalities, both forms of thinking are capable of living side-by-side within the polyphasia of knowledge. Depending on the interests of the subject and the concrete context in which they are embedded, different kinds of knowledge can be employed in the representations of an object. Indeed, Moscovici's hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia 'refers to the possibility of *using* different and sometimes diverse ways of thinking and knowing, like scientific, common sense, religious, metaphorical and so on.' (Marková, 2003a, p.111, emphasis my own). The crucial element then, is the actual act of eclectically drawing upon these elements depending on the concrete situation. That is, how within the plurality of knowledge, some meanings are asserted in rejection to others?

Within the field of social representations there is a large amount of evidence for Moscovici's hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia (e.g. Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999; Wagner, Duveen, Verma, & Themel, 2000; Wagner, Duveen, Themel, & Verma, 1999). The conceptual importance of the notion is double. Firstly, it allows us to conceptualize knowledge as a 'mosaic' characterized by the co-existence of contradictory and heterogeneous modes of thinking rooted in the diversity of the social and relational context of its production. Cognitive polyphasia expresses precisely the plurality and dialogicality of all knowledge systems and the constant networks of relationships that form the experience of everyday life. It provides the means to theorise how a multiplicity of voices of others speak through individual speakers and within social fields. Secondly, it reveals the dynamics of the dialogical communicative processes between people or groups from the same or different social spheres of knowledge. It elucidates the increasing representational conflicts that emerge from the regime of encounters between knowledge systems in contemporary society (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Indeed, globalised societies are more open to contestation and dissent and are more heterogeneous and dynamic than ever before providing greater possibilities for mobility and encounters between groups and their different knowledges. Consequently, the nature of knowledge changes towards more hybrid systems characterized by the polyphasic co-existence of multiple contents and modalities of thinking (Jovchelovitch, 2002, 2007). Amongst this multiplicity of voices, there is not a universal monological consensus of what is regarded as real, yet, there are different groups of people, in different places and at different points in time, that construct different meanings and use diverse symbols to signify reality. The concern underlying these dynamics is that of the existence of asymmetries of symbolic power between knowledge systems.

Different forms of knowledge are categorised in terms of 'the place assigned to them in a hierarchy, the reified forms being readily considered as higher in value and power than the consensual forms.' (Moscovici, 1998, p.234). Some modes of thinking (i.e. scientific/reified knowledge), are legitimately regarded as containing the 'truth' and thus have a privileged relation to others in terms of the criterion of

'rationality'<sup>14</sup> and truth. In contemporary times 'it is clear that the underlying problem is that of modern rationality' (Moscovici, 1998, p.231), whereby scientific knowledge has acquired the status of the authoritative truth, and thus has acquired great symbolic power. Rather than conceiving knowledge as a phenomena in which commonsensical forms of thinking aspire to develop into 'higher' scientific forms, the concept of cognitive polyphasia recognises that these indeed live side-by-side within the plurality of knowledge. Compromises between them, need to be understood in the light of the context and aims of the process of knowing (Jovchelovitch, 2002). Social representations theory in this sense has a potential to critically explain the battle over meaning between conflicting modalities of knowledge. The concern is: (1) how incompatible modes of thinking that diverge in their degree of symbolic power are eclectically drawn on, appropriated, reproduced or challenged by individual subjects in different situations, and (2) why some forms or contents that co-exist together are asserted and privileged over others at different times. Other authors have also outlined a difficulty within social representations theory's effectiveness to socio-psychologically explain the use of representations in concrete contexts (Howarth, 2007; Potter & Litton, 1985).

Moscovici (2000) asserts that amongst these incompatible modes of thinking 'you can observe partial and temporal hierarchies.' (p.242). This elaboration brings to the fore the central question of what determines that a specific thinking mode is drawn on at any particular time and context. To give an example, how a religious belief, instead of scientific 'fact', might be used in order to contest a conflicting political thought around a certain issue that is being constructed through debate? Or to put it in other words; What instigates that a particular form of knowledge might be used in order to contest another mode at a certain point in time and within a particular dialogical communicative context? I argue that this is an issue that remains ambiguous and is not clearly specified by the concept of cognitive polyphasia. Whilst the concept would assist the analysis of 'the relationships which are established

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<sup>14</sup> In inverted commas indicating that there is not a unique rationality. As Jovchelovitch (2002) argues, the logic of knowledge has to be understood not in terms of its objectivity and accuracy to represent reality; but in terms of the context where it is being produced, and the 'how', 'why' and 'what for' of the process of representing. Is this socio-psychological contextuality of knowledge what explains the plurality of logics and rationalities (Jovchelovitch, 2002).

between' different 'modalities of thought' (Moscovici, 1961/1976, p.187, translated by Gervais, 1997, p.53), it needs to be further developed in order for it to be able to clarify the dynamics of appropriation, reproduction and contestation of meanings within the plurality of knowledge. That is, how in the conflict between contents and modalities of knowledge, individuals put to use their representations and in doing so dilemmatic and contradictory contents and modes of thinking are either assimilated or challenged. I take issue with this in the following section.

In this section I have examined the question of the plurality and contextuality of the phenomena of knowledge. I have attempted to show that in the process of the social construction of knowledge, all social spheres exist in relation to each other and all types of knowledge are a form of social representation. No knowledge is indifferent to the symbolic and material aspects of the socio-cultural and historical context in which they are embedded. Through discussing the concept of cognitive polyphasia, I have argued the polyphasic, conflicting, and dynamic nature of the phenomena of knowledge. Based on Jovchelovitch's (2002; 2007) arguments of the importance of bringing to attention the contextuality of knowing in order to understand the plurality of knowledge, in the following section, I work through the dialogical triad of the production of social representations. In the following one (2.2.2.), I explore how within the dialogicality of knowing, the concept of social positioning (Harré & Langenhove, 1998b) can shed light on the intricate dialogue between *interacting* forms of knowledge in the use of representations. I highlight the role of the social positioning of the co-producers of the representation in order to clarify how people alternate and make use of diverse and contradictory modes of thinking. I shall do this in order to ground my main argument, namely, that *the use* of social representations is mediated by the social positioning of the individual towards the interlocutor within a particular dialogical context. The incorporation of this element to the dialogical triad aims at theoretical development of the concept of cognitive polyphasia. Particularly in its capacity to account for the dialogue between different meanings and modes of thinking coming from different spheres of knowledge and experienced first hand at the various relationships in which HPs are located.

### **2.2.1. The Dialogical Making of Social Representations: The Relationship Between Interacting Forms of Knowledge.**

The genesis and transformation of social representations are discussed here by reference to a line of research that unfolds the dialogical ontology of human beings. The focus is on ‘representations in the making’ (Moscovici, 2000, p.244), that is, on how they are produced, brought about and renovated within dialogical processes embedded in particular socio-cultural contexts. The making of social representations is a crucial phenomena since it involves the *interacting* and strife of different meanings and modes of thinking of self and dialogical others. Hence, the dialogical nature of social representations needs to be subjected to discussion, since it is essential in our understanding of cognitive polyphasia. Cognitive polyphasia can only be understood against the context and relational background of multiple dialogues with others, from which it derives the plurality of contents, dialogues and rationalities that it contains (Jovchelovitch, 2007). The dialogicality of social representations illustrates the complex relationship between different modes of thinking within dialogue, which concerns issues of power and resistance within the plurality of knowledge. Indeed, ‘social representation is not a quiet thing consisting of an object and a science and the transformation of that object.’ (Moscovici, 2000, p.275). Moscovici (2000) notes, that ‘there is kind of ideological battle, a battle of ideas [...]’ within the communicative making of social representations (p.275). In order to develop my argument regarding the critical potential of the concept of social representation within the polyphasia of knowledge, I start by reflecting on Marková’s arguments on communication and dialogicality. Indeed, the dialogicality of knowledge and human nature allows for the possibility of critical engagement and contestation to dialogical others’ meanings and worldviews. This is an issue that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Within social representations theory the ontology of human beings is dialogical in nature. Dialogicality also applies to the ontology of knowing, and communicating (Marková, 2003). The heterogeneous and hybrid nature of knowledge, cannot be understood outside the social dialogical relations within which it exists and is constituted. Models of the phenomenon of the development and circulation of knowledge neglect the ‘tension, and exchange between the emitter and the receiver of knowledge’ (Moscovici, 2000, p.259). Instead of an issue of

individual decision making, Moscovici sees this process in terms of dialogism and co-construction<sup>15</sup>. Co-participants in the construction of knowledge come together to negotiate, debate, discuss, re-construct, and/or innovate, that is to *co-produce* knowledge about the social world. Hence, Moscovici moves beyond traditional conceptual lines that see knowledge as discrete static entities and/or isolated information processes, centring his argument 'on their genesis, on representations in the making, not on something already made.' (Moscovici, 2000, p.244). To put it in other words, the constitution and re-constitution of knowledge refers to a process of knowing in dialogue, a dialogue between subjects in relation to an object, as well as a dialogue between diverse contents of knowledge and different forms of rationalities.

Marková (2003a) defines the notion of *dialogicality* as 'the fundamental capacity of the human mind to conceive, create and communicate about social realities in terms of the Alter'<sup>16</sup> (p.85). Within the dialogical relation there is a mutual interdependence of the Ego-Alter, which refers to the fact that they exist, communicate and think in relationship with one another. It is through this mutual dialogical relation that they construct knowledge about an object and simultaneously co-develop themselves (Marková, 2003b). To put it in other words, both the knowing of the object of knowledge and the constitution of the knowing subjects are rooted in dialogical relations (Alter-Ego, Alter-object, and Ego-object). This is one element that will be taken up in the next sub-section and discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

The starting point to understand the dialogicality of the making of social representations, is the triadic dialogical relationship between a minimum of two 'knowing' subjects involved in a communicative action and the object of the representation (Moscovici, 2000). Knowledge exists in the triadic dialogical relation of the whole unit Ego-Alter-Object (Marková, 2003a). These three elements in mutual dialogical relation explain the process of knowing and becoming, which involves the production of social representations.

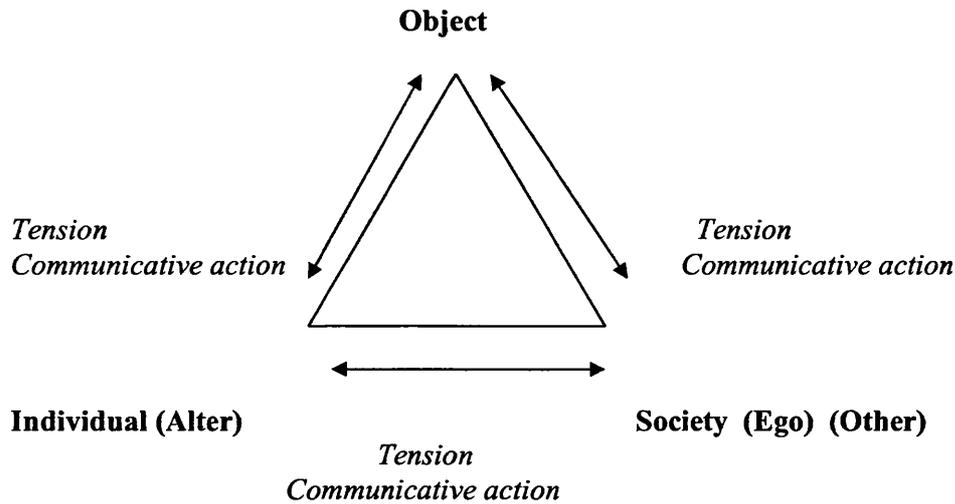
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<sup>15</sup> The prefix 'co' refers to the social nature of knowledge. As in the word 'co-operation' and 'co-ordination', 'co' denotes the joint and common enterprise of making sense and constructing knowledge of the world. It expresses the idea that subjects are interdependent in the dialogical relation of the making of their social realities.

<sup>16</sup> The *Alter* refers to 'the other' (be it a subject, an individual, or a group).

**Figure 1: The dialogical triad.**

(Moscovici, 1988a, p.9).



The internal dynamics of the triad can be understood through the notion of ‘dialogical tension’ (Marková, 2003a). The in-between Ego-Alter-Object is a space of dialogical relations characterized by tension, which is the sine qua non for the dynamics of the making and renovation of social representations. Tension, which is the stimulus arising from opposition and antithesis in communication, creates conflict, which in turn brings about action, dialogue and change (Marková, 2003a). Thus it accounts for the dynamic epistemology of the theory of social representations. Tension is created by a clash of differences between the co-authors and the array of multiple meanings and heterogeneity of knowledges that they bring into the dialogue. Tension also emerges between antimonies that arise from confronting elements between each participant and the object of knowledge. It is this tension what binds Ego-Alter together into dialogue about the object. Marková’s description of the dynamics of knowledge through her notion of ‘dialogical tension’ coincides in many ways with Moscovici’s (1984/1988) account of tension as the source of dynamic relations. For both, dialogical tension is the source of dynamics within the triangle of representation, however, Marková developed this argument

further, for she regarded Hegelian dialectics<sup>17</sup> as not sufficient for accounting for the dynamics of thinking in dialogical triads. Instead, she argues, 'it is tension and conflict arising from contradiction that is the source of action and vitality.' (Marková, 2003a, p.152). Within the dialogical triad there are clashes between; old and new, past and the present, collisions between different styles of knowing, and so on. For instance, tensions could be caused by expertise asymmetries between co-authors, difficulties in co-constructing mutual understanding, to different vocabulary, cultural backgrounds, or different expectations.

The dialogical triad of representation has been proposed as the unit of analysis for the research on social representations (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999). The basic unit of emergence and transformation of social representations is comprised of two subjects, which are co-producers of the representations, the object of the representation and the project of the subjects' social group (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999). The project constitutes the historical and cultural context in which the representation is embedded, and thus represents the time and space vector of this three dimensional model. The model is a succinct example of how representations exist, as Jovchelovitch (1996) notes, in the inter-subjective relational space between people. The advantage of using this analytical framework is that it enables the explanation of the making sense of an object between; a) members of different groups, and, b) members of a group who share a common project but who belong to a group in which different meanings can co-exist at the same time. Hence, the 'triangle of mediation' assists the analysis of how the content of knowledge emerges from the inter-play of elements from the representational fields of the different social spheres of knowledge.

I draw upon this model, in the light of Marková's notion of dialogicality because I believe this is essential in understanding the concept of cognitive polyphasia. The dialogical triad provides an excellent starting point for the conceptualisation of the emergence, circulation and change of social representations within dialogue. It can certainly illustrate the phenomena of cognitive polyphasia at work. It captures how the making of representations consists of the clash of multiple

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<sup>17</sup> Social Representation Theory is rooted in Hegelian dialectics.

voices, and the interacting of diverging and incompatible modes of thinking and ideas in dialogue. Certainly, this raises the question of how within hybrid and heterogeneous knowledge systems people alternate and make use of different and juxtaposing modes of thinking, how these are dialogically related to each other and how they are particularly drawn upon in a specific intercommunicative moment. The dialogical triad is a conceptual tool with the potential to enable a critical exploration of the dynamics of agency, contestation and/or assimilation of reified meanings in the dialogical encounter between differing forms of knowledge. This is an area in the theory of social representations which is rather unclear and that Howarth (2007) has called to be further developed in order to prompt advance in the critical potential of the theory. In order to engage in this task, I believe that the dialogical triad, needs to be further developed to account for how representations actually work within dialogue in contemporary times. These are characterised by instability, plurality, divergence in understandings, openness to dissent, and an increased sharp difference in relations of power. It is indeed in this context of conflicting knowledge systems in which social representations have the capacity of being subject to negotiations (Wagner, 1994b) contestation and debate (Howarth, 2007).

Subjects construct the social object in the dialogical space, through drawing upon the numerous and differing co-existing meanings of the same object that they hold. And in this process, they are engaged in the contestation, challenge or reproduction of legitimised and reified forms of knowledge. As has been argued in Chapter 1, there are divergences in the level of authoritativeness bestowed to different forms of knowledge that are translated into inequalities of symbolic power. I have argued that social representations have two sides; they are either tools with the potential of engaging in critical debate, or in the perpetuation of taken-for granted ideological meanings. The former refers to the creative nature of representations and human agency, which is at the heart of the theory of social representations. Indeed, agency to re-construct is central to the theory since re-presentations are ‘a potential space for meanings to be contested, negated and transformed.’ (Howarth, 2007, p.77). Being descriptive about the content of representations, that is the ‘mental topography’ (Wagner, 1994b) of a particular group or culture, which is what the majority of research has done, would not enable the development of the critical potential of social representations. We need to bring other perspectives in order to

understand the processes through which individuals or groups in dialogue have the agency to *use* representations creatively asserting worldviews and contesting symbolically powerful versions of ‘reality’ As Bakhtin (1986) puts it, the dialogicality of humans involves a *responsive* nature and an ability to *position* oneself in relation to the other within a context of juxtaposition of ideas and clash of meanings. There is no dialogue unless there is disagreement (Rosenzweig, 1921 in Marková, 2003b). Dialogue is primarily characterized by divergences, debates and fights over ideas (Rosenzweig, 1921 in Marková, 2003b). These disputes for the construction of the object are dependent on the particular way subjects position themselves in the dialogue with others (Davies & Harré, 1998). And it is in positioning oneself towards the other’s worldview and knowledge that identity construction takes place within dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984a; Fairclough, 2003).

In the next subsection I draw upon the notion of social positioning and explore the polyphasic use of social representations in the dialogue between people and the encounter between their differing forms of knowledge. I argue that the constitution and re-constitution of knowledge is bound to the construction and re-construction of social identity, which depends upon the adoption of particular social positionings relative to the dialogical co-partner in the process of representing. This involves using concrete styles and/or contents of thinking that validate and justify one’s position and reject and contest those that threaten or put one’s identity and potentialities at risk. However, this issue will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 3, where I seek to explore the link between the polyphasia of knowledge and the inner plurality of the self.

### **2.2.2. The ‘Use’ of Social Representations: Identity and Social Positioning.**

In this section I intend to explain the relationship between processes of social identity and the use of social representations within cognitive polyphasic processes. I do so by discussing (i) how the construction and re-construction of identity occurs through the manifold positionings adopted by the subject, towards the other co-producer of knowledge in the dialogical relations between them; and (ii) how the adoption of a particular social positioning may explain the use and defence of certain

types of knowledge, and the contestation of those knowledges that constitute a threat to one's identity.

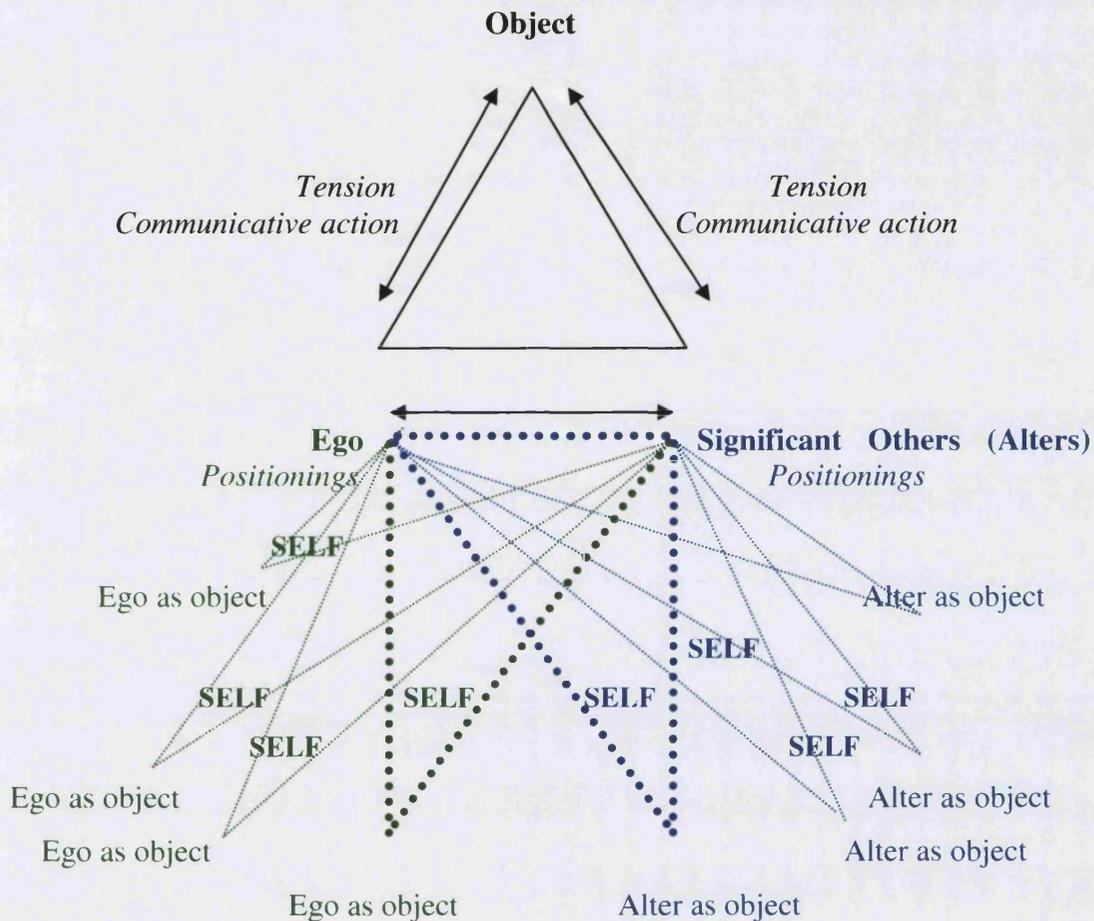
I fully agree with Howarth (2007) that 'without an understanding of identity we could not explain why and how different people use representations to different ends – to legitimize, to contest, to negate, to transform.' (p.78). The centrality of identity in the way social representations are put to use by co-participants of the process of representing, has been acknowledged by other authors (i.e., Breakwell, 2001; Elejabarrieta, 1994). Within Moscovici's arguments on cognitive polyphasia there is a reference to the relationship between the use of representations and the constitution of the self. He notes; 'Through belief, the individual or group is not related as a subject to an object, an observer to a landscape; he is connected with his world as an actor to the character he embodies, man to his home, a person to his or her identity.' (Moscovici, 2000, p.253). The theoretical dilemma that remains unanswered is how does identity actually mediate the use of representations within the polyphasia of knowledge. In order to do so I shall introduce the notion of social positioning.

Many social psychologists have studied the relationship between social representations and identity processes giving theoretical breadth to the dialectic between the intertwined processes of knowledge and identity construction (e.g., Breakwell, 2001; Duveen, 2001; Elejabarrieta, 1994; Howarth, 2002a). Both identity and social representations are ways to relate to the outside world and to the world of others. In making sense of the world people express their identities and in this process construct a sense of who they are in differentiation with the dialogical other (Jovchelovitch, 1996). Social identity is understood as dialogical (relational), contextual and open to reformulations and re-constructions through social interaction 'or through the successive encounters which make up the history of a particular interpersonal relation.' (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990, p.8). The concept of social representation and processes of social identity have been linked by the notion of social positioning (i.e., Elejabarrieta, 1994). Elejabarrieta (1994) notes that; 'if one considers social positioning as negotiated expressions of social identities that intervene in the communication between individuals and groups, this may open up a new way of analysing social representations.' (p.251). In each social encounter

individuals and groups negotiate their social identity, and in so doing, they actively take a particular social position (Elejabarrieta, 1994). Identity construction processes are displayed through the social positioning adopted by dialogical participants in the co-construction of knowledge (Davies & Harré, 1998). Movements along different self-other positions allow for the co-construction of knowledge and re-construction of identity in our interaction with others.

It is important to note here that positioning is not a completely active choice of the individual as an independent entity. Instead it is dialogical and also framed by the positions that are given to the person by the dialogical co-partner and the structures and discourses of the social context. Davies and Harré (1998) note; ‘An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is, that is, what sort of person one is, is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the *positions* made available within one’s own and others’ discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others’ lives.’ (p.35, emphasis my own). This argument implies the relational and plural nature of the self, which as will be discussed in Chapter 3, is inherently linked to the polyphasia of knowledge.

**Figure 2: The dialogical co-occurrence of the construction of knowledge and development of the self (co-construction of identity).**



The creation and re-creation of personhood occurs in the process of engagement in the dialogical construction of realities, and changes in tune with the particular social positionings adopted along the dialogue (Davies & Harré, 1998; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Accordingly, the emergence of identity is closely connected to the dialogical process of knowing along which co-producers of knowledge adopt different social positions (see Figure 2). However, it is important to note here that the adoption of a social position is not essentially intentional, it is also framed by the social position offered by the Alter in the course of their dialogue (Davies & Harré, 1998). Subjects may adopt one or even multiple social positions, along the unfolding of dialogue, and also negotiate one by rejecting positions that are made available to them within a discourse, and it is within each of these positions that they constitute themselves (Davies & Harré, 1998). In this context, identity has a

fluid and dynamic nature and is socio-psychologically constructed and re-constructed through the different dialogical practices with manifold others. Hence, the concept of social positioning helps focus attention on the dynamic aspects of identity, as well as on how polyphasic representational fields can function as assets from which individuals draw concepts, practices and meanings that enable them to make sense of the world moving across their multiple relationships and locations in the social field. As I discuss in the following chapter it opens a potential way of establishing a link between cognitive polyphasia and the co-existence of multiple selves.

Representations emerge, circulate and are transformed through cognitive polyphasia in the course of dialogical processes in which people are 'occupying different social positions in relation to one another' (Doise, 1984, p.267-268). These dialogical relations are internal and external (Moscovici, 1984b) and not only are established with the physically present other, but also with the manifold symbolic others. The multiple ways in which we think about ourselves and the social world stem from the different social positions we adopt towards those manifold others with whom we are engaged (and have been) in relationships. The meanings and iconic images used by the subject in the construction of an object bring into play the type of person one takes oneself to be, which is expressed by the way she positions herself (Davies & Harré, 1998). Within this context, social positioning may explain how different types of knowledge are drawn on as a response to the dialogical interlocutor throughout cognitive polyphasic processes. Indeed, the processes of negotiation that take place in the making of social representations are intertwined with the social positioning adopted by individuals in a specific interaction (Elejabarrieta, 1994). There is evidence that the way social representations are put to use is mediated by the social positioning that we adopt in order to assert our social identities to others and to defend them when they are put at risk by others (Howarth, 2002b; Breakwell, 2001; Lloyd & Duveen, 1992). Threats to identity motivate the way a representation is used and treated (Breakwell, 2001). A particular social positioning may be adopted in order to defend the identity of the subject, and in adopting such social positioning it might be providing the grounds for the challenge, contestation, and/or defense of particular forms of knowledge that conflict with one's identity.

Hence, the dialogical process of social representing goes hand in hand with a process of co-construction of identities. The two processes feed each other (Breakwell, 2001) and involve co-participants taking particular social positionings towards dialogical others in the construction of the representation in order to relate to the world out there. In the same way that identity processes predispose the use of representations, the process of constructing the representation offers the space for the re-negotiations of identity.

The inclusion of the concept of social positioning within the dialogical triad, could easily become a way to understand how social representations are used in a particular way within the dialogical process of knowledge and identity construction. That is, the way identity processes are intertwined with the particular use of representations within the polyphasia of knowledge. The understanding of this relationship is central since it might explain how social identities develop and change within dialogical relations simultaneously within the process of knowing. The fact that people adopt multiple social positions in the process of making sense of an object might explain the reason ‘why different kinds of knowledge and representations can coexist together.’ (Moscovici, 2000, p.253) despite tension and contradiction between them. In this way, it may be possible to make sense of the fact that knowledge is polyphasic, identity is plural, and that different conflicting elements live together in tension inside the person.

### 2.3. Professional Practitioners’ Social Representations.

Within the social representational approach there has been some research of professional populations (e.g. Morant, 1997; Palmonari, Pombeni, & Zani, 1987; Zani, 1993). These studies apply the theory to the investigation of professionals’ representations. Amongst them I highlight Morant’s work on the exploration of the social representations of mental illness amongst mental health practitioners in France and Britain. Her work is the only one amongst this body of research devoted to the critical discussion and theoretical development of the theory.

Morant (1997) proposes a model, for the conceptualisation of human service professionals' social representations of the 'object of their work' (p.2). She reformulates Moscovici's model of the reified and consensual universe, and includes two more social spheres (the sphere of professionals and of public policy). All spheres are in communicative interrelation with each other in the model of the social circulation of knowledge. Morant suggested that professional social representations consist of five inter-related elements of: practice, theory (formal theories from the world of science), professional roles and identities (social identities and inter-group relations), organisational factors (internal and external mechanisms of control and regulation), and lay commonsense. Morant's model provides an insight into the possible constitutive elements of HPs' social representations (see Figure 3). What I propose here, in line with Morant, is that the specific elements of HPs' social representations come from different social spheres of knowledge and social sectors (clients, the particular organization to which professionals belong, science, lay commonsense, the media, the government), within which they are located and engaged in multiple self-other relationships. HPs' location and movements across these contexts and relationships provide the resources for them to make sense of homelessness and construct the plurality of contents and dialogues that form the knowledge they hold. Hence, when identifying the specific elements of HPs' social representations, I shall focus on how their different meanings of homelessness, co-exist together within their knowledge through conflict, contestation and negotiation. These are sustained by different systems of knowledge and sectors in society and experienced first hand within the various relationships in which HPs participate. I focus on this aspect through exploring the way their social representations are *used*.

HPs are located at a variety of interfaces between the different social spheres and hence are in dialogue with manifold significant others (see Figure 4). Thus, they are an interesting case for the study of processes of construction of polyphasic knowledge. Professional practitioners are embedded in multiple social communicative processes, and it is in dialogue with their professional colleagues, scientists, lay people, policy makers or any other individual from the existing social spheres, that they construct and re-present the object of their work. Their knowledge is a means through which knowledge elements from different social spheres together with aspects from their professional organization and day-to-day experience in the

context of homelessness, are filtered, translated and integrated into their professional practice. This results in an hybrid knowledge where elements that might seem to be incompatible co-exist together and are put to use in different ways depending on the contextual demands. Indeed, consensus, debate and heterogeneity are aspects that live together in the same representational field (Jovchelovitch, 2007; Rose et al., 1995). Within the sphere of knowledge of HPs there is a clash of multiple and different types of knowledge that vary from reified to commonsensical forms, and thus in their degree of symbolic power.

In order to understand how HPs' knowledge integrates elements from all the spheres, I draw upon Bauer and Gaskell's model for the research on social representations (1999). This model has been regarded as appropriate to the study of the impact upon commonsense knowledge of professional understanding of the object of their work (Foster, 2003). The framework is understood in terms of dialogicality. I adopt Marková's dialogical triad as a guide, which offers general principles on the making of a representation. In particular, I focus on the role of social positioning in the use of representations within dialogical relations. And in doing so I draw on Bakhtin's insights concerning the multi-voicedness of manifold significant others that occurs within the course of the dialogical process of knowledge production (1984a). In addition, Morant's model facilitates the mapping of the social spheres involved in the circulation and transformation of professional representations, and hence of the possible constitutive elements of these representations (Figures 3, 4).

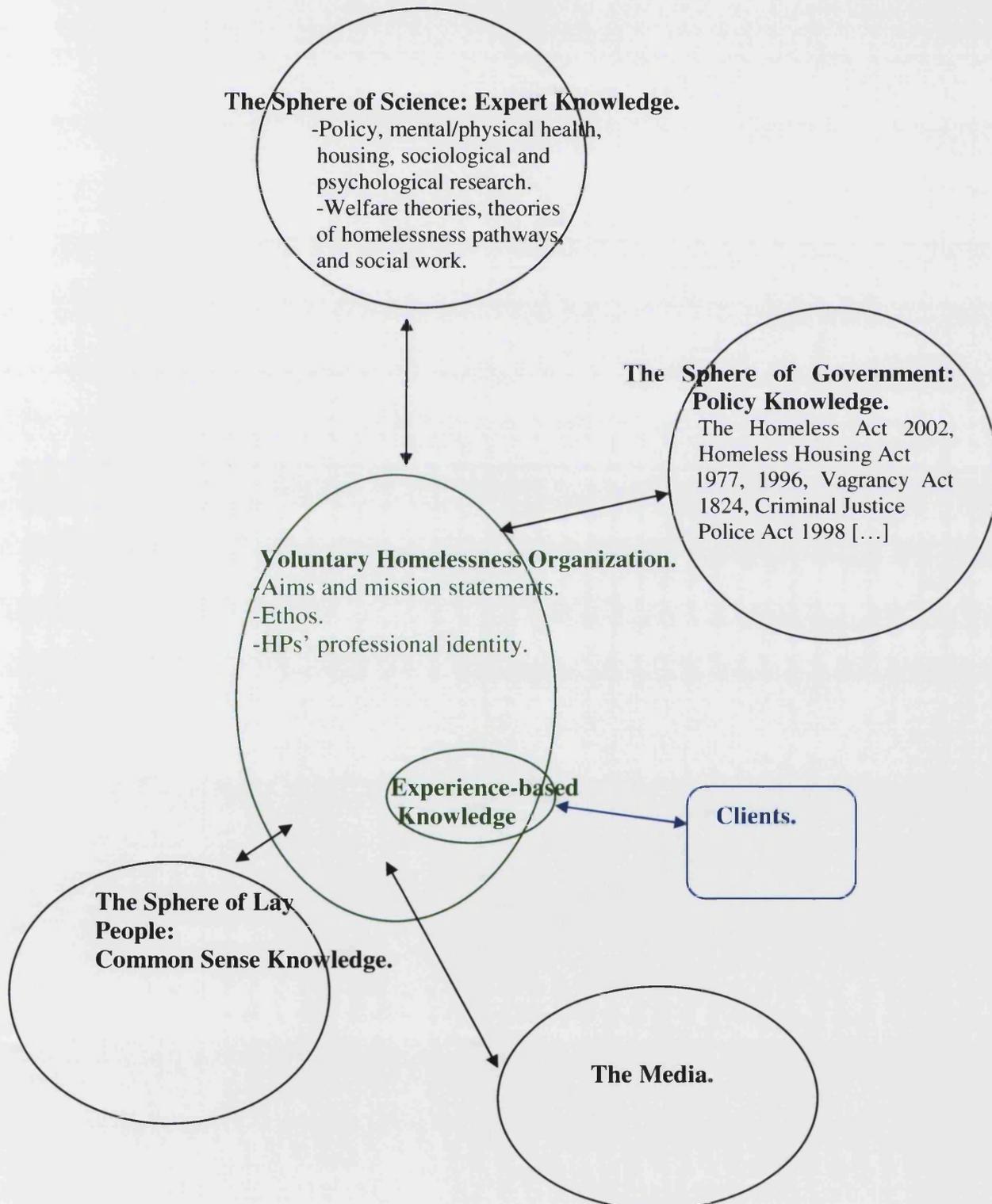
## 2.4. Conclusion.

In this chapter I have introduced the theoretical lenses through which I approach the object of my investigation; social representations theory and in particular the concept of cognitive polyphasia. I have argued that representations are systems of knowledge that are central to the constitution of the social life of groups and the subjectivity of individuals. I have discussed the polyphasic, social, dialogical and dynamic nature of knowledge. I have sought to further develop the notion of cognitive polyphasia in order to understand the *dialogical use* of representations. In

including the notion of social positioning to the dialogical triad I have linked processes of knowledge production with those of identity construction. In doing so I have introduced my argument of how representations are used in different ways is mediated by the shifting and re-shifting of positions adopted by the subject towards dialogical others in the simultaneous process of knowledge and identity construction. In the next chapter I will develop the argument on the link between ontology and epistemology in detail, though a Bakhtinian approach to the study of social representations.

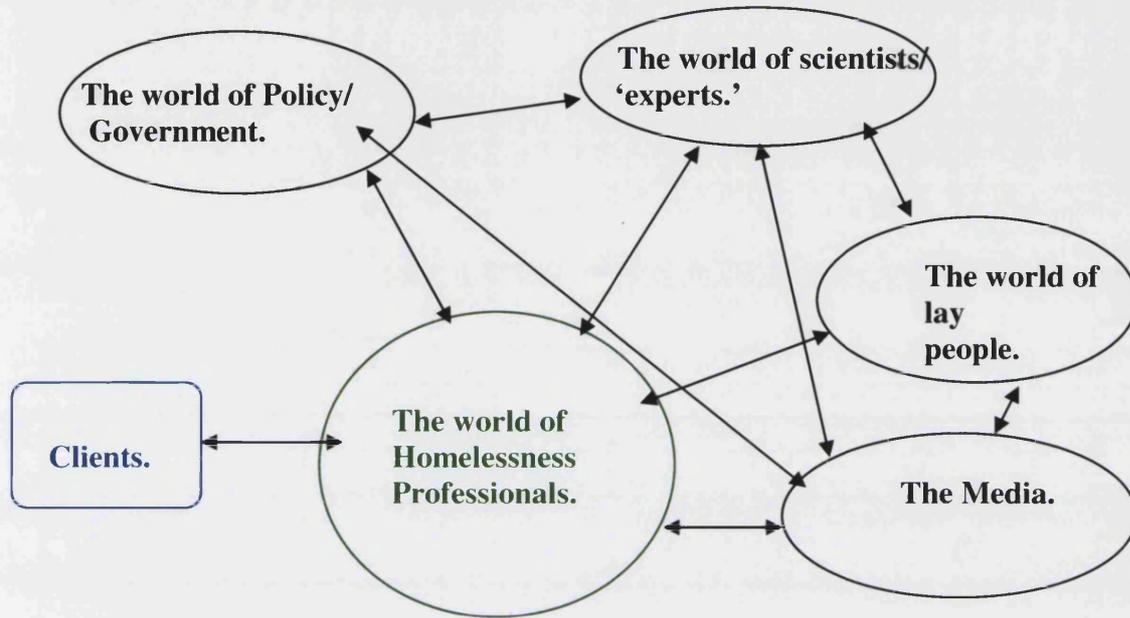
**Figure 3: Possible constitutive elements of HPs' social representations of homelessness.**

Adapted from Morant's (1997) model for the conceptualisation of human service professionals' social representations of the 'object of their work' (p.2)



**Figure 4: Knowledge spheres involved in HPs' social representations of homelessness.**

(adapted from Morant, 1997, p.68)





### 3. COGNITIVE POLYPHASIA AND THE POLYPHONIC SELF.

Building on the argument that I have proposed in chapter two, regarding the mediating role of social positioning in the *dialogical use* of polyphasic knowledge and the co-development of the self, in this chapter I present my theoretical argument regarding the link between the internal diversity of both knowledge and self. Adopting a Bakhtinian approach to the study of representations, the central aim is to discuss the link between the phenomena of cognitive polyphasia and the plurality of the self as dialogically co-constitutive of each other and mutually dependent. Drawing on Herman and Kempen's (1993) dialogical self and on Bakhtin's (1984a) concepts of polyphony, appropriation and spatialization, I conceptualise how both self and knowledge are co-constructed upon the basis of representational processes along which people take up and negotiate particular positions, put to use contents and modes of thinking, and in doing so criticize, challenge, negotiate or reproduce dialogical others' knowledges. Hence, the dynamics of polyphasic knowledge are conceptualised as the *movement* alongside multiple positions adopted towards dialogical others, from which each of the many elements of the representational field are put to use merging with a particular self construction. Furthermore, I discuss how Bakhtin's emphasis on the rhetorical nature of positioning and conceptualization of identity as a process of *ideological becoming*, can explain the contested dimensions of social representations. Possibilities for critically engaging with the representations of others contesting and re-accentuating them with their own intentions and values, are not absolute. Instead, they are dialogical processes and thus are also framed by the position of the relational co-partner and the level of authoritativeness of her knowledge. In this way, by discussing how positioning and appropriation are at the heart of possibilities for re-construction and contestation in the encounter with the different knowledge systems of others, I hope I contribute to the progression of the critical potential of social representations theory.

I depart from a basic idea pointed out by many; to make sense of oneself implies understanding the world around us and vice versa (Bakhtin, 1984a; Edwards & Potter, 1992). Processes of forming the self and constructing the world are dialogically co-produced side by side in a joint co-authorship between the self and at

least one other (actual or imagined). At the heart of the discussion of the co-constituent nature of cognitive polyphasia and the polyphonic self is the argument that they cannot be understood beyond the bounds of the social context of their production; that of the multiplicity of ego-alter dialogical relations, within which there is a confrontation of plural values, perspectives and discourses. The polyphonia of the voices of others, where diverse modes of thinking clash, is the context within which one constructs knowledge and makes sense of herself. The plurality of identities (selves) is possible because we have a 'capital' of polyphasic co-existing forms and contents of knowledge that we eclectically draw upon from different positions in the construction of realities along the multiple dialogues with alters. These plural resources are used by the subject in order to discursively respond through rhetorical positioning to the knowledge, values and perspectives of dialogical others, whilst at the same time presenting herself.

I draw on Bakhtin's treatment of dialogue both ontologically and epistemologically. For Bakhtin 'dialogue' does not simply refer to spoken conversation but instead to any self-other communicative practice with the power to produce meaning. Dialogue penetrates any form of thinking/knowledge and being since the other is omnipresent in the person. Bakhtinian dialogue implies recognising the voice of the other, appropriating and re-constructing it with new meanings. The words/discourses of manifold others infused with indignation, passion or disbelief are always present in the person and engage in agreement, conflict, negotiation or even accompaniment to each other in the inner dialogues or 'microdialogues' (Bakhtin, 1984a). Bakhtinian dialogue does not refer to a means through which mutual agreement is sought and achieved (this would imply monologism), but to relational communication, which might imply diversity (instead of unity), difference of ideas and 'consciousnesses', multivoiced-ness, and therefore conflict and ideological struggle. Dialogue emerges out of the tension produced by the disagreement, difference and judgement that occurs between 'voices'.

In Chapter Two I have discussed how the way people eclectically use diverse contents and modes of thinking within the polyphasia of knowledge is mediated by

the orchestration of multiple positionings<sup>18</sup> adopted towards the dialogical other. These serve as an asset against which the self is constructed and re-constructed in a multifaceted way. Thus, the use of a particular form or content of knowledge within the plurality of a representational field is intertwined with a particular construction of the self. In this chapter, I propose that the *dialogical use* of knowledge is a rhetorical response to the anticipated discourse of the dialogical other, and is framed within a particularly positioned *I* that conveys a specific self construction. I suggest that in as much as we live in multiple contexts where we participate in a plurality of relationships with manifold alters, then our knowledge and self co-emerge as plural and even dilemmatic as they are distributed through these multiple I-other relations.

Bakhtin's work can account for how the co-existence of multiple knowledge resources and of a plural self is linked to the polyphony of human beings, that is; the multiple voiced-ness of dialogical alters that simultaneously inhabit the person. Firstly, his notion of *spatialization* of dialogical relationships within the polyphony of the self, can shed light in our understanding of the plurality of identity and knowledge. Spatialization leaves room for the co-existence side-by-side of a polyphony of voices in conflict, agreement and/or negotiation, out of which polyphasic knowledge and multifaceted identity co-emerge. Secondly, his notions of *positioning* and *appropriation* can contribute to the development of the critical potential of social representation theory. They highlight the agency of the person to rhetorically position herself in relation to the discourses of others and creatively re-construct them. Thus, they allow us to think of possibilities for contestation of more powerful forms of knowledge within intersubjective relations, characterized by inequalities of status and valuation of knowledge systems. In adopting a Bakhtinian approach, I hope to contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of *dialogical use* of representations in the co-construction of knowledge and identity. In this theoretical development we find a fertile framework to apprehend, both the dialogue that occurs between interacting forms of knowledge within polyphasia, and the everyday dialogue of encounters between individuals, groups and institutions holding different knowledges, cultures, projects and positionings in social fields.

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to note here that in focusing on positionings, I do not reduce the individual subject to her positionings in discourse thus rejecting her ontology.

### 3.1. The Polyphonic Self: ‘Traces’ of Others in the Self.

By extensively drawing on Bakhtin’s ideas of polyphony in this section I want to start discussing the link between cognitive polyphasia and the existence of a plural self. This, can only be understood if we take into consideration that the individual exists ‘in a world of others’ words’<sup>19</sup> (Bakhtin, 1986, p.143) and her existence ‘is an orientation in this world, a reaction to others’ words’ (p.143). As stems from Bakhtin, the dialogical self is inhabited by an orchestrated polyphony of the voices of others with their respective values and worldviews. It is in relation to the ‘words’ of others that knowledge of the world is constructed and the self is developed (Marková, 2003b). I intend to examine this by discussing; (i) the extent to which the inner plurality of the person is rooted in the complex network of internal and external dialogical relations to which the co-construction of self and knowledge is bound; (ii) how both self and knowledge are dialogically co-constituted along the shifting of rhetorical positions adopted as responses towards the polyphony of others’ knowledge claims; and finally, (iii) the extent to which plurality and co-existence of contradiction within knowledge and the identity of the person is possible due to the inner spatialization of the self along simultaneous dialogical relationships.

I hope it will soon be clear that the polyphasia of knowledge is bound to the plurality of selves and that both have an open-ended character. However, it is important to note that I am not arguing that self and knowledge have a chameleonic nature, that constantly changes along with the context and new dialogical relations. A view that emphasises constant flux would imply a conceptualisation of identity as fragmented and of knowledge as ever changing. Thus, the person would not be able to establish criteria for considering what is right and wrong, good or bad. This would

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that Bakhtin does not refer to ‘word’ in the literal sense. Utterances are not only verbal, they emerge in social practices and communication. Bakhtin does not reduce the study of dialogical relations to the linguistic realm. Instead, he studied the meta-linguistics. These refer to the diverse aspects of the life of the word, which are outside the limits of the linguistics. For Bakhtin, dialogue does not only have a verbal quality, for him this is only one aspect of the multiple forms that shape the discourse. In broad terms, dialogue not only includes conversation, but also all other forms of communication including social practices.

imply a schizoid and dysfunctional person. Claiming that everything is fluidity of knowledge and identity, would fail to recognise the fundamental human need for some permanence, unity and stable framework. How if not could we experience ourselves as single persons, or how could we explain invariance in knowledge? I will in section 3.2, discuss the problem of explaining how functional knowledge and a coherent sense of self-identity is achieved within the multiple and open-ended nature of both self and knowledge. Certainly, there is place for both multiplicity and sense of unity, change and permanence in the person across time and space.

The notion of polyphony, which was used by Bakhtin (1984a) to describe the plurality and complexity of the characters of Dostoyevsky's novel, is perhaps, his most original contribution to our understanding of the dialogical self and the polyphasic nature of knowledge. We simultaneously exist in internal dialogue with the diverse worlds of multiple others (Bakhtin, 1986); those that we have encountered in the past and those which we relate to in the present time. Hence, in the polyphonic self there are 'traces' of the discourses and narratives left by others along the past or present dialogical relationships, which are evaluated and rhetorically responded to through acts of positioning (Bakhtin, 1984a). In this way the notion is central to our understanding of how the individual subject contains a plurality of polyphasic discourses about the self, others and the world. As Bakhtin (1984a) points out about the polyphonic novel, the polyphonic pluralistic self is '*multi-styled*', '*multi-accented* and contradictory in its values' (p.15), and thus an heterogeneous 'hybrid' (p.11). It is within the polyphonic encounter between voices in disagreement, harmony or negotiation, whereby meaning about the self and the world comes to be constituted. I believe that the conceptualization of the dialogical self that stems from Bakhtin's accounts of polyphony has important implications:

1. Firstly, it moves beyond traditional conceptualizations of personhood as a monological unity comprised of a single voice (Bakhtin, 1984a) towards a decentralization of the self. In emphasizing the plurality and many-ness of the self it de-mystifies the idea of the person as a fixed entity with a unique, integrated ego that exists outside the dialogicality with others and the environment. From a Bakhtinian perspective, the self is not a unity

tied to itself. Instead, its limits are in the ego-alter relationship. As Hermans & Kempen (1993) note about the conceptualisation of the dialogical self, that stems from Bakhtin's polyphonic novel; 'It permits the one and the same individual to live in a multiplicity of worlds with *each world having its own author* telling a story relatively independent of the authors of the other worlds. Moreover, at times the several authors, may enter into dialogue with each other.' (p.46-47, emphasis my own). It is along the positions adopted towards the views of dialogical others that each of the multiple selves of the inner plurality of the person is constituted in co-emergence with a corresponding discourse.

2. Secondly, it maintains a perspective of the plurality of knowledge as rooted in the polyphony of voices of dialogical others, each of which embodies a discourse<sup>20</sup> of its own. Knowledge is 'played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses' (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.88) - ideas embodied in the voice of different alters to which the person rhetorically responds (Bakhtin, 1984a). The argument of the internal diversity and dialogical confrontation between opposing discourses sheds light on the polyphasic nature of knowledge. Knowledge about a referential object does not consist of a homogeneous representational field. Instead, is like a 'field of battle for others' voices' (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.88), encompassing a multiplicity of meanings living side-by-side within the same representational field. The *eclectic use of knowledge* within the plurality of a representational field is understood as *an answer towards the voice of the other*, from a subject who 'wants to be heard, understood, and 'answered' by other voices from other positions.' (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.88). Thus, knowledge is eclectically used through the adoption of a responsive position to the discourse

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<sup>20</sup> In this thesis, 'discourse' is used in reference to linguistic and non-linguistic practices (material, social/institutional).

of the other and through which identity is co-constructed. It is the fact that in our making sense of self, others and the world around us there are multiple co-authorships that explains the plural and even dilemmatic nature of both knowledge and identity.

3. Thirdly, it supports the idea of the open nature of both self and knowledge. Bakhtin's perspective entails a conceptualization of the self as unfixed and of knowledge as unfinalised. Inasmuch as the ontology of the human subject will always be bound to the dialogue with others within a variety of contexts, then it can be argued that both self and knowledge about the world are open to change and never finally constituted. As Barresi (2002) observes in relation to the implications of Bakhtin's arguments: 'there can never be closure on the self or full identification with the other. The present self is always open to the future, and the past can always change its meaning. And there are always others-real others- with whom to engage in dialogue and mutual interaction. Even if the self could enclose the consciousness or activity of the other. The other is always an unfinished unknown. And just as our engagement with the other is undetermined, so too is our relationship with our self in that engagement. And so the dialogue continuous....and so also the thinking thought...' (p.249). The multiplicity of self and knowledge is understood as a reflection of the contradictions and diversity of contemporary times when more than ever before, there is abundance of opportunities to simultaneously meet a multitude of others from different cultures and groups. Greater dialogical relations provide more opportunities for novelty and change. As Hermans (2003) notes: 'we are living in an era in which the boundaries between different domains of the self and the outside world are highly permeable so that a great number of fluctuating positions come and go as temporary parts of the self.' (p.102-103). The outcome of the multiplication of encounters is the increase of the hybridity of knowledge (Jovchelovitch, 2007)

and of the inner plurality of the self, which enables one to cope with the dilemmatic and abundant contexts and relations in which we live.

Adopting a dialogical approach, one that recognizes that dialogue between the individual and manifold others is at the heart for the quest of knowledge of self, others and the world around us, involves a careful consideration of the polyphony of human beings. Hence, in the following section I adopt a Bakhtinian perspective in order to explore how the dialogical way we experience and come to know ourselves and others, is mediated by discursive acts of positioning towards the polyphony of the voices of others.

### **3.1.1. Constituting the Self; Responsiveness and Positioning Towards The Other.**

In this section I draw attention to Bakhtin's conceptualization of the constitution of the person as a process of *ideological becoming* for it emphasizes the contested and creative character of the dialogue with others. I intend to explain this by discussing (i) How the co-development of a sense of self and of knowledge about the world consists of a process of shifting rhetorical positions through which the knowledge of others is appropriated, evaluated and re-accentuated with one's own intentions and values; and (ii) How the adoption of a particular rhetorical position towards the knowledge of other co-authors may explain the dialogical/ideological use of knowledge.

'I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself to an other, through another, and with the help of another.' (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.287)

The ontology of human beings and the epistemology of knowledge are symbolic activities bound to each other and deeply rooted in the plurality of ego-alter dialogical relations. Within the dialogical encounter between the multiplicity of voices of others '(d)iscourse about the world merges with confessional discourse about oneself.' (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.78). Bakhtin (1984a) considered that we experience the world and make sense of ourselves in terms of the world of others;

clashing with it, judging it and rhetorically positioning ourselves towards it. As he puts it: 'I live in a world of others' words. And my entire life is an orientation in this world, a reaction to others' words (an infinitely *diverse reaction*)' (Bakhtin, 1986, p.143, emphasis my own). At the heart of Bakhtin's view is the emphasis on the unavoidability of the other in the self. As he puts it; 'Just as the body is formed initially in the mother's womb (body), a person's consciousness awakens wrapped in another's consciousness.' (1986, p.138). From a Bakhtinian perspective, others are co-authors in the development of self and knowledge of the world, which are co-constructed through a clash of plural multi-voiced<sup>21</sup> meanings. It is indeed the diversity and plurality of the dialogical encounter that explains 'the impossibility of the existence of a single consciousness' (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.287), and the inescapable polyphony of self and polyphasia of knowledge. The individual subject lives in a complex network of dialogical relationships with others, orientating herself towards the diversity of their 'voices', which guarantees the co-constitution of plural self and knowledge. As Jovchelovitch (2007) argues; 'From the proposition that knowledge is bound to community/social context, it follows that knowledge varies. There are a number of different social formations, which produce different forms of social knowledge.' (p.67) and co-constitutive selves. It is not only through present relationships with others that selfhood and social knowledge are constituted. It is also through inner dialogue with others with whom we related in the past and who left a 'trace' on us, where we find resources such as 'voices', discourses, and ideas we dialogically draw upon and respond to in order to make sense of ourselves and the environment (Bakhtin, 1984a).

Bakhtin's views emphasize that the person reflects back upon the self as an object in relation to the other's views actively appropriating and responding to them. It is in doing so that she makes them her own and in this process develops a sense of self. The multiplicity of selves is understood as a product of processes of self-reflexivity with the multiple others that we encounter in life (physically or not-

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<sup>21</sup> I would like to clarify that by 'multi-voicedness' Bakhtin does not refer to an act of copying or literally uttering others' discourses with their 'intonations' and emphasises'. Instead, according to Bakhtin (1986), an utterance is positioned in relation to the dialogical other and 'refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account' (p.91). This is the responsive nature of the utterance, to which Bakhtin refers as 'addressivity'.

physically), with which we co-construct different and even contradictory beliefs and practices. As Bakhtin (1984a) argues; ‘To be means to be for the other, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, [...] looking inside himself, he looks into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another.’ (p.287). Thus, the *I* can only make sense of herself and emerge as an ontological human being through identifying herself through the other and in co-operation and conflict (co-constructing) with the other. This highlights the mutuality of self-other and the co-authorship of others in the development of a sense of self and in the production of social knowledge.

Despite the fact that Bakhtin assumes ‘the other in me’, it is through the notion of ‘appropriation’ (1984a) that he highlights the agency of the individual person to re-construct and bring novelty to the ‘voices’ of others. ‘Appropriation’ is crucial to an explanation of how positioning constitutes an active *evaluative* act towards the discourses of others (Bakhtin, 1984a). ‘Appropriation’ refers to the process by which the self actively draws upon the discourses<sup>22</sup> of others and re-works them making them hers through infusing them with own values and intentions (Bakhtin, 1981). It is in investing them with her own ‘accents’; ‘re-accentuating’ them (Bakhtin, 1981)<sup>23</sup>, that she gains co-authorship of them and rhetorically responds to the other. The dialogical constituting of the self and knowledge requires the person setting her own *position*<sup>24</sup> towards and responding to the alter. This implies evaluating her perspectives, appropriating and giving them a new value. Such an act of positioning invites agency to contest, challenge and re-construct. It is through acts of signifying positioning (Bakhtin, 1984a) that she is capable of answering, agreeing, refuting, re-negotiating and/or re-constructing the other’s discourse and worldviews. Indeed, as Marková (2003b) argues, ‘Co-authorship demands evaluation of the other, struggle with the other and judgement of the message of the other.’ (p.256). The ‘use’ of knowledge is embodied in a voice and a

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<sup>22</sup> Please note that by ‘discourse’ I also refer to the symbolic construction of reality that occurs through social practices, structural arrangements and so on.

<sup>23</sup> By re-accentuation Bakhtin (1981) refers to; ‘An accent, stress or emphasis. Every language or discourse system accents-highlights and evaluates-its material in its own way, and this changes through time.’ (p.423).

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that positioning is regarded as not merely ‘conversational’, but as a discursive *practice*, a *material activity* that goes beyond spoken and written language.

position (Bakhtin, 1984a). By adopting a position, the person is co-constructing meaning in anticipation of the potential response of the other (Bakhtin, 1986).

In as much as self construction and the making sense of the world are one and the same process, then we can understand how for every response to an other's discourse the new meaning that emerges 'talks' about both the referential object and the self of the person. As Bakhtin puts it (1984a), it is from a positioning towards the other that 'a story is told' and 'a portrayal built' (p.7). The co-constitutive process of proposing an identity and using a form of knowledge is done through the rhetorical positioning and re-positioning towards the knowledge claims of the manifold dialogical co-partners. It is through acts of re-negotiation, assimilation and/or contestation that others' 'words' (social groups, institutions, politicians) come to be part of the identity and knowledge of the person.

It becomes clear that the process of positioning is linked to argumentative contexts. Positioning does not only reflect the dialogical but also the rhetorical nature of knowledge and self-construction, within which the person is engaged in debate with imagined or actual (present) others. This is critical if we are to make sense not only of the inner plurality of the person, but also to appreciate how this is fraught with dilemmas and contradictions. In as much as the individual subject is inhabited by a polyphony of voices of others she lives in a sphere of conflict between different statements of what is the truth, confronting values about justice, and so on. Our inner polyphony is characterized by a clash of diverging and even contradictory 'voices' (values, perspectives and ideas) of the different others and the person's discursive evaluations of them. Hence the polyphony of the self is co-constitutive of the polyphasia of knowledge, as it refers to the co-existence within the person of discourses and perspectives of diverse and even contradictory nature embodied in the voices of manifold others. Furthermore, Bakhtin's (1984a) emphasis on the agency of the person to rhetorically position within the dialogical relationship with others, helps us understand the eclectic use of knowledge within plural representational fields. The evaluative act of positioning, mediates the contradictory and dilemmatic way individual subjects represent the world and come to know and experience one-self. In this way, the inner reality of the individual subject resembles a public sphere where multiple voices with their respective discourses, social values and judgements

clash and confront each other. It is indeed out of the confrontation of this polyphony of voices, in which the discourses of multiple others are evaluated, responded to and re-constructed by different positioned 'I's, that new meaning/ideas emerge and different 'Me's are built (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Through this process a plural self and polyphasic knowledge emerge.

As I will develop in the following section, the polyphonic self is understood as the simultaneous co-existence of a multiplicity of I-other positionings towards the discourses of others. This guarantees the plural nature of self and knowledge and explains the possibility of internal dilemmas and contradictions. As Marková (2003b) argues; 'The speech of others and their thoughts contain *strangeness*, which the self tries to overpower by imposing its own meaning on the other or to appropriate by making it part of its own thoughts and speech.' (p.257). In positioning oneself with respect to others' knowledge over time, 'appropriating' it in order to claim and defend a particular vision of the world 'one that strives for social significance' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.333) one engages in what Bakhtin calls a process of '*ideological becoming*'. As Tappan (2005) puts it; 'Identity development as *ideological becoming*, for Bakhtin, entails gradually coming to authorize and claim authority for one's own voice, while remaining in constant dialogue with other voices [...]' (p.55, emphasis my own). Bakhtin's conceptualization of the constitution of identity as *ideological becoming* along the shifting of discursive positionings, has an important bearing on the issue of the contested and argumentative dimensions of social representations<sup>25</sup>. As argued in Chapter Two, the importance of introducing the notion of positioning as a mediator in the dialogical making of social representations is that it would further enable the development of the critical potential of the theory. A critical version of the theory 'highlights the intersubjectively negotiated and contested character of human relations' (Howarth, 2004, p.363). The notion of positioning does indeed so. It does not only mediate the use of knowledge and the co-construction of identity, it also accounts for the creative agency of the person to rhetorically respond and re-construct the knowledge of others. Positioning accounts for the possibility of a new production; a re-presentation, that emerges through dialogical/ ideological reworking of the voiced claims of others with the aim of serving one's own intentions.

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<sup>25</sup> This issue will be discussed in the last section.

In this section I have argued that the internal diversity of self and knowledge is an expression of the responsive nature of human beings towards the polyphony of discourses of others. The act of adopting particular social positionings mediates the dialogical appropriation of the plurality of others' meanings and their contestation, re-production or re-negotiation. We can conclude that identity and knowledge construction are plural co-constitutive acts of co-authoring with the other. However, the diversity of knowledge and multiplicity of selves bring to the fore the question of how different forms of knowledge, meanings and identities live, simultaneously within individuals and groups. The question that remains to be answered is how co-existence of plural and opposing forces (selves and forms of knowledge) within the person can be possible. In order to discuss this, in the following section, I draw upon Bakhtin's principle of spatialization (1984a) of dialogical relationships. In particular, I discuss Bakhtinian spatialization in reference to Hermans and Kempen's (1993) perspective on the dialogical self.

### 3.2. Spatialization of the Plural Self: Use of Polyphasic Knowledge as Movement of *I* Positions.

'In the polyphonic translation of the self there is not an overarching *I* organizing the constituents of the *Me*. Instead, the spatial character of the polyphonic novel leads to the supposition of a decentralized multiplicity of *I* positions that function like relatively independent authors, telling their stories about the respective *Me*'s as actors. The *I* moves, in an imaginal space, from the one to the other position, from which different or even contrasting views of the world are possible. Moreover, like the authors in Dostoevsky's novels, the different authors, localized at different positions in the imaginal landscape, *may enter into dialogical relationships with one another, agreeing or disagreeing with each other*. In this highly open and dynamic conception of the self, transactional relationships between the different *I* positions may lead to the emergence of meanings that are not given at one of the available positions' (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p.47, emphasis my own).

In this section I draw attention to the relationship between the use of polyphasic knowledge and the plural self, understood as constituted along the co-existence of spatialized *I*-positions adopted towards dialogical others. Hermans and Kempen's (1993) perspective on the dialogical self is the springboard from which to engage in a discussion of the feasibility of polyphasia and co-existence of plural selves. They draw upon Bakhtin's notions of polyphony and spatialization and the Jamesian distinction between *I* (self as knower) and *Me* (self as known object) (James, 1890) in order to conceptualize the dialogical self as a multiplicity of *I*-positions dialogically related to each other and orientated to actual or imaginal others. Both James and Bakhtin assume the plurality of the human mind, yet each one has a different view on it. On the one hand, for James the multiple selves of the person are intertwined by a volitional, unifying and distinctive *I* that tends towards the continuity of the self through time (Hermans, 2001). Thus, for him identity tends towards continuity and unity despite multiplicity (Hermans, 2001). Bakhtin, on the other hand, emphasises conflict and discontinuity between the discourses and worldviews of the multiple 'characters' that comprise the polyphony of the human mind (Hermans, 2001). According to him, the internal plurality of heterogeneous 'voices' with their diverse perspectives co-exist simultaneously, in terms of space rather than time (Bakhtin, 1984a). Hence, the internal multiplicity of the self is characterized by the *juxta-position*<sup>26</sup> of plural meanings and discourses that live side-by-side without dialectically merging with each other. In this way, Hermans and Kempen achieve a balance since it is in drawing on Bakhtin's perspective that the assumption of essential unity and continuity of the self implied in James' work is overcome whilst a certain unity within the self is assumed. This balance enables explaining how a sense of having a united self identity is possible within the multiplicity of selves. Both Jamesian unity (continuity) and Bakhtinian co-existence (discontinuity) are integrated in their notion of the dialogical self, thus allowing for a degree of coherence within the multiplicity of the self (Hermans, 2001). Although they achieve a decentralized notion of the dialogical self as a co-existence of a multiplicity of 'characters' (positioned *I*'s), at the same time they leave space for the experience of a certain sense of permanence and of being one person (oneness of

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<sup>26</sup> Please note that by including the hyphen I am highlighting the spatialization of dialogical positions within the plural self, through which multiple and even opposing meanings about the self, others and the environment are co-constructed.

mind), which responds to the essential human need for some reference and stable framework. James's *I* 'preserves the continuity and agency of the same self' whilst the Bakhtinian notion of position helps understanding how 'the self is extended towards a discontinuous heterogeneity of individuals and groups of the society.' (Hermans, 2003, p.109). In both there is an assumption of the agency of the '*I*' (in James' case) or the '*character*' (in Bakhtin's case), to reject and discredit the other's meanings and thoughts.

The dialogical self is spatially extended along a dynamic multiplicity of opposing or mutually supporting *I*-positions<sup>27</sup>, which the person is able to alternate between in relation to contextual changes in the dialogue with manifold others (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). These different *I*-positions exist in mutual dialogical relation of contradiction, exclusion, difference, questioning, coalition and/or co-operation (Hermans, 2001; 2003). The positioning repertoire of the person, is open to change by the inclusion or suppression of positions depending on the changes in the situation (Hermans, 2003). This is what ensures the possibilities of change of knowledge about self, others and the world around us. Depending on the demands of the socio-cultural context, the person develops different types of relations between her repertoire of *I*-positions in order to respond to the battles of everyday relational life with actual or imagined others from the different milieus where she simultaneously lives. In these different milieus the person is engaged with different projects, values and systems of knowing.

The multiplicity of selves, each of which can come into conflict with each other, is therefore understood as the co-existence of spatialized *I*-positions and their corresponding discourses, which are claimed or 'used' from those positions. The person shifts from one position to another in a dynamic way enabling the articulation of responses to dialogical others, whereby multiple selves are experienced and plural knowledges 'used'. Indeed, the production of meaning is understood as dialogical movements along the multiple and even opposite spatialized *I*-positions from which a

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<sup>27</sup> *I* positions are not fully volitional and result of the agency of the individual. They are not fully organized and controlled by the individual, they are also organized by the social environment and shaped by the dialogical other.

particular voice or discourse is ‘heard’ and a related self narrative co-emerges (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). As in Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel every thought is ‘the position of a personality’ (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 9) and conveys a particular self within a pluralistic identity. Each *I*-position tells different and even opposing ‘stories’ about the world and the self. Hence in this way, particular selves, or identities are intimately bound up with particular forms of knowledge, discourses and social practices.

The notion of identity as spatialized is essential in understanding the simultaneous co-existence of a multiplicity of selves each merging with specific meanings about the object world, which are eclectically ‘used’ (claimed) from different *I*-positions. Any human being, by virtue of being human, has a dialogical ontology and thus lives in a constant process of becoming, along which re-negotiates and changes who she is by trans-positioning her-self<sup>28</sup> towards multiple others in the dialogical event of meaning-making. The question that arises is; How do the conditions of a globalised modern world, in which there are multiple possibilities for meeting other cultures, groups and communities impact on the self? On the one hand, these coming social conditions offer more possibilities for dialogical relations and the encounter with different knowledges and thus new and plural possibilities for experiencing and coming to know oneself, others and the world around us. On the other hand, there are concerns on the impact to a person from the over-saturation with media and the sheer increase of the backdrop of social relations against which identity and knowledge are co-constructed. If we argue that the person is open to change, it is tempting to assume that within contemporary society the self is, as some authors have envisaged, ‘distributed’ (Bruner, 1990; Wetherell & Maybin, 1996), ‘saturated’ and ‘multiphrenic’, lacking coherence within the manifold and opposite potentials of being and knowing that these conditions give way to (Gergen, 1991). However, as I have argued earlier in the chapter, I distance myself from such postmodernist and radical anti-essentialist views of the self (Salgado & Hermans, 2005). They assign too much importance to fragmentation and fluidity of self and knowledge in a way that can be quite overwhelming within the characteristics of

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<sup>28</sup> The prefix ‘trans’ stands for ‘moving across’ positions along which a shifting of identities is achieved.

contemporary society. It dismisses the existence of an internal and subjective space and instead implies incoherence and vacuity of the self (Salgado & Hermans, 2005).

However, the question that arises is; How can the plural polyphonic person experience herself as being single, integrated and the same across time and spatialization of dialogical relationships? In recognizing the open-endedness of self and knowledge then we confront the dilemma of explaining how a functional sense of self-identity as well as intelligibility and coherence along the multiple relations with others are achieved. Indeed, the maintenance of a sense of personal continuity with oneself is an essential condition for the existence of the self (Habermas, 1991) and for being comprehensible and coherent within communicative processes. A dialogical notion of the self can resolve the paradox of unity versus multiplicity since it implies that both dilemmatic aspects are two opposing, yet complementary by-products of the dialogicality of our existence (Salgado & Hermans, 2005). A 'position', which refers to the specific 'location' from which a particular knowledge is claimed, can change from moment to moment, yet it is the Jamesian *I* that enables the creation of a sense of permanence and unity in the person. The *I* that emerges in relation to the dialogical other is what remains at the centre of the 'here-and-now' experience across space and time, thus, enabling the 'centredness' feeling of the concrete experience (Salgado & Hermans, 2005). From one moment to the next, the position of the *I* might be different, yet 'it still remains an I-position: unity and multiplicity are brought together in the notion of the I-position.' (Salgado & Hermans, 2005, p.10). Moreover, it is out of our constant need to engage in communicative dialogue with oneself and others what requires us to be intelligible. This explains our constant engagement in a process of seeking and negotiating with others and with oneself, a degree of coherence and stability (Salgado & Hermans, 2005). Despite the fact that modern social life involves the multiplication of dialogical relations and the continuous re-shifting of positions, it is the Jamesian *I* that brings a certain degree of certainty to our sense of personhood and coherence to our identity as it travels through the multiplicity of selves and as it merges with the eclectic use of diverse and competing forms of knowledge. Ultimately, in embedding multiple potentialities of being and knowing, the plural person is able to cope with the vicissitudes of modern social life and the competing dilemmas that the multiplication of relationships bring forward.

The notion of the dialogical self as *spatialized* and internally polyphonic allows us to understand the link between the polyphasia of knowledge and the plural nature of the self. Perhaps, more importantly, an understanding of personhood as being constituted and re-constituted along the shifting of *I*-positions, allows for recasting the issue of *co-existence and eclectic use* of opposing forms of thought and the concomitant experience of multiple selves. Polyphasic knowledge does not live within the bounds of a single unified self or ‘consciousness’ as Bakhtin (1984a) would say. Instead, knowledge is similar to the genre of the Dostoevskian polyphonic novel, which is ‘multi-accented and contradictory in its values’ (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.15), reflecting the pluralistic and dilemmatic nature of the social world and the contradictions that co-exist among and within people in society.

According to Bakhtin (1984a), the person’s consciousness ‘is in essence multiple. *Pluralia tantum*’ (p.288) and has a multiplicity of co-existing authors (poisoned *I*’s) each ‘voicing’ their own discourse. Such arguments constitute a brilliant aid to the understanding of the link between the eclectic use of knowledge within polyphasic representational fields and the concomitant experience of plural identities. From a Bakhtinian perspective, the use of knowledge is understood as a dialogical response to the alter, mediated by the adoption of an *I*-position through which both knowledge about the referential object and the self is co-constructed. Due to its embodiment in different ‘characters’, or positioned *I*’s, knowledge is conceived as a multiplicity of heterogeneous and even conflicting worldviews ‘voiced’ through the different positions in response to the other dialogical co-author. The fact that the dialogical being is linked to a certain *I*-position only in space and time opens the possibility for the *shift between multiple selves* and the eclectic use of different and even opposing forms of knowledge. Thus, the internal plurality of the person, functions as an asset that can be drawn upon when co-constructing knowledge and identity, in order to cope with the *juxtaposition* of voices and discourses characteristic of the vicissitudes and the distensions of modern life.

The person’s multiplicity of *unmerged* selves and co-existence of a plurality of knowledges are not dialectically synthesised in a Hegelian whole. Instead, they live side-by-side, juxtaposed in dialogue. There is no fusion of the inner ‘voices’, but

instead co-existence and even confrontation in the dialogue between the voiced discourses of each positioned *I* and the diverse and even rival selves. The spatial extension of the self across a multiplicity of *I*-positions provides opportunities for the plural realisation of the person and for the eclectic use of different forms and contents of knowledge. Furthermore, spatialization alongside co-existing positions ultimately makes feasible the plural nature and plasticity of knowledge and self as two co-constitutive phenomena. These are open to change by the addition of novel perspectives and positions and the suppression of others as a consequence of new encounters with others and the establishment of new relational styles (i.e becoming a mother). Hence, it becomes clear that the person exists in a process of becoming and her knowledge is ‘plural and plastic, a dynamic and continuously emerging form capable of displaying as many rationalities as required by the infinite variety of sociocultural situations that characterise human experience.’ (Jovchelovitch, 2007, p.70). The transition from one position into another explains the plural nature of identity and the emergence of a multitude of contents and forms of knowledge. And the Jamesian *I* leaves space for our sense of being the same person across time and relationships.

In Chapter Two, I have argued the role of social positioning as a mediator between the eclectic use of polyphasic knowledge and the co-constitutive process of identity construction. Having adopted a Bakhtinian perspective and discussed the dialogical self, we can now conclude that knowledge and identity are co-developed upon the basis of representational activities that occur along the spatialization of dialogical relationships with others. From a Bakhtinian approach, I regard the *use* of knowledge as a discursive response to the anticipated view of the other, which is framed within a specifically positioned *I* that conveys a particular ‘*me*’ or self construction of the individual. Hence, the dynamics of polyphasic knowledge consist of an ongoing *trans-positioning* from one orientation and valuation of the alter’s knowledge to another, along the network of dialogical relations. As the person *moves* alongside positions, each of the many elements of the plural representational field are used merging with a particular self construction. Indeed, the notion of the dialogical self suggests an understanding of ‘meaning as movement’ (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Therefore, assuming a spatialized plural self that shifts across *I*-positions in the making of meaning further clarifies what I proposed in the previous chapter; the

fact that social positioning explains the way people alternate and make use of different and contradictory contents and modes of thinking whilst simultaneously co-constructing an identity.

### 3.3. Critical Use of Representations: Contesting The Other Through Rhetorical Positioning.

In the foregoing section I have discussed the co-construction of self and knowledge that occurs along the movements of positions towards others within the dialogical space. Now, one could ask: If there are possibilities for movement across multiple positions, what is it that drives the eclectic selection of the mind within the inner plurality of the person? In order to answer this question, in this section I re-address Bakhtin's argument on the discursive nature of positioning (discussed in section 3.1.) since it brings about the issue of the critical potential of social representations. Positioning implies the *appropriation* of the other's knowledge, its re-accentuation with one's intentions, which in turn invites for re-construction and contestation. However, I also point to the fact that it is due to the dialogicality of the human nature, that the person does not hold total agency and authority sovereign from the position of the dialogical other. In engaging in this discussion, I hope to further articulate two main arguments that I have put forward in the previous chapters.

In Chapter One, I have argued that social representations are tools with the potential to contest or exercise power. It is dependent on whether they are used in order to challenge or impose hegemonic and/or taken for granted commonsensical discourses and versions of reality that they might serve to perpetuate or contest relations of inequality and dominance. At the root of both usages of representations is the desire to support the different interests, values and ultimately identities at stake, underpinning the representational act. In Chapter Two I have explained how positioning mediates the intricate dialogue between interacting forms of knowledge within polyphasic representational fields. The shifting across different social positionings explains how, within inner and outer dialogue, the individual subject is able to eclectically use multiple co-existing forms of knowledge, which differ in their

degree of symbolic power. This is done in order to assert her social identities towards others and to defend them when they are put at risk. The particular interests and aims that are held at a given time and place are responded to by a particular use of a form of knowledge and a concomitant representation of the self.

The strength of Bakhtin's views lies in their potential for articulating these two arguments, for he asserts that positioning refers to an active rhetorical practice by which the other's views and knowledge are discursively evaluated and responded to and in this process knowledge and identity are co-constructed. Insofar as Bakhtin argues that positioning has a rhetorical/evaluative character, then it is essential to note that we are positioned<sup>29</sup> agents, who do not exist in a neutral relation to the discourse of the other co-author in the making of representations. This approach to the dialogicality of representations implies that knowledge is eclectically used from a particular *I*-position from which, the interlocutor engages in a rhetorical act of judgment of the discourse of the dialogical other and in doing so defends her own positioned knowledge and concomitant identity. As such, social positioning is a rhetorical act of orientation and defence of one's view, which expresses the *commitment* (responsibility) to one's knowledge and to the particular self that co-emerges with it. Within polyphony, where the voiced discourse of every co-author is attempting to dominate the others (Bakhtin, 1984a), *commitment* to one's 'words' is essential. The failure to commit could lead to losing self identity and authenticity (Marková, 2003b). Within dialogical polyphony there is amongst all voices a yearning to acquire a position of superiority and a struggle to control one another. It is through this active strife with the other's thought (regarded as both verbal language or material practices) that new meanings emerge.

It is precisely the adoption of a position, that mediates the *use* of some elements of knowledge and the rejection of others. In this regard, the mediating role of positioning within the dialogical triad of knowledge brings about the issue of the critical potential of social representations. In implying the *appropriation* of the

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<sup>29</sup> It is important to note here that positioning is not conceived in mere individualistic terms. Instead, positioning is regarded as negotiated and mutually constitutive, since the positioning of the self is co-determined/co-constituted by the anticipated positioning of the other. Positioning is understood as co-authorship.

other's knowledge, its re-construction and re-accentuation with one's intentions, it invites for its contestation. This resonates in many ways with the act of *re-presenting*, which 'is intimately tied to the operation and contestation of power' (Howarth, 2004, p.358). Both refer to the argumentative essence of dialogue and the contested nature of knowledge. It is the rhetorical nature of positioning what makes possible questioning and debate.

As an evaluative act of the discourse of the dialogical co-partner, the act of positioning is accomplished by the *use* and *defense* of certain modalities of knowledge and the assertion of the particular concomitant self. This invites contestation to those discourses of others that are assessed by the person as a threat to her identity, values, interests and striving for social recognition or desire to deny it to the other. Hence, positioning is infused with intentions and brings to the fore the critical nature of social representations which relates to the yearning for social recognition and its denial to others. Indeed, dialogicality, entails 'judgments, evaluation and passions and these are concerned with the desire for and the denial of social recognition.' (Marková, 2003a, p.189). The positioned use of knowledge within dialogical relations conveys *commitment* to projects, social practices and memberships to communities, groups or cultures, and mediates the experience of our identity. Intertwined with this commitment and our experience of identity is the search for or denial of *social recognition* (Marková, 2003a). Social recognition 'involves realization of two fundamental dialogical potentials. One potential refers to the *Ego*, who desires that the *Alter* treat him with dignity. The other potential refers to the *Alter*, who desires that the *Ego* treat him with dignity. Social recognition, therefore, is a basic social drive-or desire-directed towards other human beings.' (Marková, p.255). In this sense, the need of social recognition explains how despite multiplicity of selves there is a search for a certain degree of continuity and coherence in our identity and polyphasic knowledge, which in turn drives the contestation and challenge of those representations that constitute a threat to our identification and *commitment* to values, projects and communities. Indeed, along the same lines of Marková, Jovchelovitch (2007) argues that dialogicality; the orientation and response to the other is 'fraught with underlying psychic forces that struggle to preserve the *omnipotence* of self and its *narcissistic* programme.' (p.128, emphasis my own).

The adoption of a particular social positioning in the fight for social recognition or in the endeavor to refute others' social recognition is intimately related to our commitment to forms of knowledge and identities. Thus, positioning invites the *critical use* of social representations; the defense of certain types of knowledge, and the contestation of those that constitute a threat to one's identity within the dialogical encounter between differing forms of knowledge. A particular social positioning may be adopted in order to defend the identity of the subject. This might provide the grounds for the contestation and resistance of particular forms of knowledge 'voiced' by the alter and that conflict with our commitment to values, our desire to remain omnipotent, be socially recognized or our attempt to deny social recognition to the other.

However, I would like to make a point here; the agency to take a rhetorical position critically engaging with the representations of others, cannot be separated from the fact that the person is also framed by the authoritative position of the dialogical other<sup>30</sup>. In this way her knowledges and identities have the risk of being constrained by the way the other positions her. It is because of the very dialogical nature of human beings that the person does not have an absolute agency and authorial stance independent from the other's position. She is not fully able to freely move from one *I*-position to another, independently from the dialogical co-partner. Instead, she is also framed by the position of the other and shaped by its level of authoritativeness. When the self is seen in this dialogical framework, questions arise as to the differences in authoritativeness between positions and the knowledges they convey. The power of the other to shape one's position co-exists with the power and agency of the person to challenge and contest it. Both types of power are mutually dependant, and we cannot speak of one without the other.

In order to further develop the critical potential of the theory of social representations, it is important to problematise the possibilities for criticizing and

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<sup>30</sup> In addition one should not idealize agency and also be aware of the fact that the agency (volition and ability) to change something is also inherently related to having the structural opportunity within the socio-cultural and political context to do so (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

contesting more powerful knowledges and the positions that they impose on us. It is to the discussion of such issue that the following section is devoted. I therefore explore this issue in the light of Jovchelovitch's (2007) model of the encounter between different knowledge systems and Bakhtin's perspective on the process of identity formation as 'ideological becoming'. The aim is to draw attention to the implications of the socio-ideological nature of both representations (Howarth, 2004) and identity (Bakhtin, 1981) for a critical social representations theory.

### **3.3.1. Socio-ideological Representing and Becoming.**

Spatialization along dialogical relationships makes possible polyphasic representational fields and multiple selves, yet, it brings to the fore the problem of dominance in the interaction of forms of knowledge that are conflicting and differ in their degree of symbolic power. In this section I argue that despite the individual subject is susceptible to being subordinated to the dominant 'voices' of authoritative/powerful others, she has the potency to take contesting and innovative *I*-positions subverting the knowledge of the other and the position it imposes on the self. Such tense 'cut and thrust' between different 'forces' inside the person constitute the dynamics of struggle that characterize the socio-ideological making of representations and the concomitant process of becoming. Such contradiction and tension within the internal dialogues of the person are a reflection of the conflicts with which self-other relationships are loaded (Jovchelovitch, 2007). In putting forward this argument I hope to draw attention to the creative and assertive use of social representations, which sits at the core of their contested nature. That is, their power to critique more powerful knowledge systems; those that dominate and exert control on self and others. Indeed, from a critical social psychological perspective it is contended that power, which suffuses all human experience, is both agency (blended with structural opportunity) to '*fulfill or obstruct* personal, relational or collective needs.' (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002, p.7, emphasis my own).

Domination of the self-other relationship is understood as the taking of control in the co-construction of knowledge and identity, whereby the positioned

discourses of the more powerful interlocutors place the other in a lower position. It entails the restriction of the individual's freedom and opportunity to move from one *I*-position to another, asserting identities and claiming without the other's control, contents and modalities of knowledge through those positions. Some *I*-positions might be constrained and denied a 'voice' by the powerful other, whose discourse has a structuring influence. For the one in the lower status it implies that her knowledge and identity are disregarded and her ability to co-author the definitions of her self and the understandings of the world are constrained. Hence, the risk is that her perspectives would be suppressed, her self would tend towards monologism (Hermans, 2003) and the polyphasia of her knowledge would be seriously reduced. In an extreme case, this could result in 'segregation/destruction (monological cognition)' (Jovchelovitch, 2007, p.147) of those forms of knowledge belonging to subordinated positions. Such severe exclusion of the perspective of the other is what Jovchelovitch (2007) calls the non-dialogical encounter between knowledge systems, whereby the knowledge of others is displaced by those that are higher in status and valuation.

Both internal and external relations are subjected to differences in power between positions since these are 'institutionalized and culture-bound.' (Hermans, 2003, p.96) and the types of knowledge they are linked to are unequally valued and recognized in social life (Jovchelovitch, 2007). The asymmetries between the voices that dialogize within the self are a reflection of relationships in society, where there are power inequalities between the 'voices' of groups, communities and cultures. Within the dialogues of the inner plurality of the person there are clashes between interacting forms of knowledge and a struggle to develop the different possibilities of selfhood (identity) of the person. Some 'voices' are more dominant than others and their positions and the knowledge they claim through them enjoy a higher status in society (i.e. because of their position in an institution, community or cultural landscape). Hence, they are more powerful to impose their knowledge and to reject competing representations. The consequence for the marginalized positions would be the denial of the opportunity to voice their ideas and to experience the concomitant identities.

These internal socio-ideological ‘battles’ between ‘voices’ constitute the dynamics of the production of knowledge and the co-development of the person. The formation of identity is a socio-ideological process that consists of ‘an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values.’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p.346). His conceptualization of the formation of identity, as a process of ‘ideological becoming’ (Bakhtin, 1981) whereby a plural ‘consciousness’ (knowledge) is co-constructed in dialogue with others, resonates with the making of representations that occurs alongside ‘a kind of ideological battle, a battle of ideas’ (Moscovici, 2000, p.275). The dialogical (Marková, 2003a) and socio-ideological process of re-presenting (Howarth, 2004) involves the constant clash and fight between competing representations ‘voiced’ from different positions, from which they are constructed. As Howarth (2004) puts it; ‘Re-presentations are socially and ideologically (re)constructed in dialogue and practice with actual, multiple and generalized others—and some ‘others’, particularly powerful institutions and dominant discourses, may have more social capital to impose constructions and so marginalize competing re-presentations.’ (p.372).

Jovchelovitch’s model (2007) of the encounter between the different knowledge systems of self and other can be extrapolated into the sphere of the inner self in order to shed light on our understanding of self-other relations that occur at the micro-level. Indeed, inter-subjective relations in the socio-cultural and institutional contexts in which the person lives function as the relational capital against which internal dialogues are formed when constructing reality and making sense of the self. These occur between the polyphony of ‘voices’ of others that one has encountered in social life and whose perspectives of the world are diverse and opposing, thus infusing dialogues with dilemmas and contradictions.

According to Jovchelovitch (2007) self-other relationships are dilemmatic and are fraught with productive and contradictory destructive energies. Thus, they have both the potential for empowering and restraining the formation of our knowledge and identity. The possible positive or negative outcomes of self-other relationships depend on ‘whether interlocutors can communicate and mutually recognize each other as legitimate partners in interaction.’ (Jovchelovitch, 2007,

p.132). Indeed, acknowledging the other, engaging in a relationship with her difference and becoming able to take her perspective are a condition for the constitution of the person (Jovchelovitch, 2007). The concern is that, some voices and the knowledges that they claim have a lower or even no degree of legitimacy and authority. Thus, their different perspectives are not recognized in their own right, and the person is not acknowledged as a legitimate relational partner in the construction of knowledge with the outcome that no communicative dialogical relationship is established within such encounters (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Amongst all the voices that one encounters in the socio-cultural context, some are backed up by an authoritative status (i.e. religious, scientific, political), thus their discourse is socially and institutionally endowed with power to exclude the other and the alterity of her identity, knowledge and projects. Hence, the encounter with other interlocutors whose knowledge is believed to be inferior and is denied legitimacy leads to a process of domination and displacement of the views, practices and values that it embeds by those from the more powerful knowledge system (Jovchelovitch, 2007).

When the legitimacy and validity of the knowledge of the authoritative one is *recognized* by the person, the concern is that it comes to be part of herself as a form of static monologue not open to change (Bakhtin, 1981). In this way, the words of the powerful other function as 'authoritative discourse' not open to appropriation and upon which the person does not have either co-authorship or co-responsibility. A discourse of others that functions as authoritative is 'recited by heart' and 'demands our unconditional allegiance' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.343). It has a monological 'closed' character and does not allow for dialogical 'play' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.343). The encounter with this type of discourse has the risk of leading to the displacement and segregation of the less powerful knowledge of others upon which is imposed (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Thus, the possibilities for the realization of multiple identities and for creating new meanings and putting them into practice are constrained. This becomes a psycho-political problem since what is at stake is not only their knowledge systems but also the identities that they bring forward. As Jovchelovitch (2007) argues: 'If it is your knowledge and representations that are put at the lower end of a scale this can devalue you as a person and de-authorise your vision of the world vis-à-vis other social groups. It can discredit what you have to say and undermine your chances of gaining access to resources and opportunities.' (p.42).

Nevertheless, the constraining framework of authoritative discourses is not absolute. For, representations also constitute a site for creative contestation to more powerful knowledge systems. This can be fully appreciated if we consider the rhetorical/argumentative character (Billig, 1991) and contested nature (Howarth, 2004) of social representations, that goes hand in hand with the agentic nature of the self. The dilemmatic clash between diverse and opposing meanings within the self-other dialogicality provides the grounds for argumentation and opens possibilities for the contested re-construction of knowledge. The confrontations and dilemmas embedded within the polyphony of human beings provide the matters for the continuous debate and argumentation that occurs alongside the socio-ideological processes of knowing and becoming.

The making of representations is inherently linked to the rhetorical capacity of the person to argue and negate, that is, 'appropriate', the counter-position of the other. The process of thinking that occurs through the making of social representations, is as an activity of arguing (Billig, 1991) where there is always a potential for re-working and re-valuating (Moloney & Walker, 2002). Knowing needs to be understood as *re-presenting* since change and resistance are always possibilities within social representations (Howarth, 2004). The Bakhtinian notion of dialogical *appropriation* (Bakhtin, 1981) is at the core of this critical potential. It implies an agentic self and invites for re-presentation and challenge of the discourse of the other. It is through positioning that the other's discourse is 're-told' with one's own values, accents and re-formulations (Bakhtin, 1981). Expressing one's own position constitutes an act of *arguing*, which goes hand in hand with the endeavour to criticise and contest the counter position (Billig, 1991) of the dialogical co-partner. In this way, Bakhtin's arguments imply the agentic and contested nature of the person to challenge and reformulate authoritative discourses. As he puts it; 'One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to *liberate* themselves from the authority of the other's discourse. This process is made more complex by the fact that a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual's consciousness (just as they struggle with one another in surrounding social reality)' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.348, emphasis my own). And it is this continual

battle between discourses along the shifting of positionings that constitutes the socio-ideological becoming of the person (Bakhtin, 1981). This Bakhtinian characterization of the formation of the person is highly relevant to the times we are living in, where the multiplication of encounters between people produce continuous clashes between opposing knowledges and competing identities.

Along the same lines as Bakhtin's notion of appropriation, Moscovici (1984b) argues that within the dialogicality of knowing, representations 'are re-thought, re-cited and re-presented' (p.9). However, he is silent about how this is achieved. Drawing on a Bakhtinian approach to the study of representations, then we can argue that it is the positioning and re-positioning in the making of social representations, that highlights the possibilities for argument, contestation, and the development of alternative knowledges and identities. The rhetorical process of positioning that mediates the development of knowledge and the co-constitutive process of identity formation is thus at the heart of the contested nature of social representations. It is through 'appropriation' that is possible to engage in a critique of other forms of knowledge. Indeed, representations ultimately are 'an expression of the agency of social subjects who engage, think, feel and eventually transform the contexts in which they find themselves' (Jovchelovitch, 1996, p.128). The 'ideological' battles that take place between agentic self-others in the work of representation and the constitution of the person are characterized by argument and debate. It is the character of this genesis that defines the plural and contradictory nature of the inner person.

In this chapter I have discussed the link between the plurality of the self and the polyphasia of knowledge. In adopting a Bakhtinian perspective I have argued that the internal plurality of the person needs to be understood as being developed alongside the rhetorical positioning and re-positioning adopted toward the polyphony of dialogical others. Hence, the polyphasia of knowledge is regarded as the co-existence of diverse and even contradictory responses to the voices of dialogical others. It is alongside the movement of the eclectic use of polyphasic knowledge that multiple identities are co-constructed. Spatialization of dialogical relationships in which the person takes different *I*-positions, provides the grounds for co-existence of diverse forms of knowledge and identities, and thus explains their dynamic and

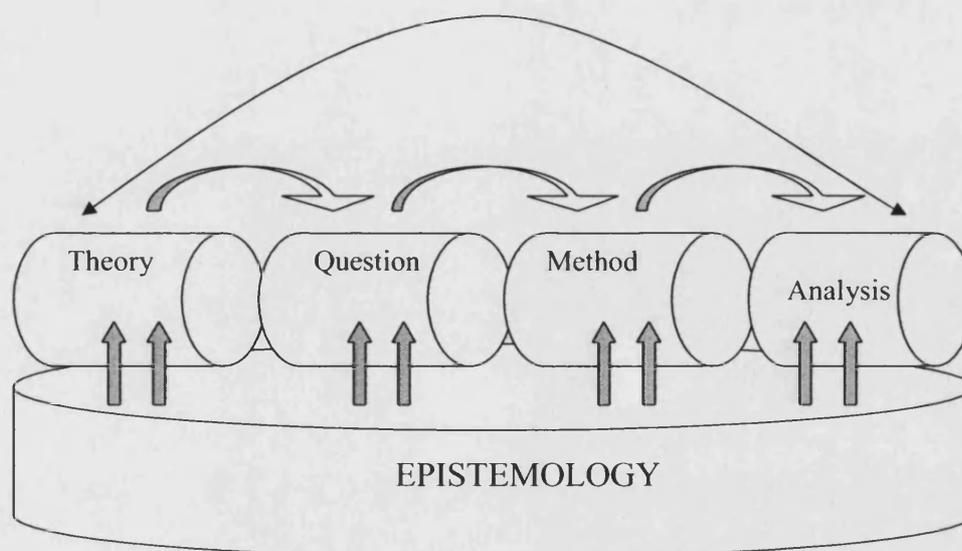
plural co-constitution. Alongside spatialization the person has agency to take contesting positionings and through appropriation finds ways to subvert representations that position her in an inferior place and that sustain relations of dominance.



#### 4. INVESTIGATING HPS' EXPERT KNOWLEDGE: METHODOLOGICAL 'DIAGNOSIS' AND 'PRESCRIPTION'.

One of the challenges one confronts when doing research is what Bauer and Gaskell (2000) call the 'diagnostic decision' of methodological techniques and analytical processes. Such 'diagnosis' is a matter of the intricate interplay between the epistemological foundation, conceptual framework, research question and methodology (see Figure 5). The research question is framed within a particular theory, which is underpinned by certain philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality and scientific knowledge. Accordingly, methodological procedures designed to answer the research question need to be guided by both the theoretical framework and its epistemological underpinning. Additionally, through methodological techniques further theoretical development is enabled (Howarth, 2000). Therefore, in order to engage in a discussion of my approach to the challenge of deciding 'how' the research was going to be conducted, I ought to start by outlining the epistemological premises of my theory first, and thereafter address the question of which methodological technique may be most adequate to address the object under investigation.

**Figure 5: Methodological prescription.**



#### 4.1. Epistemological Underpinning: Dialogism / Constructivism.

‘As our methodologies become increasingly sensitive to the relationship of researchers to their subjects as dialogical and co-constructive, the relationship of researchers to their audiences as interdependent, and the negotiation of meaning within any relationship as potentially ramifying outward into society, individual agency ceases to be our major concern. We effectively create the reality of relational process.’ (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p.1042)

This quotation illustrates the epistemological foundations in which I position my research. Any investigative inquiry needs to make explicit in its discourse the underpinning epistemological assumptions about the nature of the world and the knowledge we construct about it. Many have warned of the danger of failing to account for the philosophical foundations of socio-psychological scientific research (Jovchelovitch, 1995; Marková, 1982). The primary concern is that neglecting the epistemological premise of the theory prevents the researcher from having the opportunity to reflect upon methodological options and from questioning her own research (Marková, 1982). In addition, it does not enable public accountability, since it stops the research community considering and questioning the research.

I strongly agree with Jovchelovitch (1995) that there is a demand within science to be explicit about ‘what’ and ‘how’ we conduct investigative practices (p.86). Throughout the foregoing chapters I have explicitly defined my theoretical framework, outlined some elements of its underpinning epistemology and introduced my research question. In doing this I have answered the ‘what’ of the research. The main concern of this chapter is with the ‘how’. Therefore I shall start by discussing the philosophical presuppositions that underpin my theory and guide my methodological strategies. In particular, I shall consider the dialogical and constructivist epistemology of social representations theory.

I have discussed in Chapter 2 how social representations theory is positioned within a constructivist view, which considers human action as essentially meaningful and regards knowledge as actively and socio-culturally constructed by individuals.

Furthermore, there is also an inevitable dialogical dimension to this construction. I have also examined, how social representations theory is underpinned by a fundamental dialogical epistemology. Marková (2000), who is committed to the study of the epistemology of social representations theory, argues that:

‘The theory of social representations and communication is not simply the study of interdependence between the collectively experienced phenomena and their reconstitution in the minds, activities and practices of individuals and groups. It is, above all, its underlying dialogism: that is, this interdependence involves dynamic tension, the transformation of meanings and of communicative genres resulting from this interdependence, polyphony and clash.’ (p.455-456).

Her words convey the fundamental dialogical and socio-psychological constructed nature of social representations, and the centrality of communication and language in processes of knowledge production. Knowledge is not an entity bounded in the individual mind. Instead it lives within the dialogue between the self and multiple others. Hence, it is formed by inner dialogues, permeated by manifold voices and differing perspectives, as well as being inhabited by the knowledges of many others. In this sense, it has a profound heterogeneous nature.

Social representations theory rests on a relational (dialogical) ontology of human beings and thus regards knowledge as socially constructed within dialogical and inevitable dialectical processes. The self exists in dialogical interrelatedness with the other. Within this logic, both the construction of the world and the constitution of the self are sides of the same coin. Self and other are co-constitutive of each other and co-authors in processes of knowledge production. In this context, I believe that Bakhtin’s *dialogical epistemology* (1981), can significantly contribute to our understanding of the dialogism underpinning the theory. In particular, his concept of ‘unfinalization’ conveys the unfeasibility of a constituted truthful knowledge of the world (Frank, 2005). Insofar as the person is an essential dialogical being, the meanings she constructs are not fixed but open to dialogue with manifold others. This argument contributes to our understanding of the dynamic, fluid and non-definitive nature of social representations. However, first and foremost, this Bakhtinian idea expresses the inevitable unfinalized character of the person. The

dialogical self is not definitely constituted but continually emerging in tune with the many contexts and dialogical others. Hence, dialogism implies; on the one hand, an unfinalized person that lives in a process of 'becoming', and on the other, an inconclusive knowledge. Both co-emerge through the dynamic dialogue with the polyphony of others' knowledges and discourses. It is in this self-other dialogue that interlocutors co-constitute each other. This has direct implications for the research act, the nature of scientific knowledge and the presentation of research reports positioned within this epistemology.

While positivist monological epistemology has instituted an understanding of knowledge as a truthful finalized representation of the world, dialogical epistemology postulates the relational, dynamic and non-definitive nature of knowledge. If knowledge is understood as dialogical, then the question arises as to how this relates to the scientific explanations that the researcher develops about the same dialogical knowledge. In the dialogical act of research, as in the process of interference between therapist and client, the researcher and the field of research, influence each other (Jovchelovitch, 2007). The reality of the field of research informs and reshapes the researcher's previous knowledge, assumptions and working hypothesis (Jovchelovitch, 2007). At the same time, the researcher participates and impacts on the field of research with the languages, knowledge, agendas, culture and working hypothesis that she brings to it (Jovchelovitch, 2007).

A dialogical epistemology of knowledge needs to go hand in hand with a *dialogical attitude* towards our research practice. Our need as researchers to be engaged in dialogue with the researched communities has been asserted by many (see Frank, 2005; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Jovchelovitch, 2007; Scollon, 2003). This attitude requires the researcher to recognise her participation and implication in the field of research whilst at the same time developing a position of disinterest and distancing (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Dealing with the dilemmatic tension between participation and separation is a requisite for active listening to and dialogical engagement with the researched community, and is at the heart of the emergence of critical reflection and effective research interventions (Jovchelovitch, 2007). The social researcher needs to be cautious about making positivist statements about the results of the research (Frank, 2005). Within a dialogical approach to research one

should bear in mind the ‘unfinalized’ nature of knowledge, which renders the monological scientific discourse unethical since it finalizes and institutes the researched subject/object as a definitive constituted entity (Frank, 2005). Instead, a dialogical engagement with research demands a ‘more significant task of representing individual struggles in all their ambivalence and unfinalizability; in particular, *how is each voice the site of multiple voices*, and what is the *contest* among these voices.’ (Frank, 2005, p. 972, emphasis my own).

Hence, the dialogical/constructivist paradigm has two implications for the development of scientific practice. First, dialogical research does not seek a rationalist assertion of the reliability and external validity of its knowledge. Second, it needs to be aware of the researcher’s co-authorship in the participant’s dialogue about the object of knowledge. This demands the researcher to see the research as ‘relation’ (Gergen & Gergen, 2000), to self-reflect upon her participation as an alter that is in dialogue with the subject of investigation, and to be aware of her socio-cultural positioning. Furthermore, inasmuch as the self is conceptualized as ‘relation’, our methodologies need to be sensitive to this in order not to fall into reifications of the monological knowledge of the researcher (Gergen & Gergen, 2000).

The above discussed constructivist/dialogical epistemology is the framework that guides my research practices. The methods and the analytical procedure have been carefully chosen in order to capture the discussed assumptions about knowledge. That is, its dialogical, discursive and socio-culturally constructed nature. As well as aiming to do justice to the underpinning epistemology, I have sought to choose a methodology that would enable me to respond to my research question. As outlined in Chapter 1, my research aim is to engage in a critical socio-psychological exploration of HPs’ knowledge of homelessness. Hence, in applying dialogical principles of research to the study of HPs’ knowledge of homelessness, my objective is not to authoritatively institute ‘the’ knowledge of HPs as statements that are held to be true representations of the phenomenon of homelessness. Instead, my objective is to examine the different symbolic contents and dialogues that form their knowledge, and the discursive dynamics of negotiation, argumentation and contestation of both ‘taken-for-granted’ and reified forms of knowledge of ‘homelessness’. Hence, in approaching the research question from a dialogical

perspective, particular attention was paid to, on the one hand, the exploration of the different discourses conveyed through the polyphony of voices that emerge in participants' conversations during their processes of knowledge production. And on the other, I also focused on the different positionings that participants take as rhetorical strategies towards the manifold addressees within the different internal dialogues, which emerge in the course of their knowledge processes. These internal dialogues are innumerable and ultimately indefinite (Scollon, 2003). Thus, my intention was to identify, wherever possible, the general patterns of internal dialogues and voices present in the participants' conversations.

Through the foregoing discussion I have sought to demonstrate that this investigation requires a methodology that captures the dialogical and socio-cultural construction of knowledge. The attempt has not been to create a 'paradigm war' between positivist and non-positivist epistemologies (Kelle, 2001). Instead, I have sought to introduce the epistemology underpinning my theoretical framework in order to demonstrate the importance of prescribing a methodology that is coherent with it. I believe that a qualitative methodology based upon communicative processes (conversation, dialogue) could profoundly capture the polyphony of voices, clash of discourses and eclectic use of thinking modes that occur within the processes of knowledge production. The suitability of qualitative methodological tools rests in their capacity as highly sensitive means to elucidate the symbolic content of social representations, while allowing the individual to freely express their thoughts, offering direct access into meanings and belief systems (Fraser & Gaskell, 1990).

In what follows, I shall examine my engagement with the research process as a dialogical relationship. For this purpose I will discuss the dialogical relationship between the researcher-researched, and I will reflect on my co-participation in the participants' processes of representing homelessness.

#### **4.1.1. Reflexivity On The Dialogue Between Researcher (Self) – Researched (Other).**

From a dialogical approach to research we assume that there is an inevitable relationship between researcher (self) and researched object/community (other). As Farr and Anderson (1983) claim ‘Perceiver and Other are to be considered *in relation to each other*’ (p.63). This is because the researcher is not a separate entity from the investigative process, rather, she is dialogically engaged with the research participant (Frank, 2005; Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Inasmuch as research is understood as *relation*, investigating the other, necessitates a reflection on the socio-cultural and historical situatedness of the researcher, since she brings these resources to the research dialogue. This is crucial in order to develop an attitude of active and disinterested listening to the understandings of others, which requires us to suspend our own agendas and situatedness (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Self-reflection of how the researcher dialogically relates to the researched is important since it is through this dialogue that the object of research is constructed and investigative conclusions are derived. Indeed, within qualitative research, self-reflexivity is an indicator of the quality of the research practice (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000) and of an ethical attitude with the researched community (Howarth, 2000).

Dismissing self-reflexivity implies privileging the voice of the researcher over the poly-vocal others. This would constitute an unethical exercise of power through which the researcher institutes her monological discourse about the researched. As Gergen & Gergen (2000) argue in critique of monological methodologies: ‘Typically, the investigator functions as the ultimate author of the work (or the coordinator of the voices) and thus serves as the ultimate arbiter of inclusion, emphasis, and integration.’ (p.1028-1029). In relation to the literary work, Bakhtin argues (1986) that it is indeed because of our essential dialogicality, that the author needs a responsible engagement with her piece of art. This is indeed the challenge that all qualitative researchers confront, and must take into account in order to guide their responsibility and obligations to the researched society (Schwandt, 2000). In this context one is enjoined to pay attention to the personal investments in the research act through reflecting upon one’s positionings and personal histories.

Self-reflection is an act I engaged with throughout the research process and participation in the field. I agree with Jovchelovitch (2007) that an ability to recognise and deal with our implication in the research process is certainly a necessary skill of any researcher working with socio-psychological phenomena. I do not attempt here to do an 'autoethnography' (Ellis & Bochner, 1996) through which I would delve into a detailed account of how my situatedness and personal histories impregnated the research process. In what follows, I shall briefly discuss how I have, through my dialogical approach to research, worked out the tension between distancing and participation in the field of research, which is central to active listening to the researched (Jovchelovitch, 2007). This is a skill I was trained in during my clinical background and I developed through therapeutic practice. In extrapolating it to the conduction of the research it enabled me to combine what appears as two paradoxical, yet necessary, positions: being detached in order to observe and recognise the difference of others whilst at the same time implicated and participative in the field of research (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Dealing with these tensional positions required me to self-reflect upon the dynamics of difference and similarity that exist within the research relationship (Howarth, 2000). As Farr and Anderson (1983) explain: 'Man's effectiveness as an agent is thus highly contingent on the facility within which she can alternate, in her mind, between the competing perspectives of self and of other.' (p.50). In what follows I shall look at both the different ways in which my-self connected with, and separated from the object of research.

My research relationship with HPs and homelessness was characterized by an interplay of self positions as both an 'outsider' and an 'insider'. Ideally, the research should be a space in which participants feel free to take up a tacit positioning through which to voice the self. However, participants intentionally respond to the researcher according to the assumptions they make about her positioning (Harré & Langenhove, 1998a). As I knew that HPs struggle to get their voice and expertise recognized, I wanted to explore their social representations of homelessness without adopting a scientific 'expert' positioning since such positioning would intimidate and prevent participants from talking at length about their meanings of homelessness. It would force them to adopt intentional positionings as scrutinized practitioners and hence

hinder any tacit positioning, which would lead to a more 'natural' and spontaneous process of knowledge production. However, I was aware that I would be seen as both a middle class academic and an outsider. I am detached from them, particularly in terms of experienced-based knowledge and contact with the homeless. Prior to engaging in this stage of my research I had spent the last twenty-four years of my life in Bilbao, a small city in northern Spain, with, in relative terms, an apparently insignificant incidence of homelessness, with the result that there is no 'homelessness voluntary sector'. The strangeness of the phenomenon is indeed what awoke my curiosity and encouraged me to choose this as my area of research.

As Howarth (2000) has demonstrated, difference between the researcher-researched is highly valuable for the investigation. Whilst I also believed difference between myself and the participants of my study could be usefully employed for the benefit of the research, I thought it was also crucial for me to sincerely present myself as a naïve researcher with a genuine interest in homelessness. In this sense I could make use of difference whilst at the same time avoiding potential representations of me as an expert. The potential gap between them and me as an academic 'expert', could hence be bridged through communicating my genuine interest in their views, and verbalizing my lack of experienced-based knowledge. I entered the field of research with a dialogical approach, and whilst observing, interviewing or conducting focus groups, I engaged in an active attitude of disinterested listening to the community of HPs, which required self-reflexivity and self-critique. My task was to allow HPs to communicate their thoughts, so that I could understand their community, perspectives of homelessness and how they organized their everyday practices. In order to engage in dialogue with them I always sought to recognize their voice and to allow them to express their perspectives. Therefore, I stressed that because of their wealth of knowledge my aim was 'to explore and not to test'. I literally asked them to 'instruct' me and 'teach' me. My wish was to communicate my authentic desire to understand homelessness through their expertise, and by approaching them in this way, balance the fact that I might be seen as an academic seeking to judge their practice or methods. Through my participation in the field I was able to move beyond my perspective as an 'outsider' and gain some experiential insight into the responsibilities of each sub group of HPs, their day-to-day activities and the work dynamics of the voluntary sector.

It became clear to me throughout the research process that participants felt empowered through the discussion about homelessness. After the interview/focus group, and in follow-up conversations with them, most communicated how much they had enjoyed participating. They recognized that no one had ever asked them about their understanding of homelessness, nor had they stopped to think about it. For instance, one participant asked me after the focus group to get a written list of the questions that I had raised in the group discussion, since she wanted to show this to a colleague. To sum up, it became apparent that this process had proved a positive experience, through offering a platform to air their points of view. I will, in what follows, discuss the design of the research; the choice of methods of data collection and the rationale that has guided the selection of the different sub-groups from the milieu of HPs that have participated in the study.

## 4.2. Method.

### 4.2.1. Methodological Strategies.

Moscovici (1984b; 1988b) advocates for a creative broad methodological approach to the study of social representations, that considers the socio-cultural situatedness of the phenomena with which the theory is concerned. Even though there is no strict outline of which methods should be used, the epistemological assumptions of the theory always determine the choice of methodological approaches and data analysis (Bordieu, Chamboredon, Passeron, & Kraus, 1991).

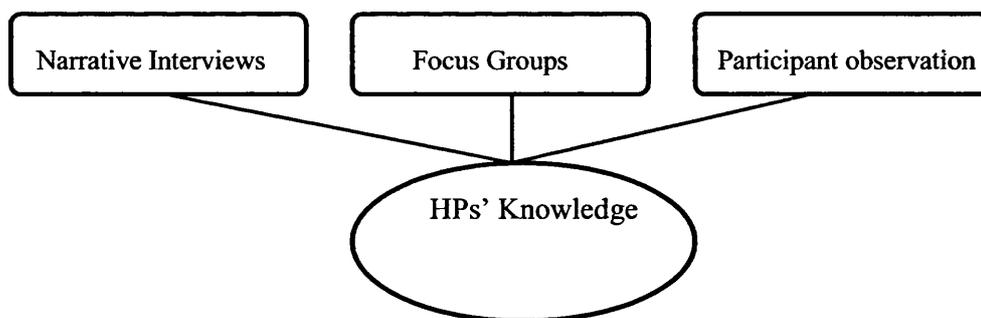
The nature of social representations and of the research questions required the triangulation of different qualitative methods: narrative interviews, focus groups and participant observation<sup>31</sup> (see Figure 6). Triangulation involves a combination of methods, data and levels of analysis that enables one to comparatively examine the diverse ways in which different groups make sense of reality (Gervais et al., 1999).

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<sup>31</sup> This study has benefited from drawing on aspects of the ethnographic method of participative observation, however, I do not claim that I have fully utilised this technique in its orthodox form.

The benefits of triangulation are twofold. On the one hand, triangulation has been advocated as a strategy that increases the credibility of data collection, analysis and interpretation in qualitative research (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Flick, 1992b). On the other hand, as Fielding & Fielding (1986) put it, the combination of methods enhances the ‘breadth or depth to our analysis’ (p.33). In particular, within social representational research, triangulation of observational and language-based methods increases the effectiveness of this strategy (Jodelet, 1989/1991), and enables to reveal the more implicit aspects of the representation (Gervais et al., 1999). Denzin introduced this technique in 1978 as an indicator for testing the validity of the results in qualitative research (1978). However, triangulation has not been used with its original rationalist purpose of attempting to achieve a ‘finalised’ objective knowledge. The pursuance of this monological knowledge is contradictory with a dialogical epistemology and approach to research (Frank, 2005). In combining three qualitative methods I was informed by Fielding and Fielding’s (1986) suggested use of triangulation as a means for achieving an in-depth understanding through an integrated examination of the different angles and dimensions of the complex phenomena under study.

**Figure 6: Research design.**



Hence, the research comprises three linked studies seeking to investigate representations of homelessness in the group of HPs of non-statutory organizations working within inner London. In this case, narrative-interviews and focus groups, in combination with participative observation were regarded as the most appropriate for studying how HPs represent the object of their work. This particular choice was motivated by theoretical considerations. Wagner (1994a), conceptualises social representations as ‘integral units of beliefs and action’ (p.243), which are best

investigated through a combination of observational and language-based techniques (such as interviews and focus groups). Indeed, both behaviour and verbal communication are data which ‘must be seen as two illustrations of the same representational contents’ (Wagner, 1995, p.16). In particular, triangulating data from focus groups, interviews, and observations, enabled an integration of the individual and the social elements of social representations, and thus an exploration of the subjective and shared. This type of triangulation (see Table 1: ‘Strategies of Triangulation’) has been a strategy of other studies of professional social representations (see Morant, 1997).

Table 1 outlines the methods of data collection, the milieus of HPs that participated in the study and the objectives of each method. In the following subsection I describe the rationale for using each method.

**Table 1: Strategies of triangulation.**

<b>DATA TRIANGULATION.</b>	<b>TRIANGULATION OF METHODS.</b>	<b>TRIANGULATION OF LEVELS OF ANALYSIS.</b>
Narrative interviews/Focus groups/Participative observation: -With different subgroups of HPs. -In a range of locations (different inner London boroughs). -In a range of services (outreach teams, day centres first stage and temporary hostels, resettlement teams and employment/ training schemes).	-Narrative Interviews. -Focus groups. -Participative observations.	Data collection and analysis integrates the following levels: -Individual. -Inter-individual. -Group. -Organizational/ institutional. -Socio-cultural.

INTERVIEWS		PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION		
<b><u>INDIVIDUAL</u></b>		<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b><u>ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING</u></b>	<b>OBJECTIVES</b>
-Front-line	Narrative interviews with: Outreach workers, Project workers (in hostels, day centres, semi-independent housing), Project Managers Mental health, drug misuse workers Director of programs, Policy officers, Press officers, Media officers, Fundraisers.	Eliciting and gathering individual narratives of homelessness.	Volunteering work as a researcher at a London-based voluntary organization (9 months)	Observing what HPs do within the setting of the voluntary organization: their day-to-day activities, responsibilities and work dynamics.
-Rear-line				Gathering HPs' accounts through informal conversations, gathering documents and speaking with clients.
<b><u>GROUP</u></b>	Four 'natural' social groups:	<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b><u>THE SECTOR: CONFERENCE EVENTS</u></b>	<b>OBJECTIVES</b>
-Front-line	(1) Outreach workers	Creating the social scenario for the discussion, generation and negotiation of meanings. Exploration of the emergence and circulation of social representations in the dialogical communicative space between HPs doing the same job.	Participation in two conferences on homelessness: (1) <i>'Innovations Fair 2004: From homelessness to loneliness: social exclusion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'</i> (Crisis) (2) <i>'A Job Worth Doing'</i> (OSW Employability Conference)	Observing the dynamics of concentrated debate and heated discussion on homelessness amongst the different organizations within the voluntary sector.
-Rear-line	(2) Training & development workers  (3) Mental health & drug misuse workers  (4) Project managers, director of programs			

Table 2: Data collection methods and participants.

### *Generating data: Narrative Interviews and Focus groups.*

To elicit the representations of front and rear-line HPs, I adopted a multi-method approach, which combined four focus group discussions and thirty-six narrative interviews with both groups of professionals. The approach to these studies has as its central assumption, the fact that it is through spoken language (dialogue, conversation) that it is possible to gain access to people's dynamic and flexible constructions, perspectives and world-views (Moscovici, 1984b). Language is 'what allows us to have the world we have' and 'makes possible the disclosure of the human world' (Taylor, 1995, p.ix). These two techniques that I have utilized rest on conversation and social communicative interactions as means of understanding the world. These are fundamental socio-psychological activities (Harré, 1979) and a central domain of our discipline.

Each technique enables one to examine how social representations work at two different levels. On the one hand, focus groups create the social scenario for discussion, generation and negotiation of meaning. The group discussion discloses the shared, the contested and the more idiosyncratic and taken for granted elements of their social representations. On the other hand, individual narrative interviews enable the researcher to delve into the more subjective elements of social representations. They provide a way of exploring the plurality of ways in which shared stock of representations are subjectively anchored within each individuals' own experience.

### *Narrative Interviews*

Narrative interviewing is a qualitative research technique which has been broadly used in the social sciences (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000) and in many studies of social representations (e.g. Jovchelovitch, 2000). It is through narratives, which are a universal means of story telling, that individuals freely communicate their social knowledge, meanings and belief systems of the world (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Our activities are symbolic in nature, and narratives are the vehicle and the site within which meaning of the world and of the self is constructed and re-constructed. Narrative techniques are regarded as valuable for investigative explorations of the symbolic realm and in particular for conducting dialogical

research since 'the very act of telling and listening to stories is entangled in a dialogical intersubjective structure' (Jovchelovitch, 2007, p.165).

The way 'narrative' approaches treat interview data is absolutely opposed to 'realist' approaches that seek to map out the objective representation of the respondent's experience (Silverman, 2001). Instead, within this approach interviews are regarded as means to access the different narratives produced by respondents in their active engagement in constructivist processes of meaning-making (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Silverman, 1993). These narratives do not picture the experience of the de-contextualised individual, instead they 'are embedded within the sense-making processes of historically and culturally situated communities' (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p.1027). In order to construct their narratives respondents draw on the multiple voices and different socio-cultural and historical discourses, whilst at the same time co-constructing themselves through discursive processes of positioning. The nature of narratives therefore does justice to the epistemological and theoretical presuppositions of this investigation.

Furthermore, the presupposition underlying the choice of narrative interviews is that their in-depth and open quality is best suited to acknowledge the four methodological principles formulated by Moscovici (1984) (Farr, 1993). Narratives are elicited by asking the interviewee to tell the story of an object. Hence, in abandoning the question-answer schedule and focusing on story-telling they diminish any constraining influence on the interviewee (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Due to their 'open' quality, they offer the interviewee free scope for the reconstruction and negotiation of her views without these being shaped and controlled by the interviewer's own representations (Farr, 1982). Hence, their in-depth, non-structured and flexible nature renders them the most adequate for the free emergence of the interviewee's worldviews and thus for drawing on issues that are more relevant to her (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Their appropriateness for studies of social representations is that they create a setting, which is sensitive to the social nature and historical and cultural context of social representations.

The use of narrative interviews was informed by the format introduced by Bauer and Jovchelovitch (2000). The 'informant' (interviewee) (Jovchelovitch &

Bauer, 2000) was asked to 'tell' her meaning of homelessness. I invited them to talk at length as if they were telling me a story of what homelessness means to them. The purpose was to elicit the narratives through which the informant would re-present her meanings of homelessness. Before starting I clarified the procedure of the interview. Hence, I highlighted the fact that it consisted of one question, a process of storytelling, in which I would not intervene, followed by a final questioning phase. I emphasized that I was interested 'on their views, rather than on testing their knowledge'. This posed an initial problem to the informants creating on them confusion and anxiety that later disappeared in the course of the interview.

In order to minimize the informant's initial anxiety and develop my role in the elicitation of narratives, I drew on my clinical training in the client-centred therapeutic relationship. As is done in counselling, before starting I communicated to them my non-judgemental and evaluative attitude and that what they had to say would be very valuable. I manifested my warm interest in their views through verbal and non-verbal communication that showed attention and recognition of their voice. This created a feeling of security, which is indeed a fundamental direction to take in the process of the client-centred therapy (Rogers, 1991). The aim is to avoid any threat to the self of the client and hence create the context within which she feels secure to freely utter her experience (Rogers, 1991). In addition, in order to enhance the authenticity of their narratives, I presented myself as ignorant on the issue of homelessness. This technique prevents the informant from engaging on 'strategic communication' that addresses the assumed agenda of the interviewer (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Hence, within this framework, once accepted the invitation to talk at length, the informant relaxed and moved from an initial rigid intellectualizing position towards a more experiencing one. The movement was towards a position in which the self engaged on a dynamic, spontaneous and more emotionally engaged symbolic experience of constructing the meaning of homelessness.

Despite encouragement to talk it is important to note that in some interviews there were long moments of silence. However, in order to be consistent with the principles of narrative interviewing, I did not 'rescue' the informant from the silence. Silence was respected and understood as a valuable space for reflection and hence, as an essential element of the symbolic experience. Silence is also a marker of the end

of a story-line. Hence, in order to assure that the story was finished I used probing questions such as 'is this all you want to tell me?' (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). In adopting this fully informant-centred orientation to the interview I could trigger rich narratives and thus tap into the informants' profound and intricate meanings of 'homelessness'. After this initial phase of the interview, once the main narrative on 'homelessness' was finished, there was a questioning phase (of four possible questions) aimed at exploring the way informants see themselves and the way they perceive others see them as professionals from the voluntary sector. Their beliefs on other HPs' and statutory professionals' views on homelessness were also explored. Through these questions I wanted to examine the interplay between statutory's and voluntary sectors' discourses on homelessness, and the discursive practices of the informant, that is, how would she position towards them (see appendix 1). It is important to note here that these elements emerged in the main narrative, and thus, it was not always necessary to draw on the four questions.

Hence, in adopting a narrative approach, the data generated from the interviews was treated as narrated versions of HPs' constructions of the meanings of homelessness. In particular, these narrations were regarded as the site where the different voices and their respective discourses that live within the socio-cultural context of the respondent clash. The attempt was to explore the respondent's rhetorical use of the different discourses that circulate in society and that they actively draw upon when representing homelessness. In adopting a rhetorical approach to the narratives I focused not only on 'what' discourses the interviewee uttered but 'how' she uttered them through acts of positioning towards other interlocutors. In constructing the narrative as a whole many different story-lines unfold, in which the interviewee shifts from one to another positioning (Harré & Langenhove, 1998a) through which relations of opposition, conflict or complementation between the elements of their representational field are visible. In this sense, the rhetorical analysis was facilitated by the identification of these positionings as indicators of 'how' the interviewee responded to particular discourses of dialogical others. A discussion of the analytical framework will be presented in Chapter 5 and 6.

In what follows I will discuss the rationale for using focus groups as a complementary means for eliciting a social process of constructing narratives.

### Focus groups

Focus groups are a research technique that has been commonly used amongst many social representation researchers (De-Graft Aikins, 2005; Howarth, 2000; Jovchelovitch, 1995). The choice of focus groups was informed by the conceptual aim of exploring how social representations actually live in the inter-subjective communicative space between people. While the individual interview is based upon the subjective, focus groups rely on social interactive processes, thus providing data that would not be accessible otherwise (Morgan, 1988). The group dynamics that they create, which are triggered by the plurality of participants, are key aspects for the research since they elicit the emergence of social processes of meaning making and construction of shared knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This research technique was considered to have a lot to offer to the understanding of the social processes of development of the social knowledge that emerged through the individual interview data. Hence, four focus groups with HPs were conducted (See Table 2).

Focus groups aim at replicating, insofar as the design of the research would enable, the social context where people would naturally interact (Morgan, 1988; Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Hence, they are of key importance for the exploration of social relations (e.g. conversation) in which, as Moscovici argues, social representations are constructed, transformed and enacted (Moscovici, 1984b). They create a scenario of discussion for the generation and negotiation of meaning, which allows one to observe the process of circulation and development of social representations. Hence, they provide a way of moving beyond the individual's narratives gathered through the interviews, and examining the different dialogical dynamics and interactive processes between participants. They provide the opportunity to observe how through dialogue, clash of perspectives and adoption of heterogeneous positions, people construct and transform knowledge together. Therefore focus groups, are methods that enable tapping into both the shared and conflicting aspects of representations (Gervais & Jovchelovitch, 1998). The

communicative processes between participants, disclose both the more idiosyncratic and taken for granted elements of their social representations. Focus groups are particularly significant for the purpose of this study since they offer high quality data of the group dynamics of contestation, confrontation and negotiation between participants.

An advantage of this technique is that in focusing attention on the collective, rather than on the individual, it creates a context in which participants feel free to express themselves and are stimulated to utter their views (Frey & Fontana, 1993). Such an emphasis on the collective leads to empowerment of the participants through the recognition of their voices and experiences (Madriz, 2000). Indeed Gaskell (2000) has characterized the focus group situation as close to Habermas' ideal of the public sphere. In this way, it can be argued that the potential danger of the power relationship between the researcher-researched is minimized.

Similarity *within* focus groups and difference *across* groups are the two main factors that need to be considered when segmenting the group and selecting participants (Howarth, 2000). Morgan (1988) suggests that there is a need of a degree of homogeneity in background, but not in perspective, for the discussion to be elicited. On the one hand, similarity between participants within a group enables one to observe natural shared processes of knowledge production whilst at the same time allowing for a degree of heterogeneity. The group discussion benefits from being compounded by people that belong to the same social milieu and share a common socio-cultural project, in which the moderator can act as a naïve observer (Gaskell, 2000) thus titling the balance of power over the debate towards the group. On the other hand, segmenting the groups on the basis of different natural social categories provides a multi-perspective view of the subject of study, thus, enabling the researcher to explore and understand the worldviews of the groups that compound the field under investigation (Howarth, 2000).

For the purpose of this investigation I considered both similarity and difference. Hence, I determined four 'natural' social groups. These were split on the basis of job/profession within the voluntary sector. The study contained four focus groups: (1) outreach workers, (2) training and development workers, (3) mental

health and drug misuse workers, (4) Project Manager/Director of programmes. Each of them was comprised of HPs from different London-based organizations. This segmentation aimed at obtaining an understanding of the array of different worldviews on homelessness (in terms of job experience and location at the various interfaces of homelessness) within the whole voluntary sector. Due to their job practices, these groups deal with different aspects of homelessness. The first three groups work in the front-line and hence have direct experience and access to the voice of the homeless. The fourth group has less degree of contact with clients but greater access to the 'outside world' through dealings with statutory agencies, funding bodies and so on. The four groups together resembles a cross-section of the voluntary sector. However, I am aware that a gap has been left by not setting up two additional specific groups with policy officers and fundraisers. There are practical and theoretical reasons for this.

Whilst the jobs of policy officer and fundraiser are important within the sector, there are only few such posts within each voluntary organization. Organizations tend to have a vast majority of front-line HPs. The reduced number of policy officers and fundraisers that were available, added to the fact that these were very inaccessible and reluctant to participate, posed considerable problems to setting up focus groups with these professionals. However, it is important to note here that this shortcoming was partially overcome since participants of the fourth group also developed activities related with policy and funding, or had done so in the past.

Each focus group had between seven and ten participants. The length of the discussion was between 60 and 90 minutes. All were conducted at the Social Psychology Institute of the London School of Economics and all were video and audio digitally-recorded with previous consent. Both the phase prior to the initiation of the discussion and the informal conversations that emerged once the focus group was finished were recorded for analytical purposes. This contextual information is very valuable for the analysis of friendship and the relationship of each participant to the rest of the group (Howarth, 2000). Documenting the development of these social dynamics and interactions provided me with some very important data. Indeed, it proved highly valuable in assisting the understanding of the group dynamics within the actual discussion. In order to facilitate the discussion and encouragement of

social interactions participants were requested to arrive half an hour before the focus group in order to have tea in an informal gathering. Despite belonging to different organizations, some participants knew each other from the field. The discussion evolved very easily since they all shared a professional experience and all were familiar with the issues that were raised.

In the light of the narratives and issues that emerged in the individual interviews I designed a schedule for the focus group, which was flexibly used as a guide of the topics I wanted to cover (see below). Indeed, in the course of the discussion I discovered that participants were naturally covering the questions in the same sequence that I had designed.

I wanted to tackle the following issues (see appendix 2 for full details):

- Their views on homelessness.
- The meaning and experiences of the one-to-one relation with clients.
- Sources of knowledge of homelessness.
- The dynamics of professional identity: their self-views as professionals doing that job, and as members of the voluntary sector.

Similar questions were posed to the four focus groups in order to create a framework for the analysis. In all of them I wanted to explore the socio-psychological process of re-presenting 'homelessness' and the co-occurring process of constructing the self. Hence attention was on processes of social identification with one's job and with the community of the voluntary sector. In particular, in having four focus groups with different professionals, I wanted to explore whether they would draw on specific elements of their job and location when constructing the meaning of homelessness.

I functioned as the moderator of the discussion. As in the interviews, at the beginning, I presented myself as a naïve observer (Gaskell, 2000) interested in their views and experience. I emphasised that questions would be posed to the group as a whole. Thus making clear that the debate was open to all. I communicated that I wanted them to share experiences and be responsive to each others' comments. Therefore my role was to catalyze the interventions encouraging people to participate.

### *Participant Observation: Entering The Field.*

During the initial phase of my thesis, in which I was engaged with the literature review and the design of the theoretical framework of the thesis, my work got trapped in an impasse. I realized that if I wanted it to advance I needed to move beyond my perspective as an 'outsider' and gain some experiential insight in the field. This encouraged me to entering the field of the voluntary sector. Hence, I drew upon aspects of participant observation, as a way of immersing myself in the field and developing a more thorough understanding of the context where HPs' representations emerge, circulate and evolve. Whilst I do not claim that I have fully utilised the ethnographic method of participative observation, I acknowledge that this study has benefited from drawing on aspects of this technique, since is well suited to research on social representations (Gervais, 1997). The aim was to complement interviews and focus groups, and aid reflexive engagement with the process of designing and reviewing the methodology of the study. Agar (1986) highlights that when observing, the social ethnographer rather than measuring or testing hypothesis, should be encouraged to learn and make sense of the world she encounters through focusing on what people actually do. This goal is underpinned by three theoretical assumptions, which are pointed out by Silverman (1993) as being shared by many social ethnographers. The three of them echo central aspects of social representations theory. Firstly, a valuation of common sense as rich, intricate and wise (Silverman, 1993). Secondly, social practices are regarded as the place where common sense lives. Thirdly, the phenomena under study exist on the site of particular practices and settings, and are understood through them. This shows how not surprisingly ethnography has richly contributed to the research on social representations (De-Graft Aikins, 2005; Gervais, 1997; Howarth, 2000; Jodelet, 1989/1991).

Moscovici highlights the symbolic power of social representations to influence behaviour and communication (1984). Nevertheless, Moscovici is not referring to a causal unidirectional influence of representation over behaviour. This remark is useful since without it, deductive models of explanation would have to be advocated for the present study. For this reason it is appropriate to refer to Wagner's (1995) assumption that both communication and behaviour are expressions of social representations. Communicative processes between individuals within the public

space constitute both the environment and an inherent component of their genesis (Jovchelovitch, 1996). The diverse forms of interaction of HPs is the context in which their representations are engendered, enacted and transformed; a context that Moscovici has claimed must be acknowledged through observational techniques (1984).

Participative observation is a technique that has been specially recommended for studies where 'the meanings people use to define and interact with their ordinary environment are central issues' (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 23). This is certainly the case of the study of HPs' social representations. HPs' meanings permeate their interactions with clients, advocating/lobbying practices, 'translations' and portrayals of 'homelessness' to the outside audience (government, public, media). I was interested in observing what HPs were doing within the setting of the voluntary sector as a way of accessing their social processes of meaning making in context. Hence, borrowing from elements of participative observation involved; some direct observation of relevant events, some social interaction in the field with the subjects of study, informal interviewing, and the collection of documents (McCall & Simmons, 1969). Documents were gathered through my participation as well as from the organizations' web pages and emails received as a member of two voluntary sector networks. Immersing myself in the context of the voluntary sector allowed me, whilst analysing the data, to move beyond interviewees' and groups' accounts and relate their discourses to their specific social-political and cultural contexts.

I performed two practices of participant observation in chronological sequence. Firstly, the initial attempt to enter the field consisted of an observation of what HPs do within the setting of the organization. For this purpose I volunteered over the period of nine months as a researcher for a London-based homeless organization. The aims were to observe the workings of the voluntary agency as a source that could lend meanings to the design of methodology. This type of preliminary information was also significant in later analytical stages of the accounts that emerged in the interviews and focus groups. Through this experience I was able to have informal conversations with HPs, gather documents, speak with clients, and observe interactions amongst professionals. Volunteering gave me an insight into the fact that there were possibly different views held between those working at the front-

line and those at the rear-line. This informed the segmentation criterion of front-line and rear-line professionals.

Secondly, I wanted to examine meanings circulating within the voluntary sector. I was concerned with the 'hot' issues and debates on homelessness that were being discussed amongst the different voluntary organizations in London. I was able to locally observe these through my participation in two main conference events on homelessness organized by the homeless voluntary sector (see appendix 3 for conference programme details). They were held five months after my initial observation. One was organized by the organization *Crisis* under the title '*Innovations Fair 2004: From homelessness to loneliness: social exclusion in the 21st century*'. The other one, '*A Job Worth Doing*' was organized by the voluntary agency OSW, and the focus was on employability. Participating in these conferences (and in the organizational setting) offered me an excellent opportunity to move beyond research dialogues. I could observe how the voluntary sector, in context, collectively made sense of homelessness and co-constructed a simultaneous shared identity as a community of HPs, critically engaging with reified and taken-for-granted forms of knowledge. Indeed, conferences disclosed rich information about the dialogues that form HPs' knowledge and the dynamics of negotiation and contestation of institutionalized discourses of homelessness, that inform their identity and knowledge.

Data from both practices of observation was recorded through notes. In addition, some sessions of the conferences were taped. The data gathered through both observational processes was used as an aid to the analysis and interpretation of interviews and focus groups. Both experiences offered a valuable backdrop to my research providing me with a deep understanding of the workings of the voluntary sector. Most essentially, they offered a perspective on the complex interplay between homelessness policies, the shortcomings of the welfare system and the daily realities of homelessness services. Additionally, they were an opportunity for me to reflect on my research methods and make the first contacts with participants.

*A note on ethical considerations.*

In all the studies I carefully considered all the ethical aspects of the British Psychological Society's (BPS) code of conduct related to my research. Particularly, special attention was paid to each of the issues in the section on 'ethical principles for conducting research with human participants'. Participants were treated with consideration and respect. Information of the study was previously supplied to all the participants. I provided through both verbal communication and written documents, a summary of the aims and objectives of the research. They were also informed as to how the research involved them as participants, and of their right to leave the study at any moment if they wished so. In both interviews/focus groups and conference sessions, participants were asked for their consent to be video/audio taped. When applying for the two conferences I told the organizations about my research and explained in what way attending the conference could contribute to my study.

Participants were ensured confidentiality of the data they provided, which has been treated with anonymity through the use of codes. The systematic process of encoding the name of each participant has ensured that they are not identifiable. In addition, verbatim texts have been safely kept.

**4.2.2. Segmentation of the Social Milieus of HPs.**

For the qualitative purpose of exploring HPs' representations, participants were selected through segmentation procedures (Gaskell, 2000). This technique enables one to engage with the ultimate aim of qualitative research, which consists of 'exploring the range of opinions, the different representations of the issue', rather than, 'counting opinions or people' (Gaskell, 2000, p.41). In order to inform the selection, as Gaskell (2000) suggests, I conducted prior background research volunteering within an organization and thus I was able to talk to different HPs. In addition, I did desk research on the infrastructure of the voluntary sector and the different jobs developed within it. Hence, this a priori research made me realize that different views were possibly held between those HPs working on the front-line with clients and those working at the rear-line of homelessness. In particular, I believed

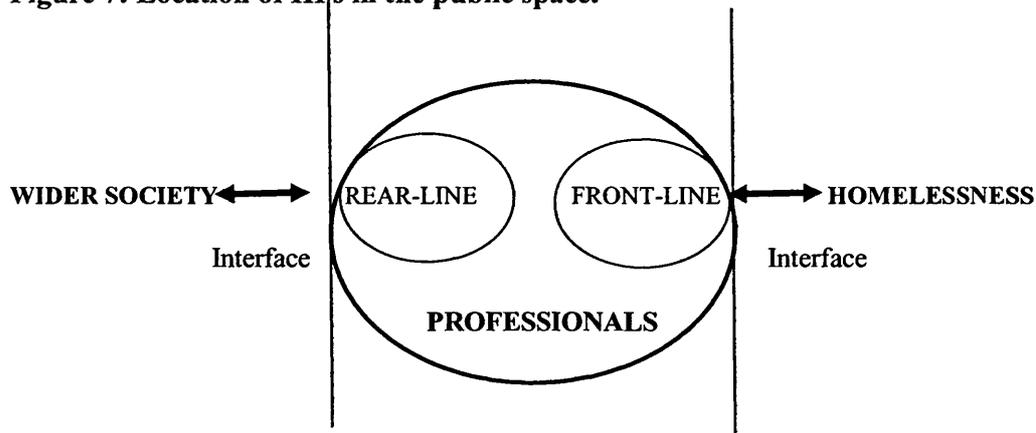
that it was necessary to select various members doing different jobs within each of these two groups. Therefore, the social milieu of HPs from the voluntary sector in London, was segmented into front-line and rear-line HPs (see Table 3). Given the social milieu of HPs from the voluntary sector, the aim was to explore the diversity of views on homelessness within each sub-group and within each of the wider social milieus (front-line, rear-line).

In addition, this criteria of segmentation was informed by theoretical considerations underpinning the research. On the basis of the dialogical triad of representation (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999), which has been introduced in chapter two as the unit of analysis, it was believed that worldviews and positions would differ amongst HPs dialogically engaged (co-participating) in different constellations of 'ego-alter-object-project'. Therefore, participants were selected on the basis of their ability to exemplify the different job positions within the homeless voluntary sector. With the aim of obtaining a sample that reflects the full range of professional positions that exist within non-statutory homelessness organisations, interview/ focus group respondents were broken down into two sub-groups: rear-line and front-line HPs. The alter and the project vary across front-line and rear-line HPs in relation to their jobs and quality/quantity of relationship with clients. There are differences between both in the place of work, type of practices and interaction with the homeless sub-groups. The group of rear-line HPs is comprised of those individuals with office-based activities such as fundraising, public campaigns, media communication and policy. Front-line staff are workers that have direct contact with clients. Amongst these, we find HPs of outreach teams, day centres, first-stage and temporary hostels, resettlement teams and employment/ training schemes.

Each group deals with a different dimension of the phenomenon of homelessness. Both groups are at the interface of the divide between the homeless and the outside world, however front-line professionals are closer to the inside reality of homelessness (see Figure 7). Their practices consist on one-to-one daily support and contact with clients. On the other hand, rear-line professionals are the public side of homelessness. Their practices consist on communications with the outside world (the public, the government and the media). Whilst the former have an advantaged experience of working in relationship with clients, the latter have a privileged

position in the social fabric for communicating about homelessness. For instance, fundraisers and public campaign officers aim at portraying the issue of homelessness to potential donors and the outside public. Policy officers are in constant contact with the government in their lobbying and advocating practices.

**Figure 7: Location of HPs in the public space.**



The selection of number of interviews and focus groups as well as the number of respondents in each segmentation was informed by the notion of ‘corpus construction’ (Bauer & Aarts, 2000; Gaskell & Bauer, 2000). This is a systematic process that consists of selecting respondents, analyzing texts and re-selecting more respondents until a saturation is reached and additional data can not provide new and unknown representations (Bauer & Aarts, 2000). Hence, in aiming at maximizing the variety of representations until the range of worldviews is exhausted ‘corpus construction maintains the efficiency that is gained from selecting some material to characterize the whole.’ (Bauer & Aarts, 2000, p.20).

*Recruiting Participants.*

Participants were chosen from twelve key London-based organizations. Even though I had developed contact with professionals of two main voluntary agencies through past voluntary investigative work and through my MSc research work, entry access was an extremely difficult challenge. In order to select participants for

individual interviews and focus groups, I made written and oral contact with these organizations. For some of these, research that involves recruiting members of the staff has to be approved by the organization. Therefore, prior to the recruitment process with these particular organizations I submitted a successful introductory letter and research synopsis. In addition, an e-mail with the information about the aims of the research and procedure of the interview/ focus groups was sent to all potential participants. This e-mail was followed by a telephone discussion in which I explained my proposed research and the implications of participating in the study. The name of the organizations will not be quoted here for confidentiality reasons.

I conducted thirty-six interviews with HPs from different organizations and four focus groups (see Table 3). Both lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews were tape-recorded and conducted, in most cases, in the organization and also at the London School of Economics. As I have stated previously, focus groups, were video/ audio digitally recorded and took place chronologically after the process of collecting interview data. They were hold at the Social Psychology Institute of the London School of Economics.

**Table 3: Segmentation of participants.**

(see appendix 4 for a description of each area of work).

Front-Line (N=24)			Rear-Line (N=12)				
Outreach worker	Project worker <sup>32</sup>		Project manager <sup>33</sup>	Director of programs	Policy officer	Press officer Media officer	Fundraiser
<b>Interview</b>	<b>Interview</b>		<b>Interview</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Interview</b>
N=4	N=13		N=7	N=2	N=3	N=3	N=4
<b>Focus group</b>	<b>Focus group</b>		<b>Focus group</b>				
N=1 Outreach workers	N=1 Training and development workers	N=1 Mental health and drug misuse workers	N=1 Project managers and chief executives				

#### 4.3. Quality Assurance.

Insofar as this study is engaged with essentially dialogical phenomena, the quality of the research can not be assessed within the framework of the Cartesian paradigm of Science. Quality assurance in qualitative research is not achieved through criteria of reliability, validity and representativeness. These are criteria that do not do justice to a dialogical/constructivist epistemology. Adopting them would mean turning to the same epistemology and nomothetic methodologies that I have intended to escape from. However, the inability to transfer positivist quantitative criteria to qualitative research does not restrain the latter from having its own critical and rigorous factors of excellence. Indeed, as a result of fighting over traditional positivism and seeking to develop own quality standards, there has been within the field an emergence of rich methodological innovations (Gergen & Gergen, 2000).

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<sup>32</sup> In hostels, day centers, semi-independent housing.

<sup>33</sup> In hostels, day centers, semi-independent housing.

Gaskell and Bauer (2000) ground their view of quality in qualitative research in the importance of introducing public accountability as criteria of excellence of the investigative practice. In relation to adopting an external indicator they argue that there are 'internal benefits of setting a frame for constructive discussion and peer review.' (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000, p.337). Being informed by the criteria of public accountability, throughout the research process, this investigative inquiry has carefully paid attention to issues that would critically ensure its own quality and credibility. Hence, I have sought to meet Gaskell's and Bauer's (2000) proposed quality indicators of *confidence* and *relevance*. Confidence is a measure that ensures that the outcomes of the analysis, far from being fruit of the fantasizing of the researcher, rest upon solid foundations and transparency that render them open to critical debate. Relevance, refers to whether the research is both significant and useful in practical and/or theoretical terms. In aiming to achieve this, I have adopted Gaskell's and Bauer's (2000) suggested strategies of triangulation, reflexivity, procedural transparency, thick description and corpus construction (see Table 4).

As I have earlier discussed, there are various levels of triangulation in the present research (see Table 1). In using triangulation, as well as seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study my concern was also to engage in a process of self-reflexivity. Hence, there are in this research two uses of triangulation that ensure a path towards confidence and relevance. In addition, I have attempted earlier to demonstrate, as much as it can be conveyed in written, the personal process of reflection upon my relationship with the researched. In making explicit my epistemological foundations, discussing the diagnosis of methodology, outlining the analytical framework, and communicating the reflection of my relation with the researched, I hope that throughout the thesis I have achieved both clarity and transparency, and thus opened the doors for public accountability. In being transparent I have sought to give the reader the information needed in order to de-construct and unveil my research construction.

Furthermore, thick description as a marker of relevance and confidence has been performed through the presentation of a wide range of verbatim resources, through which I have sought to both show the origin of my claims and communicate the richness and complexity of the worldviews of the participants. Relevance and

confidence have also been achieved through the process of corpus construction. The sample was segmented, and interviews and focus groups were analysed until there was evidence of saturation.

**Table 4: Quality indicators.**

<b>Quality indicators</b>	<b>Brief explanation</b>	<b>Confidence</b>	<b>Relevance</b>
Transparency and procedural clarity	Transparency of epistemological position, theoretical framework, methodological diagnosis, data collection procedure, analytical framework and analytical process.	√	
Triangulation	Triangulation of: methods, data, and levels of analysis.	√	
Reflexivity	Reflexivity upon the dialogical relationship between researcher and researched as an attempt to occupy an ethical space within this relationship.	√	
Thick description	Verbatim samples.	√	√
Corpus construction	Saturation is achieved through sample segmentation procedures.	√	√

#### 4.4. Conclusion.

This chapter has examined the methods through which the object of investigation has been approached. I have discussed the epistemological foundations that have guided the choice of investigative strategies. Hence, firstly, I have affirmed my position within a dialogical paradigm, and discussed the ethics of a dialogical approach to research. Secondly, I have highlighted the benefits of utilising focus groups and narrative interviews, and examined the problems I have confronted

throughout the research process. Finally, I have discussed how in adopting certain methodological strategies, the research has ensured quality through indicators of confidence and relevance.

Epistemological foundations and the theoretical questions of my research directed the interpretative analytical procedure. In Chapters 5 and 6 I discuss the analytical framework of the two levels of interpretative analysis that were conducted. On the one hand, the content of symbols and meanings was researched through thematic analysis. This is an analytical technique that assists the researcher in the process of coding qualitative data. It consists of a systematic process of; perceiving and encoding patterns, identifying and interpreting themes. This endows the researcher with a profound insight into the more latent meanings, thus revealing fundamental aspects of the content of the representation. For these reasons, thematic analysis was chosen as an appropriate technique to assist the analysis of all the qualitative data derived from the studies. Specifically, I followed the pragmatic process of thematic analysis established by Attride-Stirling (2001).

On the other hand, I conducted a meta-analysis of internal dialogues, which was guided by Bakhtin's view that what people convey in conversation, comes from the polyphony (1984a) of voices of multiple others that inhabit the self, i.e. institutions, other groups etc. The aim of combining both hermeneutic and dialogical approaches was to examine the critical aspects of HPs' social representations, and thus to understand how different elements of the representations were put to use within the polyphasia of knowledge. Both analytical processes were computer-assisted through the programme ATLAS/ti.



## **5. SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF HOMELESSNESS: DIALOGICALLY NARRATED EXPERT KNOWLEDGE.**

This chapter provides the analysis of the data collected from the in-depth interviews with both rear-line and front-line HPs<sup>34</sup>. Section 5.1. discusses the procedure of the analysis, and the analytical model that has functioned as the framework for the two-level analysis of the interviews. Section 5.2 provides the results of the analysis. The subsequent section discusses the general pattern of dialogues between the multiple co-existent voices of symbolic ‘others’ that emerge in the dynamics of knowledge production. In section 5.4, I present illustrative accounts from my participative observation that mirror the themes found in the interviews. The last section draws conclusions from the discussed analyses.

### **5.1. Analytical Model and Processes.**

The analytical model comprises a combination of two perspectives. On the one hand, the meta-analysis of internal dialogues was guided by the concept of positioning and Bakhtin’s view that what people convey in conversation comes from the polyphony of voices of multiple others that inhabit the self of the interlocutor (1984a). On the other hand, the rationale for the analysis of the content departs from the concept of cognitive polyphasia and Jovchelovitch’s model of the dialogical encounter between different forms of knowledge (Jovchelovitch, 1997, 2002, 2007).

#### **5.1.1. Meta-analysis of Internal Dialogues.**

The basic idea that underlies this analysis is the view that what people convey in conversation comes from the co-existence of voices of multiple symbolic ‘others’ that percolate the self of the interlocutor (i.e. institutions, other groups etc). As discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, the self exists in dialogical relationship with manifold ‘others’, with whom she is dialogically engaged in the production of knowledge and the co-construction of identity. Both from psychoanalysis to Mikhail Bakhtin’s

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<sup>34</sup> A total of 24 Front-line and 12 Rear-Line HPs were interviewed.

literally philosophy, one can find recurrent arguments of how the multi-voicing of others' meanings permeate the talk of the interlocutor.

The present analysis adopts Bakhtin's perspective of the heteroglossic nature of communication and knowledge. By 'heteroglossia'(1981) he referred to the 'carnival'(1984b) and the 'polyphony' (1984a) of multiple 'others' that get articulated through the voice of the speaker. Through positioning and in relating the other's voice with the voices of many other symbolic interlocutors within the course of conversation, the borrowed voice acquires a new value (Bakhtin, 1984b). Through the utterance's quality of addressivity to the other's message the self positions in relation to the symbolic other (Bakhtin, 1986). The speaker is able to anticipate and respond to the symbolic other, who is constructed as responsive co-participant in dialogue. In the course of this process, the meanings and opinions of the voiced other are subjected to contestation, criticism, or assimilation and defence. An understanding of this discursive process can be enhanced by drawing on the concept of 'positioning' (Harré & Langenhove, 1998b). In the course of speech, as a discursive act the self adopts multiple and fluid stratum of positionings towards the symbolic other. Their articulation depend on the particular story-line and the positioning of the dialogical co-authors with whom the interviewee is engaged with (Harré & Langenhove, 1998a). The object of knowledge is represented within the clash of multiple voices, through processes of re-constructing others' perspectives from the different intertwined positionings.

In adopting this model, I engaged with a 'dialogical orientation to research' (Marková, 2005), which involved, an analysis of the different dialogues that occur within conversation. I also focused on the different positions people take in the representation of 'homelessness'. In the context of the interview dialogicality occurs at two levels. Firstly, there is dialogue between interviewer and interviewee that occurs at the *inter-subjective* level. The rhetorical tools and the meanings constructed are to an extent shaped by the interviewer's verbal and non-verbal communicative acts and the interviewee's assumptions concerning the interviewer and the consequent positionings adopted towards her. Secondly, there are multiple *internal* dialogues, within which the interviewee takes different positions towards symbolic interlocutors, whose knowledge is spoken and responded to through the

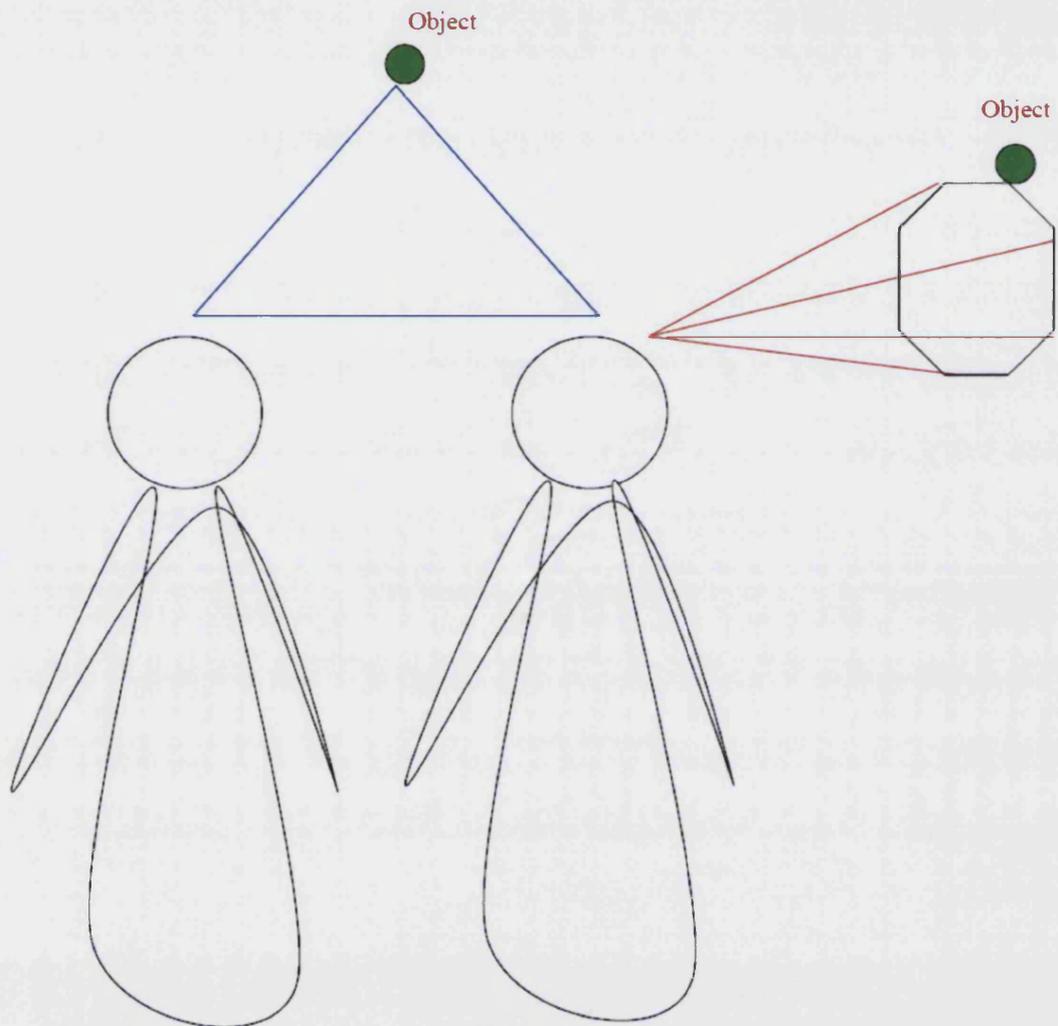
interviewee's voice (see Figure 8). The story telling is guided by a sequence of argumentation and contra-argumentation towards the symbolic addressees, in the course of which the interviewee utters her explanations, beliefs and justifications. Thus, there are at least three interlocutors in the social communicative context of the interview: the interviewer, the interviewee and the symbolic other. The importance of conducting a meta-analysis of internal dialogues is that these form the knowledge that HPs hold, where symbolical others are co-authors in its construction.

The unit of analysis for both levels of analysis was the spoken utterance. The dialogical communication of the person is build up of a chain of responsive and interconnected utterances. This is a speech unit that is naturally bounded by the speaker through pauses, breaths and/or silences once her presentation of an idea or rhetorical purpose is accomplished. The utterance can therefore be comprised of one or more sentences. Within dialogue between speakers that are physically present, the beginning and ending of the utterance is demarcated by the change of speakers. However, in the individual interview the utterance is bounded by the uttering of a different voice of a symbolic other. Hence, the focus of the analysis was not only on the single spoken utterance, but in addition special attention was paid to the dialectical relationship between utterances, that is, how an utterance qualified a preceding one.

Focusing on spoken utterances as single units of analysis, the attempt was to look at; the different others engaged in dialogue, and the fluid layers of positionings adopted by the interviewee within each of the main discursive themes that emerged in the narratives. Hence I asked myself: Which are the main arguments in the storyline? How is the interviewee subjecting others' messages to re-constructions in order to mark them with a different meaning? And what is the discursive goal of the interviewee's positioning? The key to answering this was to adopt an approach sensitive to the sequential emergence of dialogues within the narrative. It was through a broader look at the sequential compound of the clashing of voices, and their relationship with each other, that I was able to make sense of the particular positioning and communicative aims of the interviewee in the course of constructing homelessness. Both the analysis of the internal dialogues and of the content of knowledge, were developed hand in hand through a process of multiple coding

rounds. In section 4.3, I provide an explanation of how through this two-fold analysis one is able to make sense of the dynamics of HPs' polyphasic knowledge of homelessness.

**Figure 8: Inter-subjective and intra-subjective dialogues.**



### **5.1.2. Analysis of Content.**

Following from theoretical discussions in Chapters 2 and 3 on the concept of cognitive polyphasia, and Jovchelovitch's model of the dialogical encounter between different types of knowledge, the second level of analysis is focused on the hybrid and plural nature of knowledge. The plurality of knowledge is rooted in the dialogue that occurs in the encounter between the different modalities and contents of knowledge (Jovchelovitch, 2002, 2007). The goal of the analysis was to document the varied forms of rationality and multiple meanings embedded within HPs' knowledge. Cognitive polyphasia was viewed as the co-existence, within an individual and a group, of multiple and contradictory styles of thinking and meanings. These are products of the network of dialogues that take place between self and manifold others.

### **5.1.3. Procedure.**

The analytical procedure was a combination of top-down (from theory to data) and bottom-up approaches. In a similar vein to grounded theory, once I developed and matured my theoretical framework I delved into the corpus of data. It was in the course of reading and re-reading the interviews that I started to 'discover' the different themes and dialogues. The procedure of the analysis consisted of two coding processes that took place sequentially. This chronological process goes hand in hand with the emergence of results from a concrete and textual level to a more abstract (conceptual) and interpretative level. The analysis moved beyond the story line that emerged in the interviews to observations in the broader socio-political and cultural context of the social actors; the conditions where their representations emerge. For this I drew upon the media, web pages of the voluntary organizations, Government and policy documents. I sought connections between the text (interviews) and the context. These were recorded in the form of comments in ATLAS.ti 'memos' and assisted the interpretation of the data.

ATLAS.ti enabled the creation of two hermeneutic units (HU), called 'Rear-Line' and 'Front-Line' through which the entire data set was separated. Hence the focus was on the two basic milieus of HPs within the voluntary sector. My first engagement with the data consisted on an exploratory analysis in which I looked at each individual interview within its context<sup>35</sup> and within the 'hermeneutic unit' (Rear-line or Front-line) to which it had been imported. It was only in later stages when I looked at the data as whole in order to find common patterns and themes between both milieus of HPs.

In the first coding process I subjected all the interviews to the most basic open coding-frame based on the following codes:

- 1) Self about Homelessness
- 2) Self about HPs
- 3) Self about Organization
- 4) Self about Statutory Sector
- 5) Self about the Public
- 6) Self about the Self
- 7) Self about Voluntary Sector

This open coding frame emerged after the first 'round' of reading of the interviews. In the course of this reading I realised that the narratives could actually be categorised under different objects of communication ('*the talked about*'), which are all involved in the phenomena of homelessness.

Following this initial segmentation of the data I continued by exploring the different utterances in each coded text segment in order to look at: (1) *What* is the interviewee conveying through this utterance? (2) *How* was the message being communicated? And (3) *Why* was the message communicated in that way? Both the *Why* and the *How* were not present in all the utterances. Answering to these questions involved a conceptual work that required me to be able to look at the utterance within

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<sup>35</sup> With 'context' I mean the information of each interviewee that was appended to Atlas.ti 'memos'. The contextual information was on the following issues: professional and academic background, actual job, activities developed within this job, organization, training received within the organization and/or job.

its particular location in the narrative of the interviewee. Hence, I had to be aware of which was the context in which a particular '*what*' emerged within the whole interview. It was in examining each utterance taking into account its location within the succession of sequences of utterances in the interview, that I realised the presence of multiple symbolic others with whom the interviewee was engaged in dialogue and positioned upon. It was here that I engaged on a parallel meta-analysis of the internal dialogues (see appendix 5).

In the course of profoundly examining the data through the multiple rounds of exploration of these three questions, I started to realize the different themes that were emerging from each code. Hence, a second open coding frame was developed and applied to both Hermeneutic Units. After multiple thorough 'rounds' of coding and re-coding, the coding-frame was improved and all the data was segmented under a final coding-frame comprised of eighteen codes (see appendix 6). Once the data was segmented, I engaged in a long process of search for themes. ATLAS.ti networking tool, enabled me to technically link codes, quotations and memos, hence supporting me in this conceptual and interpretative phase of the analysis. At this stage the focus was on meanings, symbols and images of homelessness.

Alongside the analysis of the content, I started to realise the general patterns of internal dialogues. It was in the last analytical stage when I exclusively devoted myself to look at both symbolic interlocutors and the positioning and rhetoric strategies adopted by the self of the interviewee upon these voices. At this last stage I sought to answer: What are the main concepts that are being conveyed here, through which voices and positionings? The sequential approach assisted the exploration of how the transitions between positions were articulated in a comprehensive way, through integrations, clashes and conflicts between the discourses claimed from different positions. In addition, being able to recognise the different voices and their discourses constituted a careful process of moving beyond the narrative text towards the context of knowledge production. Hence I drew on background information (interviewee, sector) and accessed organizations' web pages, agencies' campaigns, policy documents and news media. Looking at the social context from which the many discourses of homelessness emerge assisted the identification of the different internal voices and positionings that were disclosed through communication.

## 5.2. Findings.

This section introduces the results of both levels analysis. The first subsection discusses the analysis of the content and the second presents the meta-analysis of the internal dialogues that emerge in the process of re-presenting homelessness. The analysis ultimately reveals how the representational field of one community, that of HPs, is characterized by the co-existence of dilemmatic dialogues. The contested context where HPs work and the conflicting nature of the internal and external dialogues HPs are engaged with shape the representations they hold about homelessness. The dynamics of knowledge production in the community of HPs is bound to, and at the same time expresses, the conflicts and clashes of the context where it is produced and enacted. Through these dynamics emerges a representational field characterised by the co-existence (within the community and within the individual) of polyphasic themes. These are constituted through contradiction and plurality in ways of thinking and acting towards homelessness. Contradiction and plurality apply both to the dynamics *within* each one of the major themes as well as to the dynamics *between* the themes. The representations I found were framed by the clashes between the co-existing voluntary and statutory sectors and the dilemmas of sustaining the responsive, comprehensive and individualised approach of the voluntary sector, when funded by or working in partnership with the government. The representational field about homelessness held by HPs is organised around three co-existing, competing and inter-related themes. Each theme contains its own internal dynamics and contradictory content: (1) *discourses of humanization*; (2) *institutional discourses* and (3) *discourses of identity* (see Figure 9). Firstly, HPs live within dialogical dilemmas between *humanizing* and *institutional discourses*, which compete to produce a view of *what* homelessness is. It is out of this struggling relation that *discourses of identity* containing representations about the identity of the homeless person emerge. Discourses of humanization, which seek to preserve the homeless person as a holistic human being appeared linked to HPs' role as communicators and educators of the public, politicians and the media. Their campaigning battle against the otherization of the homeless claims an idealist ethical encounter with 'the other' through practices of understanding and healing as the first

step in a moral commitment to them. In constructing discourses of humanization HPs enter a contradictory dialogue with the rhetoric of victimization, which is anchored in images of deficiency and incompleteness of the homeless and is expressed in practices of judging and curing. Institutional discourses reflect the dilemmas lived by HPs in their everyday work. These concern the struggle to free themselves from the pressures to conform to the institutional discourse of funding bodies, mainly the government, and their efforts to sustain the humanizing ethos of the voluntary sector and their role as critical advocates of the homeless. They express claims of independence and self-agency to put into practice their agenda and ethical mission against the pragmatic needs of the job and the wish for the development of the voluntary sector as a professional industry. The clashes between discourses of humanization and institutional discourses and their respective internal contradictions are played out in an ultimate representation of *who* the homeless person is that emerges through discourses of identity. This surfaces as competing representations of the identity of the homeless, who emerges simultaneously as someone torn between being objectified and victimised or ontologically recognised as a whole human being.

The dynamics of HPs' polyphasic knowledge are characterized by dilemmatic dialogue between these three contradictory and co-existing themes. Hence, their representational field is constructed through manifold dialogues with others and against a background of constant contradiction and dilemmas between: (a) the approach of the voluntary sector grounded in a humanizing view of the homeless as a whole person, (b) the statutory sector's tendency to victimize and objectify the homeless through practices of curing, labelling the homeless and pushing them into official categories (c) wanting to sustain the ethical approach of the voluntary sector based on practices of healing and understanding, and (d) the pragmatics of everyday work in the industry, which implies sacrificing ethos and having to adjust to the definitions and approaches of others (public funding, the government and statutory professionals).

### ***Rear/Front-line locations***

For both rear-line and front-line HPs, the three themes are interwoven with each other forming a patchwork of arguments and contra-arguments, that unfold through the positioning and re-positioning of the ego towards multiple dialogical

others and their views on homelessness. In the process of re-presenting homelessness, both rear/front-line HPs draw on symbolic resources from daily work practices; stories about clients, the public, statutory/media representations and daily struggles to defend the ethos of the voluntary sector. There are minor differences between front and rear line HPs' knowledge content and processes.

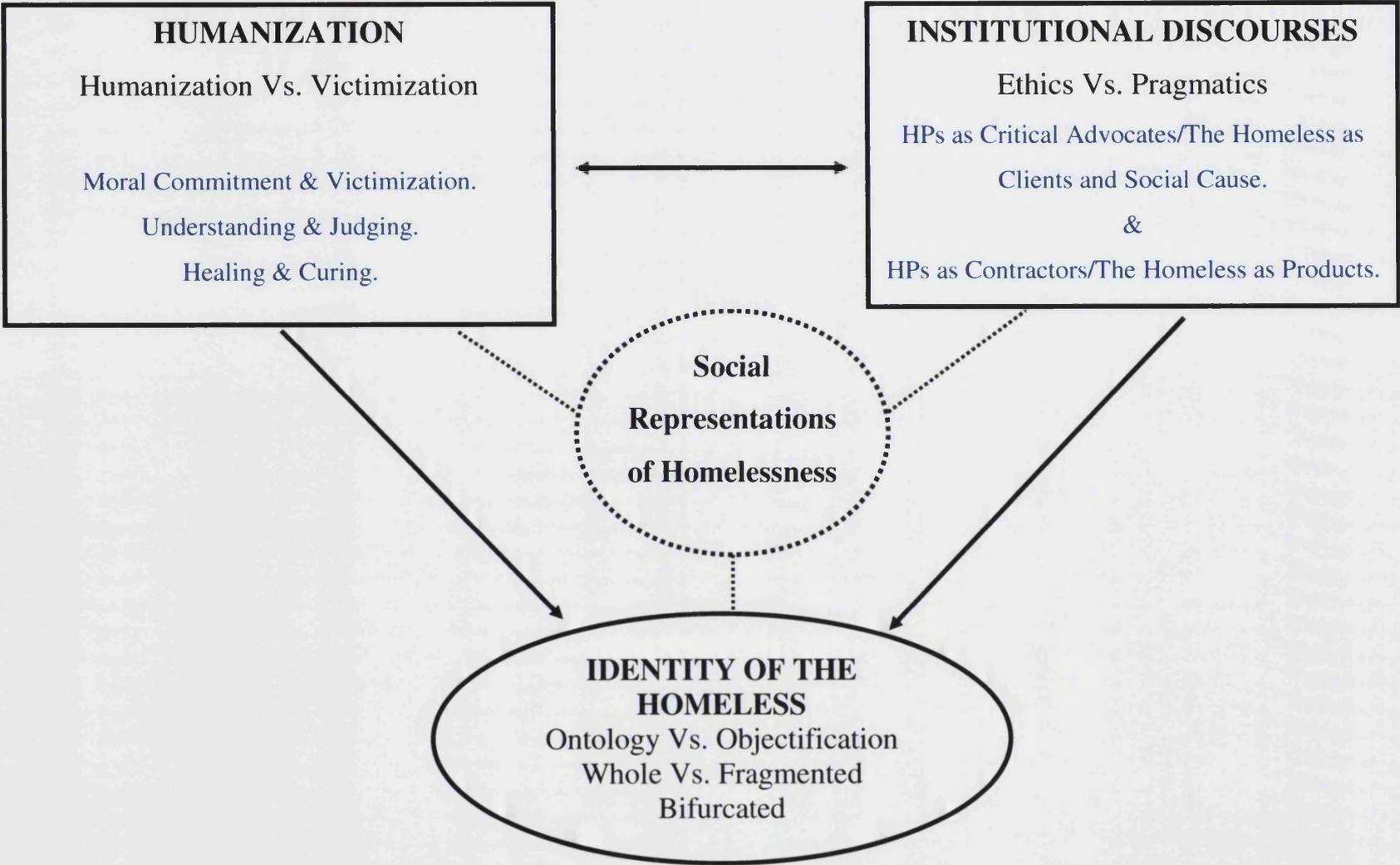
There are clear indications of how the positioning from which the person speaks in the dialogue frames what is said. Rear-line and front-line are locations that provide different experiences of the phenomena of homelessness. And it is this difference of experience what explains divergence in representations and knowledge. As discussed in Chapter 4, difference in job practices and location is translated into difference in the constellations of dialogue in which the ego is engaged. If we understand this within the framework of the dialogical triad (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999), then we see how different constellations of Ego-Alter-Object-Project result in different representations. This explains how divergence of experiences due to different contextual and relational locations, are the key to understand differences in knowledge. Whilst rear-line HPs present an intellectualised and 'second-hand' discourse about homelessness, those working on the front-line convey their direct experience of the one-to-one dialogue with the homeless person.

Whilst rear-line HPs theorize *about*, communicate and mediate between the homeless world and the outside world, front-line HPs participate in the inside *of* the homeless world. Jovchelovitch (1995) has indicated how 'This difference between the knowledge developed *about*, and the knowledge *of*, the vivid experience leads to the issue of the creation of different representations according to the distinct locus of the participants in the social fabric.' (p.133, emphasis my own). Rear-line HPs' processes of re-presenting homelessness are marked by policy and the discourse that both the voluntary sector and the organization use in communicating to the outside audience. Policy lobbying discourse, public campaign slogans and the organization's mission statements permeate their accounts. They seem to engage more with institutional discourses than with discourses of humanization. They also fall more frequently into processes of victimization, which might be used as rhetorical devices in their campaigning, funding and policy lobbying. In general, they talk about campaigning, advocating, lobbying policy change, communicating *about* and raising

funds for the homeless. Their representations of homelessness are, for the most part, iconic and general.

Front-line HPs' talk, by contrast, shows a rather more 'phenomenological' discourse and a greater ability to draw on the voice of clients and particular experiential examples as resources in the production of knowledge. Their representations are far more personal, intimate and particular. Their talk is permeated by the particular; names, personal experiences of clients, and the everyday practices that they develop with them. Because they are in dialogue with clients, they seem to be more aware of their own work practices and their impact on the homeless person. They tend to draw more on discourses of humanization and their attitude towards the homeless is tougher and less victimizing. They express a greater ability to engage in a brotherhood relation with the homeless, rather than in one of 'rescuer-victim'. This is because there is an inexorable recognition of the individual agency of the homeless person and no need to 'sell' the cause to the outside audience. Below I present in more detail the internal dynamics of each one of the discourses found.

**Figure 9: Dialogical co-existence of polyphasic themes.**



### 5.2.1. Discourses of Humanization.

*Humanization*, which co-exists in paradox with a rhetoric of *victimization*, was the overwhelming discourse that spontaneously and reiteratively arose in the interviews. The opposition between humanization and victimization is central to HPs' representations of homelessness. On the one hand, there is a rhetoric of moral commitment to the homeless that, in asserting their human dignity and wholeness, seeks to liberate them from representational violence undermining otherizing representations that reduce them to problems. The defence of the need to ethically relate to the homeless, which is regarded as the ultimate condition for their re-integration into society, constitutes a dominating rhetorical trend. On the other hand, interviewees' talk paradoxically discloses a co-existing rhetoric of victimization in which the homeless are otherized, pitied and represented as voiceless and disempowered. This conflict stems from the clash between different understandings of homelessness sustained by different systems of knowledge and sectors of society (common sense, policy, the media, the voluntary sector and the inner reality of homelessness), which are experienced first hand at the various interfaces and relationships in which HPs are located. In those locations, in communicative interaction with these groups through work practices, press releases, public awareness campaigns, responses to policy and partnerships with the statutory sector, HPs' social representations emerge and change.

#### 5.2.1.1. Moral Commitment & Victimization.

There is a paradoxical call for *moral commitment* to the homeless, which is justified through a *humanizing* discourse that asserts their dignity and holistic nature. This rhetoric co-exists alongside a discourse of pitying them, which represents them as 'vulnerable' and 'lacking'. This is anchored in images of deficiency and incompleteness. The confronting dialogue between commitment and victimization is represented in the dynamics of inclusion-exclusion of the homeless from the world of 'us'; the 'mainstream'. On the one hand, the recognition of them as subjects instead of as objects of violent representations seeks to undermine reductionistic, stigmatising and homogenising representations of the homeless. On the other hand,

the group of HPs is a community of champions and representatives of the homeless, and it is through *victimization* that they achieve compassion for the homeless from the outside world.

*'I think the phrase 'homelessness' has the capacity to, I can't think of the word... I can't think of any other word but dehumanize, has the capacity to dehumanize those who are labelled with it to just, to mean that they're just a problem and not a person.'* Rear P4

*'But being able to see dignity in people is, is a very different thing, which is a really valuable thing for any of us, for us to learn is that even in people that you don't like who, that, that you can point to, where you see, see qualities that you just don't like about them, you still need to see the dignity in that person, to see that they are actually a human being, that they as well as having, negative traits that they're not all negative. And that's what I really respect about homeless sector staff, that despite seeing all the negative things and being, being real to them rather than pretending they're not there, as well as seeing those negatives things, they have to see the positive as well because you have to see the positive to be able to work with people.'*  
Rear P6

*'Part of the problem for Government workers that work with the homeless is they get so far removed from a person as a person. You know, they just become a statistic ...'*  
Front P3

The rhetoric of *commitment* is permeated by images of the homeless as integrated persons comprised of both negatives (lacks, problems) and positives (potentialities). This comprehensive approach, which is claimed to be an essential quality of HPs' devotion to homelessness, is regarded as the *sine qua non* for homeless people's inclusion into society. The unfolding of this rhetoric is permeated by criticisms to lay people's and government's objectification of the homeless and statutory professionals inability to see their dignity and human nature. All interviewees voiced critiques to reductionistic statutory funded services (i.e. hostels) for not taking into account an holistic view of the person, and hence perpetuating the

vicious cycle of homelessness. Ultimately, this rhetoric seeks to defend HPs' humanizing attitude and comprehensive approach as ethical social responsibility.

*'A lot of people loose that, and they loose a big sense of themselves. And, because the process of physically not having a home is difficult to have, ... build up self-esteem. It's difficult then to interact with other people, so the more isolated and entrenched in what you haven't got, rather than building and using what you have got, or what you possibly want to have, and work on that. So, I think I would say homelessness also involves like a negative view of yourself and a negative cycle.'* Front P1

*'But I'm sure the people who work with homeless people are driven by the same sense of compassion that many people are in the homeless sector.'* Rear P4

The examples show how HPs' moral dedication to the homeless is paradoxically intertwined with an emphasis of homeless people's misfortunes and sufferings. They reveal a clash between *moral commitment* and *victimization*. The negatives of the homeless refer not only to physicality but also to the socio-psychological, which points to the lack of connection to social sources from which a sense of self-esteem, self-worth and feeling of belonging emerge. The ideal of moral commitment co-exists with compassion, which in turn leads to victimization. Hence, paradoxically, HPs seem to engage, at points, in the same processes of perpetuation of homelessness that they criticise institutional bodies for.

#### 5.2.1.2. Understanding & Judging.

The conflict between humanization and victimization is also played out within practices, which appear as the conflict between *understanding* and *judging*. On the one hand, there is a discourse that claims that in order to ethically address homelessness we need to dialogically understand their ontological experience. This discourse is linked to HPs' struggle to advocate for the homeless and emerges intertwined with the rhetoric of moral commitment. On the other hand, there is an opposing judging rhetoric that represents homelessness as a life downwards and as a detrimental place for a human person to be. HPs talk about homelessness as a very

damaging experience, and recognise that they would not like to be in that situation. Indeed, HPs' work is driven by the compassion towards those 'victims' that are judged to be at the bottom of their personhood.

*Understanding*; here we have a central identification of homelessness with the 'being' of the person, which is articulated in the form of a defence of homeless people's *existential autonomy*. In all the interviews there are claims of the need to listen to the voice of the homeless. These are manifested through the presence of allusions to 'feelings' and 'emotions' of the homeless 'personal' experience. Widespread processes of 'tagging' the person with the 'homeless label' are counter-claimed through assertions of the need to understand the way she makes sense of her own experience.

*'People are different and I think there's a lack of understanding from people who are in this mainstream, this big group of, 'normal' is the wrong word but this big group of people, the people in mainstream society who are socially included it's very hard to understand what drives somebody to sleep on the streets rather than go to somewhere they could get a bed, what drives somebody to take drugs, what drives somebody to wake up first thing in the morning and buy a can of Tenants Super from the off-licence and go down to the park. It's very hard for people to understand. I think it's very hard to connect that to people, to explain that this could be you because they don't see it as, 'it could be you'.'* Front P4

*'I can't tell you what sort of life they lead because I don't understand. I've never been homeless, and I would not disrespect those people by saying, 'I know what you're going through'.'* Front P2

*'It's much harder to see this guy that owned his own business who had a heavy load of bereavement at the same time, who's now trapped in a downward spiral.'* Rear P4

The interviews are abound with examples like the ones above, which reveal the prevalent criticism to society's taken for granted assumptions and lack of understanding of the homeless ontology. The criticisms are articulated in the form of

a disclaim of the reduction of the person to her problems, and of contestations to the associated labels (i.e. 'alcoholic', 'rough sleeper', 'homeless'). Living a 'normal' live does not legitimize us to claim an 'objective' understanding of the homeless experience. A defense of their existential autonomy serves as a mean to undermine attempts to establish a unique 'objective' representation of homelessness through statutory legal definitions, or through commonsensical representations. The phenomenological nature of homelessness casts light on the impossibility of any 'objective' measurement of the homeless experience. The discursive path is from a critique of an unethical and impossible 'truthful' representation of homelessness to a claim of the need to dialogically understand the homeless personal experience.

*Judging* -There is a common denominator amongst all homelessness experiences. All imply a movement 'downwards', are intricately comprised of a myriad of problems, and have a damaging effect on the person's soul. Homelessness tends to be related to a vicious circle of drugs and mental health and is represented as a world of suffering. So it would be unethical not to rescue the victim from this world. Rescuing is indeed the reason for HPs to exist. Here the paradox becomes evident, as they engage in the very same process of determinism and reductionism of the homeless experience that they criticize. The immediate association that comes to their mind when thinking on homelessness is that this is a world from which one needs to escape. Their words convey a right to decide what is 'good' or 'bad', and to impose a representation of what is 'beneficial' for human beings. However, this discourse dilemmatically co-exists alongside a claim for the need to understand their ontology, listening to their voices and feelings.

*'It's just a very sad fact, that a lot of our clients, if they make it past 50 or 60 having been out on the street for a long time, they're doing very well. Yeah. It's, it's life experience and it's awful ...'* Front P3

*'Now it means someone who doesn't have the opportunities that I've had to make the most of themselves and to live what we would call a 'normal' life. You know. To study, to get qualifications, to get a job, to make friends, all these things that are very difficult if you have a, a background that involves homelessness or living in care or, you're involved with the criminal justice system'.* Rear P1

### 5.2.1.3. Healing & Curing.

The function of HPs as a 'footbridge' for the homeless towards self-actualization and rebuilding their 'trusting' relationship with society; the inexorable tendency to cure the vulnerable: such a dilemma manifested itself in the course of the interviewees' talk. These are the dialectics between two opposing approaches to homelessness; '*healing*'- companionship, humane treatment, empowerment- and '*curing*'- institutionalism and victimization. The former, which is much more prevalent in front-line practitioners, is related with the ideal of the HP, the later with the pragmatics of everyday work, the industry and ultimately *institutional discourses*. Rear-line HPs showed a stronger and more direct tendency to engage in a defence of *curing* and when claiming *healing* it was done in a much more veiled way.

*Healing* - The rhetoric of *healing* functions as a counter-claim to the statutory discourse of *curing* and is inherently linked to the rhetorics of *moral commitment and understanding*. Healing is the HPs' ideal approach to deal with homelessness and it is based on an holistic personalized approach that attempts to deal with the whole person, rather than only with physical conditions. In such a practice HPs function as a footbridge for the homeless towards self-actualization and rebuilding their trusting relationship with society. It resembles the Rogerian's therapeutic 'helping relationship' (Rogers, 1995) founded on *companionship* and *humane treatment*. It requires self-identification with the homeless rather than judgemental attitudes from the side of the helper. It connotes the agency of the homeless person to be able to cross the abyss that excludes her from society. The supportive relationship is represented as 'doing *with* the clients, rather than doing *for* the clients'. It demands their 'self-determination', 'responsibility' and volition to engage in the journey. Along the unfolding of the rhetoric of *healing*, interviewees defend and recognize their own expertise, which is seen as having 'the knowledge of' how to engage in this relationship through a 'real understanding of the client's needs'. Interviewees demonstrate being driven by an internal motivation to work with the homeless, who are claimed to be an object of passion and unconditional commitment.

*'If you come at somebody accepting them as being essentially no different from you and asking them what they want, what it is that you can do to help, then I think that's likely to be far more successful. I think it's more practical, a more efficient way of working with people [...] I'm talking about working with people a lot. Like I said, essentially my job in terms of when it was frontline was getting on with people more than working with them. It wasn't my job to change somebody's life.'* Front P4

HPs are constructed as a 'footbridge' in supporting homeless people towards their reintegration into society and path towards self-actualization. Homeless people are depicted as 'having lost the sense of self'. Hence, the rhetoric of *healing* defends the need of a process that leads towards becoming a whole person. This implies 're-developing', and 're-discovering potentialities and skills' that one had before homelessness. Being flexible and unconditional are key qualities of this support. The meaning of 'home' is drawn upon in order to contest commonsensical and policy views of homelessness as 'houseless'/'roofless' and to criticize statutory funded services framed within this definition. 'Home-less-ness' is reconstructed as an issue of lacking a 'home', which conveys a recognition of its socio-psychological nature. 'Home' is represented as both a 'passport' to the social world and a re-connection to the self. The HPs is regarded as executing the function of the lacked home through the support relationship. 'Home' refers to the 'family' and hence constitutes the first place of socialization and source of multiple feelings. 'Home' is represented as having meaningful social relationships, as a source of self-definition, self-esteem, security, permanence, trust and of belonging to a community.

*'...building people's self-esteem, building their social confidence, giving them things to do but giving them opportunities to grow and to develop skills or rediscover skills they'd forgotten they had... Trying to bring people back into mainstream society and give them a place there. Pulling them away from the margins in which they existed because of all these problems, dealing with the problems but also trying to give them a boost, give them a push back in, being positive about it and looking about what achieve, helping them to achieve it rather than looking at what their problems are and just addressing those problems.'* Front P4

*Curing* - Co-existing with *healing*, but more veiled, is an opposing judging rhetoric that represents homelessness as a life downwards, a vicious circle of problems related to drugs and mental health, from which one needs to be cured. (Dis)empowerment, (in)action, (in)capability, (sub)ordination: these notions of the homeless person are evoked when the rhetoric of victimisation claims the need of *curing*. As opposed to the approach of *healing*, which recognises agency, inaction and subordination, rooted in incapability, expose the condition of the homeless under processes of *curing*. These notions represent the homeless as weak, needy, voiceless and indefensible, and tell us about the need to 'do for' the person instead of 'with' the person. These representations are translated into work practices, in which HPs paradoxically incorporate the institutional discourse- of ordination and establishing what is 'convenient'- to their ideal of understanding, moral commitment, and healing. The examples below show how HPs also fall into judging practices that otherize the homeless:

*'Now it means someone who doesn't have the opportunities that I've had to make the most of themselves and to live what we would call a 'normal' life. You know. To study, to get qualifications, to get a job, to make friends, all these things that are very difficult if you have a, a background that involves homelessness or living in care or, you're involved with the criminal justice system.'* Rear P1

*'Maybe for me it's time that I got another job. It's the same things I saw when I started work. You can be working for the same people like in five years time going through the same issues.'* Front P1

### **5.2.2. Institutional Discourses.**

This discourse shows HPs' dynamic conflict between putting into practice the ethics of the voluntary sector, and the simultaneous need to adjust to the representations and practices defined by government and private funding bodies. What appears as central is the dialogue between on the one hand, claims of agency

and on the other hand, contestation to and justification of having to conform to others' agenda. This discourse, which is expressed through argumentative talk, shows very well the dynamics of contradiction and conflict at work. Institutional discourses are constituted by the daily struggle of the HP, which is rooted in the dilemma between on the one hand, the voluntary sector as an industry with a profitable nature, which demands professionalism and productivity and on the other hand, its ethical mission. Consequently, there is a dialogical co-existence of two competing versions of job responsibility and identifications of HPs as both critical advocates and contractors of the statutory sector. This paradox, which is rooted in the co-existence of job guidelines of conflicting nature, unfolds through an opposing dyad of representations of the homeless as both 'clients / social cause' and 'products' of the voluntary sector. The co-existence of this contradiction is another example of cognitive polyphasia, and expresses the dynamics of HPs' work, where practicing the ethos of the voluntary sector is appropriate under certain circumstances, and adjusting to the approaches of the statutory sector and following governmental measures of progress in terms of 'hard indicators' are justified as adequate in the context of the industry. In both cases, conforming to the statutory framework is an exigency of the pragmatics of their job since the voluntary sector depends on statutory funding.

#### 5.2.2.1. Ethics & Pragmatics.

The struggles that HPs experience at work between self-agency and submitting to instituted practices are reflected in the dialogue between ethics and pragmatics. Interviewees manifest an explicit conflict between identifications with the ethos of the voluntary sector and feelings of responsibility towards the agenda of the statutory sector. On the one hand, there is a discourse that through *humanization* expresses profound responsibility to the voluntary ethos as the ultimate reason to work in the sector. On the other hand, there is a co-existing discourse on the pragmatics of the industry, which demands productivity. The sector has evolved from having a non-profitable nature to an 'industry' that seeks growth and whose *product* is the homeless. This version of job responsibility is emptied of any ethical meaning, since it seeks to merely respond to job targets instituted by others. Adjusting to such work practices is justified through the *victimization* of the homeless. The

contradictory character of working for the statutory sector and the desperate attempts to remain both 'grassroots' and independent. This paradox unfolds through an opposing dyad of representations of the homeless as both *clients/social cause* and *products* of the voluntary sector.

*HPs as critical advocates / The homeless as clients and social cause.*

In defending themselves from the imposition of the statutory agenda, HPs claim the homeless to be 'the' *clients*, and 'the' *social cause* of the voluntary sector. This discourse functions as a justificatory rhetorical device put to use to defend the self-agency and practice of their ethos. Inasmuch as the interviewees profoundly identify with the ethos of the voluntary sector, they claim a fundamental client-centred approach, disclosing a profound sense of responsibility to the homeless as *clients*, which is articulated through a rhetoric of *healing*. This approach conflicts with the statutory agenda. On the one hand, HPs are recognised for their one-to-one support work with their clients. On the other hand, they are associated with 'amateurism' by the statutory agenda, which privileges 'resource-led' rather than 'needs-led services'. The clash is between services driven by the ethos of the voluntary sector; focused on *needs*, client-centred, and services guided by the instituted practices of the statutory sector; *resources*. Here, the *advocating role* of the HP is justified through a discourse of *understanding* the needs of the homeless and a critique of the lack of resources and moral commitment of both the government and the public.

*'I think that the housing officer's as having to put limits because they, they're like a gateway and they must have targets, they must have set resources and, so they must have to be restricted on some level. Whereas when you're on the side of the fence that I'm on, you don't have to put those restrictions. In fact, you're fighting to do the opposite and so our approach from a work point of view is going to be different.'*

Rear P5

*'There is conflict basically between, organizations like [X agency] and organizations, and local authority housing departments. There is a conflict because, we, [X agency] constantly supports and represents clients who are basically in conflict with a housing department's decision and so, or that they may be evicting*

*them, or that they're refusing to give them a house or... So, there is a conflict.'* Rear P5

*'How do we as a society, such a wealthy society, allow homelessness to carry on. Why haven't we solved it?'* Rear P6

The defence of the *ethos* of the voluntary sector, the right to put to practice their own agenda through claiming that the homeless are 'their' clients; co-exists with a complementary representation of homelessness as a *social cause*. Within this discourse, HPs exist in togetherness with the homeless outside 'the system'. The former due to an alternative agenda, and the later due to a 'different' way of life. On the one hand, a claim of the homeless as *clients* of the voluntary sector serves to defend their ethos. On the other hand, claims of homelessness as 'the' *social cause* of the voluntary sector are rhetorically put to use in order to justify HPs' criticisms to the lack of both statutory resources and social commitment from the mainstream (the government and society). In the sense that HPs are the only ones that are morally committed to the social cause, their ethos and independent practices are justified. HPs' criticism of the lack of responsibility within the mainstream, regarding a problem that is rooted in society, seeks to accomplish a justification of their invaluable role in fighting for this social cause. HPs act as *critical advocates*, contesting public's meanings, and pressurizing and fighting over the government's legal definitions and approaches to homelessness (i.e. homelessness as 'bureaucracies', 'tick in boxes' and 'statistics'). Interviewees regard lobbying policy change as one of their main roles in order to be loyal to the voluntary ethos and for the sector not to work as a means in itself but as a means to fight for a social cause.

*HPs as contractors / Homeless people as products.*

Despite non-conformism HPs also declare the need to be submissive to the statutory client and its agenda. Representations of the homeless as *clients* and as *social cause* co-exist with conflicting representations of the homeless as *products* and the dilemmatic need to account for *professionalism* and *productivity* to the funding body (mainly statutory). This conflict is more common amongst rear-line HPs due to their duty of communicating homeless to the outside world and having to account for productivity and outcomes within the frame instituted by the statutory

client. Within this context the homeless is marketed and traded, sold and campaigned for with the aim of being funded. Interviewees re-present the homeless as ‘products’ that need to be depicted as ‘needy’ in order to be pitied for through emotions. Here victimization of the homeless co-exists in polyphasic contradiction with the ethos of the voluntary sector. It is used as a rhetorical device in playing ‘the system’ (i.e. private and governmental funding bodies). There is underlying critical awareness of the fact that this leads to a process of objectification, through which the homeless become victims of their own needs. Adjusting to practices instituted by others and sacrificing the voice of the homeless is considered appropriate and justified as an essential survival strategy within the context of state funding, since this is the only way of responding to the needs of the victim. Conforming to statutory bureaucratic guidelines is regarded as not affecting the identification with the ethos of the voluntary sector.

*‘My job is trying to find out at a very basic level what, what a particular potential funder, what homelessness means to them. [...] But that in a way is the dilemma that I think all fundraisers face and a lot of your time, ... and, as I said, your opinions don't really matter.’ Rear P1*

*‘Emotional blackmail, you know...(laughs) I think for the funding, we had to do a lot of work on showing what we call soft indicators. So, if an indication of success for somebody was getting a job at one end (laughs), we've had to really look at, at the end, somebody gaining self-esteem, you know, attending group for the first time, attending a class or some work for the first time, somebody turning up for a session and not drinking for an entire day and then not drinking for two days, so it is kind of showing up in all of those first steps in order to get this last step. We've been documenting, you know, and showing funders that our clients need to go through those five steps or we've got to think about those. ... yes, we will aim for so many percent of people to be high achieving, to go into training or jobs, but we also want to be able to cater within that bid for those soft outcomes as well. ...’ Front P3*

Interviewees give meaning to their relation to the statutory sector as being submissive and anchored in images of incestuous-ness. In having the statutory sector as *clients*, HPs have to accommodate to legal definitions of homelessness and work

within the bureaucratized agenda of the statutory sector. Consequently, they jeopardise their *ethos* and *client*. Submission is justified through a discourse of responsibility to *the statutory client* complemented by a self-representation of the voluntary sector as a '*professional*' *contractor*. The prevailing discourse is one of disclaiming statutory's agenda yet accepting it as a job responsibility and a way of being professionally accountable. Following statutory bureaucratic procedures such as ticking boxes, filling forms and counting the number of homelessness cases 'resolved', is openly criticised since it constrains the voluntary ethos. It causes a loss of contact with the client as a person and jeopardizes one-to-one client work. Additionally, it impacts on the unit of the voluntary sector through stemming competition and lack of collaboration between agencies. Here, discourses of humanisation, understanding, and healing are used in order to contest the statutory agenda.

Constructions of homelessness in terms of statutory legal definitions and hard outcomes (i.e. a certain percentage of people becoming economically active) co-exist along with those of the ethos of the voluntary sector, i.e. achieving 'soft outcomes' such as self-esteem and self-worth. These are considered to be a condition for achieving statutory 'hard outcomes'. The following example shows how adjusting to institutional discourses jeopardizes the humanization of the homeless.

*'I think that it's possible even that homeless professionals who don't work with street homeless people, I think that they might even have a, a double picture in their mind, you know. Homeless is that person sleeping on the street outside the tube station and then homeless is, you know, this person, you know, my client who has, you know, just come out of hospital or something. I'm referring to this project and I need to call him homeless. And I think they actually can mean two different things when I say that because I think that just like anyone they, they just slot the label on if it's useful and doesn't actually necessarily mean that they see their clients as homeless.'* Front P5

### 5.2.3. Discourses of Identity.

The conflicting dialogue between discourses of humanization and institutional discourses in HPs' representation of homelessness, is played out in a set of polyphasic co-existing representations and images of the identity of the homeless person. These are organized in terms of contradictions: ontology vs. objectification, whole vs. fragmented, resulting in a bifurcated identity. The dialogues constructing these plural and conflicting representations are, principally with the statutory sector but also with the mainstream public. These representations emerge through the processes of contestation to statutory and commonsensical representations of 'homelessness'. However, discourses of identity clearly show the polyphasic nature of the representational field and how, paradoxically HPs' are also holders of the multiple voices that objectify and fragment the homeless person.

#### 5.2.3.1. Objectification & Ontology.

There is across all participants a rhetoric of disclaiming the objectification of the homeless label since it acts as a forced identity stigmatising and ultimately perpetuating the experience of homelessness. Through the rhetoric of *humanization*, *understanding* and *healing*, interviewees claim that freeing the homeless from the taken-for-granted meanings attached to the label is an essential element of the process of resolving homelessness. Using the label implies an external and internal process of social exclusion: external through prejudice, stigma and stereotyping sustained by the outside, and internal through self-identification and internalisation of the homeless label. This perpetuates the experience of homelessness imposing an identity that acts as a 'jail' beyond which the person cannot see herself. This forced identity perpetuates the homeless as an outsider, socially and psychologically. As stated by a participant:

*'It just, it is like a tag that seems to automatically come with a homeless person and you just think like well .... I think that there are some assumptions of 'yeah, he wouldn't possibly fit in. They are all like crazy hair, big beards, alcoholics'. You know. Often from people you think should really know better, you know, rather than something you know.'* Front P1

*Objectification* occurs through judgement and lack of understanding of the human nature and ontology of the person shaped by representations of the homeless as a deviant other. It is also sustained by statutory practices of tagging people with an official homeless category (i.e. unintentional homeless) required by mainstream welfare services. In being labelled, the person undergoes a process of alienation, is cut off from her past history and present experience losing her sense of self and being excluded. Statutory definitions are criticised for ideologically instituting the meaning of the homeless experience whilst neglecting the person's ontological experience. Through an imposition of statutory services framed within the legal label, the service user is enforced into *cure*; a 'normal' way of life that corresponds with the standards of 'the system'. The real experience and needs of the person are not taken into account; she is put into a 'resource-led' instead of a 'needs-led' service. Despite being highly disclaimed, this process of objectification is also dilemmatically disclosed in the interviewees' utterances. Hence, within HPs' knowledge processes an otherizing discourse, which is typical of the mainstream, co-exists alongside a defence of the ontology of the homeless. HPs live within multiple spheres of the social fabric where in dialogue with members of different sectors co-construct representations of homelessness. Hence, the voices of these manifold others also speak through the voice of the HP.

*'And because I think the phrase 'homelessness' has the capacity to... I can't think of any other word but dehumanize, has the capacity to dehumanize, those who are labelled with it to just, to mean that they're just a problem and not a person. And I think if you're working with homeless people day to day, you can see through that. Yeah'* Rear P4

*'That's what makes working with our client group really difficult. We are talking about a lot of people who are just, basically that you would, if you weren't at work you would say they're scumbags.'* Rear P6

### 5.2.3.2. Fragmented & Whole.

Representations of the homeless as *fragmented* are expressed alongside *humanizing* counter-claims that defend the need to see the homeless as a whole human being. Certainly, interviewees manifest difficulties in finding ‘a definition of homelessness’ and broadly argue that its meaning embeds many different aspects of the person. Processes of fragmentation are argued to be founded on the disassociated approach of the agenda of the statutory sector. Experts from the statutory sector (doctors, psychiatric nurses, housing officers) are criticised for having an oblivious view of homelessness reduced to their specialist area. However, at points interviewees represent the homeless person in the light of particular aspects of their personhood and experience. They *fragment* her into her problems (addictions, mental health), visual images, physicality (roofless-ness), and the psychological (self-esteem, mental health). These co-existing representations emerge through the unreeling of the conflict between *ethics* and *pragmatics*.

*‘And it’s hard because different, different professionals have responsibilities for different parts of people’s lives then people’s lives kind of tend to get broken up into chunks and given to different people which is ridiculous because the poor person is in the middle and to them everything is all part of one thing, you know, but, you know, different people are responsible for different things.’* Front P5

Paradoxically HPs’ are holders and testers of representations that fragment the homelessness. They are themselves in conflict with this fragmentation since it is based on the approach of the statutory sector and undermines their multi-dimensional and holistic approach. This reveals the conflicting nature of their representational field and the multiple voices speaking through the voice of the HP in the construction of knowledge of homelessness.

### 5.2.3.3. Bifurcated.

In the course of disclaiming statutory approaches an intriguing representation of the homeless emerges. Statutory services are regarded as producing a *bifurcated*

identity that creates an impasse in the self. It alienates, confuses and positions the person in a state of existing in a 'no man's land'. Once inside the hostel/accommodation system the person is separated from her own peer-group or 'sub-society', which is source of social identity, support and sense of community. She is removed from a source of identification and simultaneously put through an experience where she is tagged as 'homeless' and in need of a 'cure' to be 'normal'. It is impossible to escape from the otherizing process: in offering the service there is an invitation to be normal, yet simultaneously there is the imposition of the label. Criticisms are voiced regarding the fact that these approaches constitute a false invitation to the 'normal world'. Through offering the service they are 'inviting' them to be re-integrated into 'normal' society. However, by the same token they impose upon them the label, otherize and exclude them from 'the system'. Hence the consequences are not only a *bifurcated identity* but also feelings of distrust and resistance to the outside world.

*'And when you think of, people moving into like rough sleeper flats .... They don't build them with the idea that people are going to change from the status of homelessness into being a couple, having a family. When they want to make an exchange, they can't, it's difficult for people to move. They have to move to another rough sleeper flat. They can't say, 'but that's not me anymore'. Front P1*

### 5.3. The Dynamics of Knowledge Production.

#### 5.3.1. The Dialogical Co-existence of Polyphasic Themes.

The meta-analysis of dialogues gives evidence of the socio-psychological, dialogical and dynamic nature of knowledge. It soon became clear that in the process of representing 'homelessness' each one of the voices interviewed spoke through internal dialogues with multiple others representing the statutory sector, mainstream society, the homeless themselves, and an 'ideal self' that embodied the ethical commitment with the social cause and ontology of the homeless. Interviewees created multiple dialogues shifting positionings in their engagement in arguments

and contra-arguments with symbolic dialogical co-authors, predominantly, those on the other side of the divide of homelessness. Due to the intricate intertwining of the multiplicity of voices and positionings a clear-cut delimitation of these was unfeasible. In this section I discuss the *general* pattern of dialogues and the manifold positionings taken up by interviewees as responses towards dialogical others along *discourses of humanization* and *institutional discourses* (see Figure 10). The dynamic shifting of positionings and the matrix of voices in dialogue that constitute them is played out in *discourses of identity*.

The prevailing discursive paths taken in the narratives are; firstly, a contestation to government and public views of homelessness, secondly, a defence of the community of the voluntary sector through claiming the value of its ethos and approaches and criticising the statutory agenda, and thirdly, a justification of the adjustment to the definitions and agenda of others (the mainstream). These discursive paths unfolded through a juggling of multiple positionings through which different discourses were put to use as rhetorical devices for justifying, explaining and claiming in response to the dialogical other. Interviewees eclectically put to use different and sometimes conflicting meanings and forms of knowledge such as; the ethos and mission statements of the voluntary sector/organization, policy, common-sensical, job specific and professional experience-based knowledge of the homeless client. Their movements across different dialogues and positions express the plurality of the types of knowledge at once used, constructed and re-constructed by HPs as they make sense of homelessness in their different locations and relationships with others in the public sphere. These results ultimately show how within one community, people think in polyphasic ways drawing on different knowledges that they ‘borrow’ from dialogical others.

### *Discourses of Humanization.*

The co-existence of the conflicting themes of humanization and victimization becomes clear as HPs speak of themselves as ‘*idealistic*’ and ‘*fellow human beings of the homeless brother*’, towards the ‘*cruel and ignorant*’ public and statutory ‘*experts*’ (doctors, psychiatric nurses, policy officers), while at the same time re-

positioning themselves as '*knowledgeable professionals*' who are '*representatives of the homeless*', as disempowered victims in need of compassion from the outside world. Hence, by moving across these positions, interviewees defend the moral need of an experience of brotherhood with the homeless and contest the violent representations held by the mainstream. Paradoxically they also victimize the homeless representing them in their self-destructiveness. On the one hand, this strategy of juggling different positions and voices, allows them to reassert the truthfulness of the humanizing rhetoric and the defence of the homeless person as an ontological being. On the other hand, it allows them to sustain practices, such as fundraising and campaigning for the homeless. Cognitive polyphasia here becomes a resourceful asset that allows to eclectically use discourses of humanization and victimization to respond to different needs and demands to deal with the problem. Front-line HPs more explicitly and frequently positioned themselves as '*fellow human beings of the homeless*'. Their daily work in one-to-one relation with clients, explains the greater accessibility to the voice of the homeless.

### ***Institutional Discourses.***

By positioning themselves as '*defiant nonconformist grass roots*' members of the voluntary sector and as '*idealistic HPs*', interviewees claim the homeless client as their ultimate aim and invoke an emancipating and liberating counter-agenda to the one of the statutory sector. Here the significant others that are responded to are both the '*bureaucratized and careless government*', and the '*socially irresponsible public*'. This is often put to practice through public awareness campaigns and critical responses to policy consultations. It is here particularly, where front-line interviewees, voice the '*homeless brother*' in order to justify criticisms of statutory services.

Another important aspect that emerges in the oppositions found in institutional discourses is the claim HPs make of their own expertise vis-à-vis the expertise of the professionals of the statutory sector. The rhetorical aim is to contest statutory experts' views of the voluntary sector as amateur and present themselves as highly professional. This is yet another battle that HPs have to fight in their daily practice when working in partnership with statutory experts from the NHS, housing

and benefit departments, since there is low recognition of their work from the main statutory welfare agencies (Warnes et al., 2003). Despite HPs position as '*members of the voluntary homeless sector*' and '*victims of institutional power*' attempting to put into practice their ethos, they also dilemmatically re-position themselves as '*professional experts of the homeless industry (contractors)*' in order to respond to the '*scrutinizing government*'. In shuffling between positions, where the homeless are not invited to the dialogue, they accomplish a discursive practice of defence of their professionalism and justification of the sacrifice of their ethos and their subordination to institutional practices.

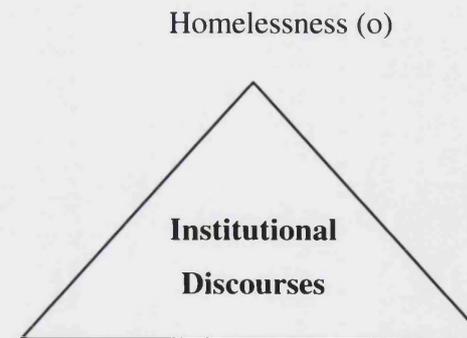
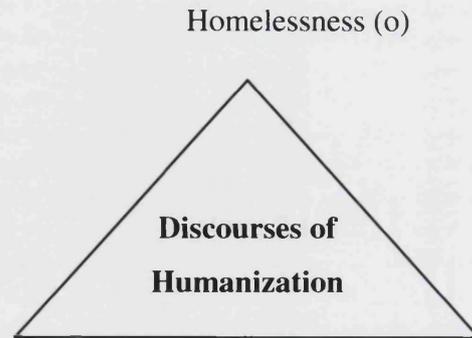
The dialogues contained in *discourses of humanization* and *institutional discourses* are played out in a polyphasic representation of *who* the homeless person is. See the example below:

*'Some people get jaded and quite cynical about it. I think there are some very committed individuals. I think it's probably more in the voluntary sector because it tends to allow more individualistic behaviour, allow more opportunities. So it's, a lot of people who are in it for commitment type reasons. And I think most people view homelessness as a social problem, as a housing problem. Recently people see it as a result of drugs. Mental health has been around for a long time and I suppose homelessness has been recognised for a long time. But I think people have seen it rather as a failure of the system to treat people or to provide the support they needed in their housing and that's why they become homeless rather than as part of the mental health condition. And that they were getting the wrong sort of treatment and that's why they became homeless. The same as a lot of our clients are seen as not being...compliant...and it's seen that they're... part of their mental illness is that they won't go to hospitals, they won't attend appointments, they won't take their medication. But it's often seen that, it's because the hospitals and the medication were the wrong treatment for them before so why should they go? It's not seen as an addict choice. I think there's a tendency amongst professionals to loose respect for homeless people just through familiarity and through sort of doing two different kinds of jobs, rather than a relationship between individuals. And certainly I think that's true for me that I've worked in management, I had less and less to do with the individuals I was working with. I was dealing with categories of people rather than the individuals. And having gone back to work on the front-line with individuals and*

*face-to-face casework, has made a big difference in my perception of the people I've worked for. And I think it's very easy to loose track of the fact that you're working for homeless people rather than work in an organisation that works in homelessness and that therefore we work to raise funding, we work to develop, we work for this, that and the other personal issues and... so on. A lot of our life is managing ... But it's, so easy to forget and I think we do sometimes forget. But certainly here we've got managers who are really clear about the fact that they work for homeless people and they really want to do something to help those people' Rear P8*

This fragment shows a double-voiced discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) in which there is an orchestration of multiple voices of others that are internally dialogised. When criticising the bureaucratized statutory agenda and defending the practices and ethos of the voluntary sector, the interviewee is both positioned as a '*defiant nonconformist grass roots*' member of the voluntary sector and as an '*idealistic HP*' speaking towards the '*bureaucratized and careless government*' (NHS staff). The rhetorical device to justify self-agency of the voluntary sector is a discourse on *understanding* and *commitment*. The practices of the voluntary ethos allow for commitment and the maintenance of the original passion towards homelessness. However, subordination to the instituted statutory agenda makes HPs 'jaded and quite cynical'. What is heard through words such as 'individualistic behaviour' and 'opportunities' is the discourse of *healing*, which co-exists with conflictive discourses of victimization through which the homeless person is fragmented into problems. The homeless is objectified and labelled as an 'addict'. Paradoxically, the reader also hears the voice of the '*defiant nonconformist grass roots*' who defends the homeless client against the voice of the '*cruel and ignorant*' statutory '*expert*'. From this position the homeless person is de-humanized and blamed (for not being compliant to medication and not attending hospital appointments). The '*professional expert of the homeless industry*' argues that the sector also needs to develop managerial activities and funding bureaucracies. For the '*victim of institutional power*' and *the 'the idealistic self'* this means the sacrifice of the humanizing practices of the ethos of the voluntary sector.

**Figure 10: General patterns of dialogue.**



- \* **Idealistic HP.**
- \* **Fellow human being of the homeless brother.**
- \* **Knowledgeable Professional.**
- \* **Representative of the homeless.**

- \* **Cruel and ignorant public and statutory 'experts'.**

- \* **Defiant nonconformist grass roots.**
- \* **Idealistic HP.**
- \* **The homeless brother.**
- \* **Members of the voluntary homeless sector.**
- \* **Victims of institutional power.**
- \* **Professional experts of the homeless industry (contractors).**

- \* **Bureaucratized and careless government.**
- \* **Socially irresponsible Public.**
- \* **Scrutinizing government.**

## 5.4. Participating and Observing.

In my ongoing participant-observation I was able to have informal chats with HPs<sup>36</sup>, visit projects and attend conferences. Here I present accounts and observed practices that corroborate the content and dynamics of the representational field found in the interview data. Through the presentation of a blend of extracts from documents, informal interviews and transcribed materials from conferences I provide examples that illustrate the content of each of the major themes, and the plurality and contradiction, which applies both to the dynamics within each as well as to the dynamics between the themes. These illustrative accounts constitute some examples of the traces of voices of dialogical others, and the contradictions and clashes I encountered in the context where HPs' work, where their knowledge of homelessness is produced and 'crystallized' in practices. In discussing this material, I hope I facilitate an understanding of how the discourses that emerged in the interviews are linked to the contested context of HPs' work and to their social position within the network of inter-relations in which they are located in their everyday experience. When I present quotes or I make reference to narratives from informal discussions I draw on fieldnotes. These capture the essence of ideas and arguments rather than verbatim accounts. Some of the examples from conference and seminar discussions were audio-taped, thus, I have presented them under inverted commas.

### 5.4.1. Discourses of Humanization.

In both conferences and documents, I found a prevailing dilemmatic dialogue between *humanization* and *victimization*. The title of one of the conferences – 'Homelessness and Loneliness: Building Social Capital in the twenty-first Century' – expresses how in engaging in *discourses of humanization* HPs enter in an oppositional dialogue with the rhetoric of victimization. This title (and the content of the conference) tells us about the conflict between, on the one hand, representations of the homeless as the 'excluded' and 'most vulnerable' (keynote speaker) needing

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<sup>36</sup> Please note that all names of HPs have been changed to preserve participant anonymity.

social bonding with the domiciled citizen, and on the other hand, including assertions of them as equal co-partners. Such competing and co-existing discourses emerged in their debates about social capital, which was constructed as key to the social inclusion of the homeless. They appeared associated with HPs' role as advocates and educators of the public, politicians and the media. This conference organized by the voluntary sector was a forum for discussion between HPs, service users and statutory professionals. The presence of the last two groups was minimal in terms of number. However, for the group of the statutory other this was compensated by the fact that, the voluntary sector had invited many policy makers and MPs as key speakers in the main debates so that the voice of the voluntary sector could be 'heard'. The titles and content of the debates were permeated by the voices of statutory others. They were framed by policies and governmental approaches and emerged as a response to the dominant statutory interlocutor.

There was in the debates a rhetoric of liberation of the homeless from the excluding and stigmatizing label. This was accompanied by a call to the public to be morally committed to the homeless. HPs were represented as the footbridge and companion in constructing the homeless' trusting relationships with society and in overcoming social exclusion:

'More than half of the people who come to X (Agency), when asked about their next of kin, say they have none [...] So building a shared identity that is not based on homelessness is very valuable.' (HP1 chief executive). HP1 focused on the idea that meaningful relationships and tackling social isolation were central to the inclusion of homeless people.

'Social Capital is an old idea reformulated. Strip away the academic language and we are talking about people and community. It is up to us to forge the kind of community that we want.' (HP2 policy officer)

HP3 responded to the statutory order and blamed policies (ASBOS<sup>37</sup>) for excluding the homeless: 'people awarded ASBOS are treated antisocially by the authorities.'  
(Chief Executive HP3)

A contradictory discourse co-emerged more implicitly where the homeless were alienated and represented as unwanted, unloved and uncared victims:

'What homeless people need is friends and loved ones.' (HP3 policy officer)

The same contradictory discourses were found in the other conference- 'Employability Conference 'A Job Worth Doing''- where the focus was on how to meet the employability needs of homeless people. Employment, which was anchored in images of the homeless as having agency and a voice, was constructed as a healing approach that leads to self-actualization. There was contestation to representations of employment as a short-term curing solution and as 'hard' outcomes;

In the pack given at the conference I found information that read: 'The programme intended to find solutions that empower individuals to make informed choices, test routes out of inactivity and worklessness, and provide innovative and individual options'. This resonated with the concerns of many participants with the need to be flexible when employing allowing for personalized support.

Conference fieldnotes extract:

Participants constantly challenged stigmatization of the homeless and claimed the need to recognise them as equal human beings. Tackling prejudices at work was regarded as central for the success of their integration into society. However, inclusion co-existed with exclusion of the homeless. In the main debate: 'Labour market equality begins at home' (title), I heard lots of conflicting views about employing former service users in the voluntary sector. On the one hand, there were arguments of the added value of their knowledge and experience to the sector. On the other hand, I heard comments from front-line HPs who were reluctant to have an ex-

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<sup>37</sup> ASBOS, Antisocial Behaviour Orders

service user working with them because of lack of trust in how they would manage confidentiality.

In the other conference, I heard: 'Go back to your own organisations and find out why you are not using homeless volunteers in your projects.' (HP4)

#### 5.4.2. Institutional Discourses.

The conflict between *ethics* and *pragmatics* emerged in many of the narratives that I encountered in the field. In both conferences, their critical advocacy for the social cause co-existed with identifications as contractors of the statutory client. In one of the seminars – 'Achieving customer care while trying to meet targets'- I could hear many claims of attempts to put into practice the voluntary ethical mission as opposed to the pragmatic requirements of the job.

'This seminar will look at how outcomes required by funding bodies affect the ability of organisations to deliver service to homeless people.' (Extract from Employability conference programme)

Within the seminar there were claims of the need of flexible funding that allows them to put into practice their own agenda. An HP contested funders' definitions of employability. Someone else supported him and claimed: 'There is a tension between funding requirements and meeting individual needs' (HP6) and argued the need to challenge them since: employability for us is different.' The seminar was closed by the facilitator commenting that voluntary agencies need to become more efficient in their lobbying role influencing government and funding bodies agenda (HP3).

However in order to survive in the context of state funding the measurement of the employability of the homeless ('hard' outcomes) is the condition imposed by the government. This statutory demand co-existed in conference narratives with the voluntary ethos of achieving 'soft' outcomes. I participated in a focus group session titled: 'Measuring progress to employability'. On the one hand, 'soft' outcomes (i.e. increase in self esteem) were advocated as central to the progress of the individual.

On the other hand, ways of quantifying these, so that progress to employability could be demonstrated to funding bodies, were at the centre of their discussions. The dilemma between ethics and pragmatics also emerged during informal conversations with HPs in my field work:

Fieldnotes extract (20/10/04): Before starting the interview Pete explained how his organisation: 'has become a corporation' and pointed at the fact that whatever he was going to say in the interview, these were his personal views. He wanted to separate himself from the industry side of his organisation. (Rear-HP)

Fieldnotes extract (7/11/04): Before starting the interview with Susan, she said that in the interview she was going to: 'stand as an individual' and was not going to speak from the point of view of her job (marketing/funding) since this was very different to the way she saw homelessness. She explained how the way she had to talk about homelessness when communicating with an outside audience in order to get funding was framed by statutory and funding bodies' representations of homelessness.

Contesting statutory approaches and pressurizing the government emerged as mandatory for the HP critical advocate. This is what I heard from conference participants (Social Capital Conference):

'My challenge is to agitate with government but also to change public attitudes.'  
(HP2)

'The point of social capital is that we do things not because there is a business case, but because they are the right thing to do' (HP6)

#### **5.4.3. Discourses of Identity.**

A set of co-existing representations of the identity of the homeless person emerged in spatial and verbalized narratives. These resonated with those that emerged out of the conflicting dialogue between *discourses of humanization* and *institutional discourses* in the interviews. During my data collection I visited projects

where practices of spatial estrangement appeared as central to the organization of the service. In most of the projects there was a very strict access control (i.e. chip identity cards) and physical separation between HPs and service users. The physical barriers (i.e. doors, walls, different entrances for staff) functioned as a symbolic remainder of the otherization and separation of the homeless from the mainstream citizen. I understand this as the ‘materialization’ of excluding and alienating representations of the homeless. This constitutes a practice of institutional exclusion that contradicts the discourses of humanization and ontological recognition of the homeless person characteristic of the mission statements of the organization and which I also observed being enacted by HPs. Representations of the homeless as an ontology emerged in their talk and also in the way they non-verbally communicated with service-users, locating close to them in a relaxing manner. Whenever I visited a project where the clients were around, HPs demonstrated a genuine interest in introducing me to them and did so in a very personalized way. What seems to emerge out of these competing verbal and material discourses is a representation of the homeless as torn between being included as an ontology and being excluded and objectified as an outsider.

In both conferences the objectification of the homeless through the use of the homeless label (‘ex-homeless’) frequently co-emerged with ontological claims of them as whole human beings. Participants contested representations of the homeless that split them into their problems, yet, one could also hear representations of the homeless person as fragmented.

‘Some messages portray people as a collection of needs and problems, [...] and that makes people more likely to have preconceptions that get in the way of building social capital.’ (HP2 referring to the government, Social Capital Conference)

Fieldnotes extract (24/09/04)

I had a coffee with George (HP11) and before starting the interview he told me he was very concerned with ‘the marginalization’ of the homeless and criticised public and policy views. However, he also told me how surprised he was that in his current project where homeless people are trained and work in a restaurant, they are doing better than what he had expected of them.

Fieldnotes extract (Social Capital conference)

Interestingly a representative that lives in a shantytown project resisted the homeless label claiming that there are no homeless people in his community. However, later on, when an HP speaker from the floor commented on the same project he used the 'homeless' label saying that the project is a model where 'homeless people' can help themselves. He also added that housing is the answer to homelessness. Picking up on that point another HP argued that homelessness is not about housing. He said that he did not agree that giving a house to everyone is the solution to homelessness.

Glimpses of the bifurcated identification of the homeless person emerged in the accounts of one participant. He had a former long-term homelessness experience and now worked as an HP. According to him his actual work had helped him personally to move on. However, he claimed that the problem was that 'people keep labelling me as 'ex-homeless''. Indeed, in the employability conference the bifurcated identity of the homeless was expressed as one of the main concerns of employing ex-service users within homeless agencies:

Fieldnotes extract (Employability conference):

Participants were worried about issues of perpetuation of the homelessness identity when volunteering or working in the voluntary sector. They talked about the importance of them moving out of the sector as an essential step towards reintegration. Someone argued that jobs within the sector needed to be limited so that they can move on and: 'don't become institutionalised' (HP9)

Fieldnotes extract (Social Capital conference):

An HP speaker explained how at a course he ran for clients, the carrier bags were really valuable because they bestowed them with an identification as 'students' rather than 'homeless' or 'mental health patient'.

## 5.5. Conclusions.

The analysis of the interviews reveals that HPs' knowledge of homelessness is polyphasic and contains co-existing and conflicting themes. These oppositional themes, rather than being mutually exclusive, live side by side in multiple dialogues, in which the person takes different positions and puts to use competing discourses through which, they propose their versions of 'homelessness'. In putting to use discourses, HPs negotiate, challenge and/or contest the meaning of 'homelessness' held by other interest groups with whom they intersect. HPs have the potential to question and contest reified forms of knowledge and the practices they contain, and are able to adopt a more comprehensive and individualised relationship with their client.

HPs' internal dialogues are an excellent example of how people can handle divergence and conflict of ways of thinking. The plurality of themes of their representational field operate as an asset from which HPs can draw the resources to deal with the contradictions and challenges of the contested context in which they work. HPs' state of cognitive polyphasia is sharply shaped by the context of definitional clashes and conflicting approaches between the statutory and voluntary sectors. The content and dynamics of their knowledge express the multiple networks of interaction with others and the struggle through which they construct *what* homelessness is and *who* the homeless person is.

Representations of homelessness held by HPs are simultaneously about being otherized, judged and reduced to problems and being understood as a whole human, about being objectified through the label and having ontological right and deserving a personalized approach, about being fragmented through reductionistic and compartmentalized services and being comprehensively treated, about being cured and being accompanied along the healing process towards self-actualization and re-development of potentialities, about being a social cause of the voluntary sector and being a product of the industry. The co-existence of internal oppositions reveal HPs' everyday struggle to define the problem, to provide support to the homeless and the impasses related to the identity and life experience of this vulnerable group. Ultimately, the dilemmas and contradictions between different knowledges, values

and practices within their representational field, express the complexity of the homelessness phenomena.



## **6. SOCIALLY REPRESENTING EXPERT KNOWLEDGE AND DIALOGICALLY CO-CONSTRUCTING AN IDENTITY.**

This chapter provides the analysis of the data collected from the four focus groups conducted with different 'natural' categories of HPs: (1) Outreach workers, (2) Training & development workers, (3) Mental health & drug misuse workers, (4) Project managers/directors of programs. The aim was to observe the production, negotiation and circulation of social representations in a social scenario designed to simulate the context where the different groups would naturally interact. Within the four focus groups, my role was to facilitate a discussion, observe the ensuing debate and to ensure that they covered the guide to the topics.

My main concern was to allow the voices of specific subgroups to be expressed, as I believed that by sharing and debating their experiences within a social setting, they would express the heterogeneity of their work and hence reveal the intricacy of their relationship to it. Thereby, in discussing the findings I do not seek to generalize the results, but instead to look at the content and dynamics of knowledge production within the social scenario that resembles the work setting of four groups of professionals whose role is relevant to the service provision of the voluntary sector (See Chapter Four for a discussion of the rationale of choice and segmentation of focus groups). As I discussed in Chapter Four, the dialogical, 'unfinalized' and discursively constructed nature of knowledge lies at the heart of the paradigm within which I locate this research. Hence, in engaging with the research of focus groups, my intention was to investigate how groups of HPs would diverge and share meanings. In particular; how would each of their collectively constructed discourses be the site for the dialogical encounter of multiple voices, how these voices would be re-negotiated and contested and which identities would co-emerge through their rhetorical responses to others.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section 6.1. discusses the procedure of the analysis, and the analytical model that has functioned as the framework for the analysis. Section 6.2 provides the results of the semantic units found in the data. Section 6.3. discusses the dynamics of knowledge production, that

is, how the different themes emerge and relate to each other; the dynamics amongst group participants and the emotions evoked. In section 6.4, I present illustrative accounts from my participative observation that mirror the content and dynamics of knowledge found in the focus groups. The last section draws conclusions from the discussed analysis.

### 6.1. Analytical Model and Processes.

The model that has guided the analysis of the focus groups is grounded on the theoretical argument developed in Chapter Three, regarding the link between the plurality of the self and the polyphasia of knowledge. The analysis departs from the view that the polyphasic co-existence of different forms and contents of knowledge function as an asset that the person eclectically draws upon from different positions. This is in order to discursively respond to the knowledge and perspectives of the diverse dialogical others that percolate the self of the interlocutor. It is alongside the rhetorical positioning and re-positioning adopted toward the polyphony of dialogical others (physically present and symbolic), in the construction of realities that multiple identities co-emerge. The framework for the classification of the content departs from the view that different modes of discourses are used in order to assert and protect the diverse identities of the person from the threats that the knowledge claims of dialogical others pose to her projects and search for social recognition. This was established in Chapter Three.

This argument has provided the framework for the classification of contents under different modes of discourse, through which the diverse polyphasic elements and plural identities co-emerge. Hence, when exploring the data the focus was on the type of discourse through which the contents emerge: contestation, explanation, justification and defense and the feelings associated with them. It soon became clear across all the groups that the making of representations was linked to the rhetorical capacity of the participants to argue, challenge and negate the discourse of the other; the statutory sector/government and the public. The statutory expert/professional, particularly, appeared as a strong dialogical other. It was through claiming and

defending their own views that different identities of the community of HPs were co-constructed.

The unit of analysis was the spoken utterance. This is a speech unit that is defined in terms of semantics. Its beginning and end, therefore, is not necessarily demarcated by the change of speakers. A unit of analysis would be defined *a posteriori* as a fragment of text that would lend itself to a semantic unit. However, my concern was not only with the semantic themes that emerged but also with *how* these, exist side by side in relation to each other. A way of analyzing this was to focus on *how* representations were produced through the progression of the discussion. Analysing the pathways of the semantic units, required focusing attention on the dynamics of the groups and the discursive strategies used when constructing social representations. The focus was on the dialectical relationship between responsive and interconnected utterances, that is, how an utterance qualified a preceding one.

Focusing attention on spoken utterances as semantic units of analysis, the attempt was to look at the contents, interactions and emotions evoked in the groups. When exploring the different utterances the aim was to answer: (1.) *What* were participants communicating through this utterance? (2.) *How* was the message conveyed? And (3.) *Why* was it communicated in that way? Hence the focus was on both content and rhetorical strategies. In addition, I also asked: (a.) Which are the main arguments?; (b.) How are participants rhetorically responding and positioning themselves towards dialogical others' messages?; i.e. how are they appropriating and re-accentuating dialogical others' knowledge with new meanings and intentions?; and, (c.) How does the group, co-construct knowledge about themselves, whilst shifting rhetorical positions? Answering these questions involved a sequential approach that required looking at the utterance within its particular location within the path of arguments. It was examining the sequence of utterances, that enabled to make sense of the network of rhetorical responses to dialogical others, the themes at a higher level of abstraction and the plurality of identities that co-emerged alongside the process of representing homelessness.

The data was analysed through a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches. The analytical procedure, for which the workbench ATLAS.ti was used, consisted of two sequential coding processes. As with the interviews, I first engaged with the data through an exploratory 'context' analysis, which consisted in looking at each focus group in relation to the background information appended to ATLAS.ti. 'memos' (i.e. activities developed within the job, organization etc.). Following this first exploratory stage I focused on the data as a whole in order to find common themes and discursive patterns. In the course of multiple rounds of examining the data under the above mentioned questions, I was able to develop an open coding frame of the themes and sub-themes that were arising. The final coding frame, which was developed after constant re-coding, was comprised of 32 codes (see appendix 7) that assisted me in the exploration of meanings, symbols and images of homelessness. The themes were generated once I was able to re-organize the codes into a higher level of abstraction.

Following this initial segmentation of the data I continued by exploring the different utterances in each coded text segment in order to classify contents under different modes of discourse. At this point, I engaged in a more dialogical analysis of the data, exclusively devoted to the search of rhetoric strategies adopted by participants towards the voices of symbolic interlocutors. A rhetorical position is always responsive to the perspectives of present or symbolic others and thus, can only be understood in relation to others' views. What is significant for the analysis is not that during a focus group people may speak from different, sometimes contradictory positions, at times using one type of knowledge, at other times, another. Instead what is important is how, alongside this eclectic usage of knowledge, a polyphasic representational field and a plural identity are co-constituted. As with the interviews, the analysis was assisted by drawing on background information (i.e. media, voluntary organization web pages, Government documents), from which the many discourses of homelessness emerge.

## 6.2. Ontologies, Relatedness and Politics.

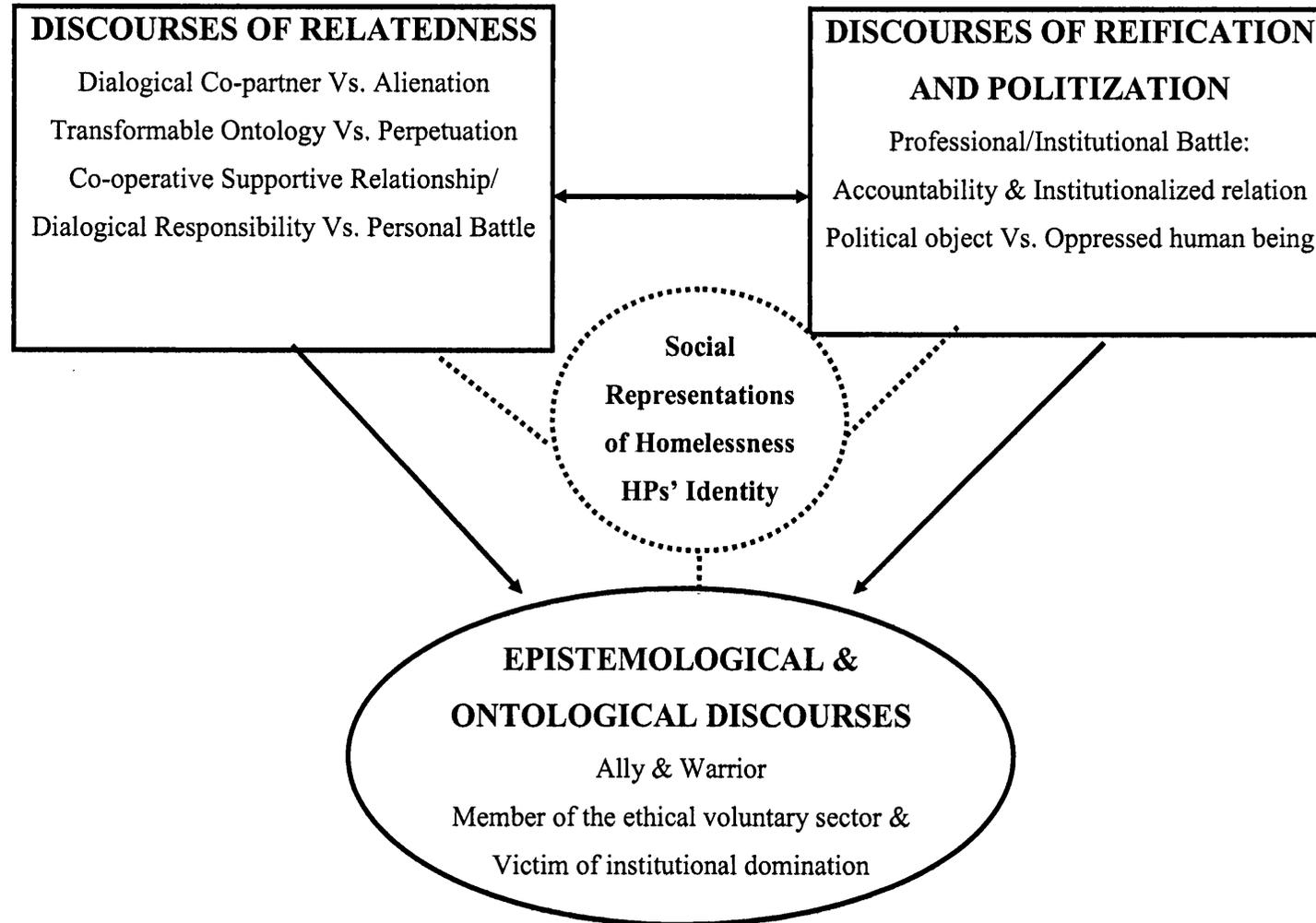
The analysis reveals the emergence of a polyphasic knowledge system and the co-construction of a plural and shared identity. The four groups make sense of homelessness through co-constructing a common identity as a community of HPs. They share the different themes that emerge, and how these are related to each other in a semantic network. The contradictory dynamics of the co-construction of identity and knowledge are tied to, and at the same time express, the conflicting character of the context where they are produced, and the challenges HPs confront in their everyday work. They reveal the dilemmatic nature of the groups' relationships to the context of service provision and offer insights into the diverse ways HPs locate within it and identify themselves as a community.

Their representational field is organized around three co-existing and interconnected themes, each one is plural and has its own conflicting content and internal dynamics: (1.) *discourses of relatedness*; (2.) *discourses of reification and politicization* and (3.) *epistemological and ontological discourses* (see Figure 11). *Discourses of relatedness* and *discourses of reification and politicization* clash and dialogically relate to each other to produce a view of what homelessness is, and it is out of this dilemmatic relation that *epistemological and ontological discourses* containing diverse representations about the identity of the HP co-emerge. *Discourses of relatedness*, which seek to preserve the homeless person as a dialogical co-partner arose spontaneously and reiteratively in the four groups. They are associated with representations of homelessness as a transformable ontology and a dialogical responsibility. They are used in order to rhetorically contest statutory approaches and defend the need of supportive interventions founded on the dialogical co-operative relationship. In constructing *discourses of relatedness*, HPs enter into a conflict with the rhetoric of perpetuation and alienation, which is expressed in a representation of homelessness as a personal battle for the HP.

*Discourses of reification and politicization* reflect the institutional and professional barriers experienced by HPs in their everyday work, their political struggles to defend their relational ethos, protect the oppressed homeless and have their expertise recognised. The homeless ontology and the dialogical nature of the

person gets lost within HPs' engagement in debates about policy and institutionalism. The homeless person becomes an object of political battles and of clashes between the practice-base knowledge of the HP and the dominant statutory expertise. He is politicised rather than dialogized and thus, unintentionally objectified. The clashes between *discourses of relatedness* and *discourses of reification and politicization* and their respective internal contradictions are played out in a co-constitutive plural and competing representation of *who* the HP is. The HP emerges simultaneously as an *ally of* and *a warrior for the homeless, a member of the ethical voluntary sector and a victim of institutional domination, an essential helper/expert and non-legitimate practitioner.*

**Figure 11: Polyphasic knowledge and plural identity.**



### 6.2.1. Discourses of Relatedness.

These discourses reflect the realization of *what* homelessness is and *who* the homeless are, that emerges through relational experience *with* clients. They emerged through the contestation of the views of the public and predominantly the statutory other. The rhetorical aim was to defend the value of the voluntary agenda and approach founded in the dialogue and co-operation with the client. Their knowledge comes from a specific location in the social fabric; from their daily experiences of supporting, caring, training, and outreaching and simply relating to the homeless person. Their 'knowledge *with*', founded on how things are 'on the ground' is used to question statutory 'knowledge *about*' homelessness, since this does not come from the immediate experience with homeless people. The accounts of all groups are permeated by their everyday relational practice with clients. This is also the case for project managers, since all had previously been working as front-line HPs. When they discuss homelessness, although they draw on their present work, what predominantly springs to mind is their past lived experience of relating *with* the homeless.

For all the groups, what emerged through continuous rhetorical responses to institutional/ statutory knowledge was a plural and contradictory representation of the homeless person and homeless ontology. On the one hand, they represent the homeless person as a co-operative partner to claim dialogical responsibility and the need of approaches that recognise her voice. On the other, they alienate her, to describe the intricacy of their job and contest statutory versions of homelessness as houseless. Ultimately, both representations aim to defend the practical value of the voluntary sector's approach and to demand the statutory other to care through a personalized dialogical relationship.

#### 6.2.1.1. Dialogical Co-partner vs. Alienation.

On the one hand, there is a rhetoric that asserts the 'real' existence and dialogical ontology of homeless people. When using this representation, they rhetorically respond to the statutory other and seek to undermine its institutional

definitions and practices. On the other hand, the homeless person is represented as an alien, to her heart, body and/or mind, and as an 'illegal alien' within society.

Across the four groups the homeless are claimed to be dialogical co-partners of our experience of reality. They are represented as intersubjective co-authors of HPs' knowledge (i.e. of personalized interventions/support), and of what they assert to be real and good (i.e. her ontology and morality). Relating with different homeless persons is an enriching source for the 'soul' and work practice. The dialogical relationship is claimed to be the fundamental means for help, the main satisfaction and ultimate reason to work in the voluntary sector. The homeless person is represented as 'the cause' of the voluntary sector and is used in order to justify its existence.

*P2: If you can actually do something, which actually has a real outcome for real people with real problems, then in this world that's bloody amazing, let's face it. So I think that's worth gold dust and I think we should all be very happy with ourselves.*

*P1: I was just thinking what you were saying about you'll never get rich working in the voluntary sector. Well, I came from a forensic mental health, which is in NHS. I'm rich now. I never had so much money. Forget the funders, forget the organisation, forget the boss, forget everything else. At the end of the day it's me and the punters and if I can...One guy said to me a few weeks ago, 'Simon, if it hadn't been for you, I would have gone back on drugs' cause he was a pretty serious druggie, 'I would have gone back on drugs' and he would have committed suicide. He's now in full-time work, clean and off, back with his wife and kids. Now for me that's job satisfaction.*

*P4: But that just says it all really in a nutshell really, isn't it? It is about the clients [...]*

*P2: The other thing I personally enjoy about this job is the diversity and it is the different people you meet. I am genuinely interested in listening to people's stories. I've met some wonderful people and I enjoy meeting them everyday and learning about them and learning new things. (Training & development workers)*

It is through the co-operative relationship with the HP that the homeless person can develop self-awareness and be co-participant in setting her own life goals.

In claiming the dialogical co-authorship of the homeless in the intervention the aim is to rhetorically respond to the monological approach of the statutory other, which fails to recognise her voice. However, there is an opposing representation of the homeless person as alienated, and thus with no co-authorship in her life decisions and in HPs' interventions. This is permeated by images of the homeless as chaotic and challenging, and of homelessness as a perpetual cycle through which the HP struggles to help the person. This involves a depiction of the person as being 'unloved' and 'unlovable' due to an incapability to relate to others in a satisfying and meaningful way. Such alienation from the heart is anchored in images of vulnerability, isolation and the feeling of not having a home, which is employed as a means for contesting public and statutory representations of homelessness as merely a lack of housing.

The homeless person can also be alienated from her mind, lacking self-control, and struggling to function alone due to an incapability to think in an organized and conventional way. This representation is predominant in the group of training workers whose main concern is to support in the development of self-sufficiency. For the groups, particularly those in mental health/drug misuse and outreach work, the extreme disintegration of the person comes with the alienation from their 'alien' body (i.e. addiction, risky behaviours). Finally, the three-level alienation from the self is played out at the level of society where they are excluded and their existence is stigmatised.

P1: *We're kind of dealing with people who've forgotten or never knew how to live. They don't know how to negotiate the barriers that they have to go through. And how do I do that? Coming from a place of no hope and then belief that I can't do it anyway, it's really difficult.*

P4: *The general experience of being homeless, it crowds you or it takes away from you quite a lot in the sense that you loose your skills, you loose knowledge and most of all, you loose past relationships. There is a huge relationship breakdown which might be the initial reason for you being homeless and then brings other things [...]*  
(Mental health & Drug misuse workers)

#### 6.2.1.2. Transformable Ontology vs. Perpetuation.

The undeniably dialogical and transformable ontology of the homeless person; the inexorable perpetuality of the homelessness cycle: such a paradox revealed itself in the course of the discussions. The debate revolved around two competing representations of *who* the homeless person is (*dialogical co-partner & alienated other*) and two corresponding explanations of the homeless *ontology*. On the one hand, ontological change is possible through support interventions based upon relational approaches; a conjoint HP-client dialogical relationship. On the other hand, the homeless person is seen as essentially constrained by her alienation and entrenchment. The discourse of homelessness as perpetuation has a twofold function. One: it supports the construction of homelessness as personal battle for the HP, emphasising the difficulties of their job and the value of their practice and thus serves to bolster their esteem and community identity. Two: it justifies the claim that dialogical responsibility is essential in homelessness interventions and subverts those statutory funded projects that neglect this, and thus contribute to the perpetuation of homelessness.

There are feelings of concern because alienation constraints the homeless person's dialogical engagement, hindering the negotiability of mental states and sustaining the endless homelessness cycle. These feelings co-exist with frustration since alienation places limits on HPs' efforts to change the homeless ontology (i.e. 'moving on' interventions). Feelings of frustration are prevalent in the case of mental health and outreach workers since they deal with the most entrenched cases.

P2: *It's people's cycles, we're working with quite a lot of damaged people that maybe...the hostel...that's their home. Homelessness means different things to different people.*

P3: *I think some people go into the total cycle of homelessness that they keep coming back round again in the hostel circuit. And I think there's definitely a case with early intervention to stop people getting into that situation in the first place. (Project managers)*

P3: *You come across a lot of homeless, that they are in this vicious circle of street, prison, get nicked, go and steal something, shoplifting, whatever, go back to prison because they're going to have food and shelter and go out and then back two weeks later [...]*

P4: *That's also to do with the funding, it's also to do with the transition from saying, right, okay, there's a worker that's going to help this person from prison to somewhere else. Not that, here you go, here's some money, right, see you later, do whatever and that's like a gap, isn't it? It's a gap in service which kind of needs to be developed cause that vicious circle is just going to continually happen. (Mental health & drug misuse workers)*

The representation of the homeless ontology as *transformable* and *perpetual*, is rhetorically used by the groups in order to justify to the statutory other their demands of the need to shift attention away from the individual and structural resources and towards the relationship. The discursive path is; 1. The contestation of institutional views of the homeless. 2. The call for government engagement through highlighting the perpetual nature of the homelessness ontology. 3. The simultaneous explanation of the ontology as transformable through dialogical supportive relationships. 4. The justification of the voluntary ethos and approaches as the ones that would activate the person's potential. 5. The defense of the fundamental value of HPs' knowledge. Despite the groups' expressing pessimism and frustration, there is hope from all, that if winning the fight for institutional engagement with a relational approach, change could be achieved. The rhetorical aim is to defend the voluntary ethos/practices founded on relatedness and dialogicality.

#### 6.2.1.3. Personal Battle.

The conflict between representations of the homeless person as a *dialogical co-partner* and as an *alienated other* is played out at the level of practice. Relational practices are dilemmatically experienced and homelessness is lived as a *personal battle*; a conflict between, on the one hand, genuine responsibility towards the co-partner, and on the other, personal struggle with the alienated other. Narratives evoking devotedness vis-à-vis the impotence to engage the homeless person in dialogue were salient in the groups.

*Co-operative Supportive Relationship & Dialogical Responsibility.*

The cornerstone of any homelessness intervention is the dialogical supportive relationship within which meaningful care is generated and the person becomes able to re-construct her identity and her alienated relationship with society. This relational approach is based on personalized support, in which the HP functions as an 'ally' of the homeless in the healing of the soul and the search for solutions. The client needs to be engaged, not as a victim but as a co-operative co-partner in order to stand up for herself. The relationship is built through the development of a sense of closeness to the HP, of being equals rather than of being under the dominance of an authority. The functionality of identification amongst dialogical interlocutors is twofold. On the one hand, it bridges the gap between the excluded person and society, making her empowered about her potentialities. On the other hand, it facilitates HPs' empathy and reflexivity, thus enabling an adequate supportive intervention. The HP may be critical and challenging, but she is always emphatic and transparent.

P2: *So it's also making them come up with the answers themselves and think their own issues through. And really, you're acting there as a support and a crutch and almost a... 'Come on, have you thought about this or what about that?' But never directing it yourself and to actually help them, maybe for the first time in their life to make their own decisions and actually create a direction which maybe wasn't ever been there before, that's the key.*

P1: *Along the way, aren't you?*

P2: *I think it is support and encouragement, motivation, self-esteem, all these things you build up as you're going along really and if they can then come back to you and go, 'hang on, I actually want to do this. 'Great, do it! I'm not going to do it.'*

P1: *[..] I think it goes back to what you just said really about you know, 'I'm exactly the same as you and, I started off in a bed-sit, but I'm not in a bed-sit now so...'*

*(Training & development workers)*

The dialogical co-operative relationship is the main purpose of being an HP and is considered to be 'the main content' of their work. This is the common aim across all the services of the voluntary sector; training, mental health/drug misuse, outreach work and so on, are all founded on a relational ethos. All the groups

discursively protect the relational 'content' from the quantitative measurement of outcomes imposed by the government (i.e. being re-housed or getting a job). Outcomes need to be appropriate to the specific person and value should be attached to achieving both qualitative (i.e. engagement in a workshop) and quantitative (i.e. people being re-housed) targets. The best indicator of progress can be observed in the relationship with clients. All the groups voice to the statutory other, that not framing interventions within this type of relationship fails to help, has a detrimental effect on the person and compromises the HPs' expertise. This rhetorical response to the statutory other's agenda is linked to the representation of the homeless as a dialogical co-partner and unfolds in a discourse that claims *dialogical responsibility*.

P1: *It's about moving people through the process like you were saying. ...What happens when your success story is about maintaining someone off the street for six weeks? How do you put that across?*

P3: *That needs to be the goal. That's where we have this argument in quite some detail that the success as far as this person's concerned...If we hadn't a word with them, they'd probably be dead. (Project managers)*

#### *Personal Battle.*

When the homeless are represented as alienated, relational work is regarded as a *personal battle*, as going against the tide of the 'perpetual cycle'. Their alienation means that they can be dependant, dangerous and complicated. Despite claiming that they have genuine dialogical responsibility to the relationship, they also express that fighting becomes at points a way of struggling to get them out of the homelessness cycle. For mental health/drug misuse and outreach workers, loosing the fight could have the consequence of death. For training/development workers and project managers, it is translated as entrenchment of the homelessness ontology. The dilemma between homelessness as a genuine *dialogical responsibility* and as a *personal battle* emerges from a network of representations of the person as both alienated and dialogical co-partner. These function as rhetorical devices for, on the one hand, justifying their supportive interventions, and on the other, for defending the value of their expertise. By putting representations into this rhetorical use, participants are bound together as a community that shares a responsibility and a

personal struggle; they co-construct knowledge about homelessness and co-identify themselves as both *essential helping experts* and *allies* of the homeless. In this way, the representation of homelessness as a personal battle emphasizes the value of HPs' efforts and responsibility.

P3: *You need the coping skills that you're trying to develop in the service user.*

P4: *Yes, you need to learn how to cope with somebody who just told you, 'I'm going to kill myself.'* (Mental health & drug misuse workers)

P3: *That's one of the biggest concerns I have. That's something that needs improving. Whether people haven't been taught to take responsibility for themselves or deal with their life skills...*

P2: *I always get really worried. I think it's really important that clients do take responsibility.* (Outreach workers)

### **6.2.2. Discourses of Reification and Politization.**

The inexorable institutional constraint of being contracted by and having to be professionally accountable to the statutory sector; the desperate political struggle for maintaining the relational/supportive agenda of the voluntary sector: this was a central paradox in the group discussions. Institutionalism is conflictive for HPs and through political battle they forge a way of contesting statutory agenda and knowledge of homelessness. The unintended consequence is the reification of the homeless person as an object of political/institutional battles. On the one hand, they intensely criticised the institutional agenda, which imposes a standardized '*professional*' relationship with the client. They justify such criticism through showing concern about the impact institutionalism has on the homeless, on the helping relationship and on HPs' expertise. There appears a representation of the homeless as *oppressed* by institutional barriers (i.e. obstacles to the use of services for people without a local connection to the borough). On the other hand, the groups fight over institutionalism, yet justify it as the only way of being professionally recognised by the statutory expert. Bound to representations of the homeless person

as a *politicized object* and as *oppressed human* there is an identification of the HP as both a *warrior* and as a *victim of institutional domination*.

#### 6.2.2.1. Professional/Institutional battle.

The spontaneous emergence of a dialogue with the statutory other and a direct jump into politics, was striking from the beginning of all group discussions. Although, in the guide to the topics I had included the issue of their views on governmental approaches, it was not necessary to raise it. Representations emerged from a consensual network of argumentative contestation to statutory institutionalism; its definitions and approaches to homelessness as well as its lack of recognition of HPs' practice-based expertise. Statutory institutionalism constitutes a threat to HPs' identity, their project and demands for recognition. In representing homelessness as a professional/institutional battle they are bound together as a community, co-constructing who they are, stating their identity to the statutory other and using *discourses of relatedness* in order to defend their knowledge and approach. However, at certain points the groups, particularly the project managers/chief executives, justify having to adjust to *institutionalized relationships* with the homeless, as this is the only way of being *professionally accountable*.

#### *Institutionalized relation.*

The groups express frustration when arguing that professional accountability, and funding, is only achieved through the institutional standardization of interventions and the bureaucratization of services. This means a loss of the supportive/dialogical relationship and a move towards institutionalized ways of relating to clients (i.e. multiple formal assessments to access the services they need). There is a strong concern because the application of policies implies emphasis on quantitative outcomes (i.e. people being employed) and the systematization of client assessment and HPs' performance reviews. Value should also be attached to qualitative outcomes (i.e. gaining self-esteem), taking a more holistic approach to meeting client needs, rather than to hitting departmental targets.

There is anger when arguing about the need to conform to institutional procedures and reviews/assessments of the statutory sector. Institutional practices legitimate the privileged position of the professional. Domination, (im)position, (de)personalization and (dis)unity: these notions of the institutional relationship are evoked in order to explain the impact of institutionalism on the support relation. These tell us about relational and structural barriers imposed on the homeless person, and are used in combination with their *discourse of relatedness* as a way of stating their knowledge to the statutory other. Domination and (im)position evoke power differentials and lack of co-participation of the homeless. (Dis)unity tells us about the separation between 'us' (HPs) and 'them' (the homeless) and (des)personalization exposes the de-humanization of the homeless within the *institutional relationship*. Contrary to the co-operative relationship, the institutionalized relation comes *a priori*, is standardized (i.e. filling assessment forms, allocating needs, ticking boxes, etc.) and neglects the voice and individual needs of the homeless person.

P2: *The ultimate thing is the actual outcome at the end of it is someone improves their life as opposed to someone hits their fucking departmental target or something.*

P1: *Yeah, exactly.*

P2: *That's the other good thing about the job.*

P1: *If you've come from that field, you do realise that it is just about an outcome. They don't care about the person. They don't care about the steps that that person needs to make before they get the job. (Training & development workers)*

P3: *The voluntary sector is becoming a lot more statutory. There is a lot more form filling and lots more stats that have to go to this commission or that commission to prove that we're doing what they're asking us to do. We are loosing the flexibility that we had. And, it's said that more services are becoming corporations.*

A; *How do you feel about that?*

P1: *Personally, I'm not happy about it. But like we're all saying here, the voluntary sector has lost too many good workers in the last couple of years. And that's where I think things are going wrong. As much as we dislike the new systems and new policies that are coming in, I think if you've got people with our mentality still in the*

*service, to question what's going on, then we have a chance, and our clients have a chance. (Outreach workers)*

Institutionalism focuses on *outcomes* and *processes* (i.e. filling in forms, funding applications, etc.) at the expenses of sacrificing the '*content*': the dialogical co-operative relationship. It means abandoning the main reason to work as HPs. This is particularly the case in the group of project managers, who have moved from the front-line to managerial work. They feel sad because institutional constraints mean, detachment from the reality of homelessness, fear of losing skills/expertise, and feeling excluded from the community of front-line HPs. The ultimate fear for all the groups is that institutionalism can culminate in the disappearance of the voluntary sector.

*Professional accountability.*

There is a dilemma between wanting to be *professionally accountable* and having to adjust to institutional standards of professionalism and bureaucratized practices imposed by the government. This conflict is rooted in their desire for social/professional recognition. For all groups, particularly those doing front-line work, homelessness is experienced as a professional battle with legitimated and dominant statutory knowledge systems. Statutory experts 'look down on' and 'condemn' HPs' practice-based knowledge because it comes from the relational realm and it is not legitimated by an academic degree. In partnership work with statutory services, HPs encounter institutional barriers to the exercise of their knowledge and relational approach, which are materialized in institutional controls (i.e. reviews assessment) and procedures. Barriers are also met when the statutory professional does not acknowledge HPs' needs assessments and the support plans. The HP has a contradiction between a desire to have their knowledge recognised by the statutory expert and their rejection of identifications of themselves as 'professionals' rather than practitioners. This is because they associate professionalism with institutionalism and forms of expertise opposed to their discourses of relatedness. Discourses of relatedness are used to assert that the professionalism of their services should be assessed in terms of how well they enable clients to move on and improve their well-being.

P4: *I'm saying, I'm gone, that's it, but it's not because I want to leave, it's because I've been forced out. It's because I can no longer ethically do this job under these conditions. I don't want to go but I'm being forced out and I think that's something that's really sad because at the end of the day, I get a job somewhere but you won't get me on the street helping a client.*

P2: *All the pay and none of the gain. So you have all of the grief associated with being a social worker, but none of the toil. But more importantly, when it comes to pushing stuff through, you don't have the money, your hands on the budgets, you don't have the statutory stick with which to beat people. So you have all the grief but none of the advantages and that's what really gets me irritated. The thing that really bugs me, the more I produce stats for people, is how many of these actually stand up to any real statistical analysis...we're judged on them and, how many of them are actually statistically significant? (Outreach workers)*

#### 6.2.2.2. Politicized Object & Oppressed Human Being.

The internal conflicts of *professional/institutional battles* are played out in a set of opposing representations of the homeless person as: *oppressed human* vs. *politicized object*. On the one hand, there is a contestation of the *institutionalized relationship* since it oppresses and prevents the person from dialogical co-participation. On the other hand, the co-existence of the desire to put into practice *discourses of relatedness*, to contest the institutional framework, and the simultaneous need of *professional accountability* means that the homeless person becomes an object of dispute between HPs and statutory professionals.

Rear-line and front-line HPs have to fight over institutional/professional barriers in their practice and struggle to defend both their expertise and those they are dialogically responsible for. Managers/chief executives have the duty of being responsible for accounting for the organization's fulfilment of statutory outcomes, which conflict with their ethos. Outreach, mental health/drug misuse and training/development workers are the main victims of professional clashes with the dominant knowledge system of statutory experts (i.e. doctors, policy officers).

The homeless is represented as *oppressed* by statutory policies and institutionalism, where; (1.) the interventions are compartmentalized and governed by rigid procedures, (2.) service users are not seen as equal partners, (3.) the dominant power remains with the professional and (4.) trusting relationships are very difficult to built. This representation expresses the troubling consequences that institutionalized/bureaucratized interventions, rather than relational approaches have for the identity and well-being of the homeless. The representation of the homeless as oppressed, is put to use in order to rhetorically respond to the statutory other and to claim the decisive contribution of HPs' expertise to the provision of care.

P 1: *These persons want to progress themselves, but they just cannot do it because of the blocks again that have been put in place, so for me, that's something that really frustrates me. Because there's me trying to develop an action plan with this person and see how I can help them to move their life forward and then I can't help them to reach their goals because the system is not allowing them to reach the goals that they want to reach so that's a big concern for me.*

A; *What do you think about that?*

P 2: *I think a related issue is maybe knowledge that the work that people are doing in the sector lasts for as long as the funding and the money is available, each year ... Will we get the funding? ...and I wonder what will happen to all of the people we work with now. They'll either have to fit into the next box and be supported.*  
(Training & development workers)

P1: *It's almost as if homelessness ...in a sense is the politics. So it's not just about not having a home. You've got to attach some other legal category to a person in effect to access the housing. So it's a bit like if you're trying to stop being homeless you have to commit an offence before you get good treatment ...*

P2: *But I think, you have the kind of the very clear sort of literally on the streets kind of homelessness and then obviously Crisis recently, is trying to broaden that definition quite a bit.* (Project managers)

The homeless as *politicized object*, emerges out of HPs' daily professional struggle for recognition of their practice-based expertise and political advocacy of their relational agenda. HPs' idealism, their genuine belief that statutory interventions ought to be better, prompt them to advocate for support interventions that aim at empowering the person, yet are not worthy of government investment. HPs have two co-existing yet competing representations of the homeless as; *dialogical co-partners* and as *politicized objects*. Whilst the former recognises their human nature and dialogical ontology and is linked with a desire to work with them as equals, the latter objectifies the person into the cause/motive of HPs' everyday struggles with the statutory sector.

### **6.2.3. Epistemological and Ontological Discourses.**

Their polyphasic knowledge co-emerged with plural identities of the HPs shared by the participants. To make sense of homelessness implies understanding themselves as HPs and identifying themselves as a group. The identity of the HP appears both plural and contradictory, since it is co-constituted with the internal diversity of their knowledge through and against the polyphony of the person. Homelessness is represented in different ways, and so can support different identities of the HP, who emerges simultaneously as someone struggling between being an *ally & a warrior of the homeless, a member of the ethical voluntary sector & a victim of institutional domination, an essential helper/expert & a non-legitimate practitioner*. At the core of such plural and contradictory identity, is the continuous struggle with the statutory other to defend the ethos and project of the voluntary sector, with which participants strongly identify. There is also the yearning for social recognition of their expertise, and the simultaneous need to conform to institutionalism. Despite being multi-faceted, there is reasonable coherence within their identity, which limits how far they move from one identity to another. There is a tendency to co-construct a positive identity (*i.e. ally, a warrior, a member of the ethical voluntary sector and essential helper/expert*) that seeks to protect their ethos, approach and knowledge, bolstering their self-esteem and pride as a community of practitioners. The internal diversity of both their representational system of homelessness and their identity is

understood an asset upon which HPs eclectically draw in order to cope with the dilemmas that they encounter in their everyday work.

All the participants construct these identities, what differs is the extent to which they switch to each of them. Project managers are officially responsible for adjusting to the institutionalism of the statutory funding body (i.e. presenting reviews of the service's outcomes). Thus, they more often construct a strong identity as *victims of institutional domination*. Outreach, mental health/drug misuse and training workers are also *victims of institutionalism*, but tend to position themselves more as *allies* of the homeless and their accounts are permeated by their daily relationships with clients. In their everyday work, outreach and mental health/drug misuse workers, encounter endless barriers set by statutory expertise. This might be the reason why they draw a lot on discourses of *professional accountability* through which they co-construct themselves as *non-legitimate practitioners*. However, through the debate they ultimately seek to bolster and defend their identity through contesting statutory expert knowledge. In all the groups, participants construct a strong community identity, continuously speaking from the position of 'we'/'us' referring to 'our' experiences/knowledge of homelessness and to the voluntary sector in terms of 'cooperation', 'collaboration' and 'mutual recognition'.

#### 6.2.3.1. Ally & Warrior.

Representations of the homeless as a dialogical co-partner are used in order to claim to the statutory others the need to develop interventions founded on a supportive relationship. In contesting statutory knowledge and approaches as not having a genuine dialogical responsibility to the homeless person, they construct themselves as *allies* and *warriors* of the homeless. These co-existing identities tell us about HPs' struggles (personal and political) with both sides of the interface of homelessness: the dialogical and alienated other in the support relationship, and the dominant statutory expert and government in the partnership and advocacy work.

The participants claim an identity as *allies* who dialogically engage with the homeless and co-participate in the self-awareness of the person's own situation and development of a sense of 'home'. They defend the value of their supporting role in

the development of the homeless person (i.e. finding out where they are going in life) and her re-connection to the self and society. This is anchored in images of HPs as 'hubs' /'parents' who support along the transition towards independence, which is achieved through unconditional care, availability, management of client's expectations and critical attitude.

*P 2: I see it more as a way of engaging with the client and also with the way of them of engaging with the rest of society and then also when they're ready, they can make that step themselves. And then once they've realised there are things available to them and they can do things and there are options more than just what they thought was available to them, they can then make choices. And when you can make choices, you can lead your own life, more or less. That's why I do training really...*

*P1: The best training that I can offer which is definitely on offer in my project, is to almost train the clients to look at themselves rather than...and to see themselves and their own skills and their own strengths. (Training & development workers)*

HPs' identification as *warriors* is linked to representations of the homeless as *oppressed* and a *politicized object* and co-emerges with *discourses of professional/institutional battle*. In identifying as *warriors*, they see themselves as representatives of the homeless rather than as equal co-partners. This is dilemmatically intertwined with their representation as *allies*, since it is their dialogical responsibility that urges HPs to fight for the homeless through advocacy and the defense of the voluntary approach. It is also put into practice on a one-to-one basis through challenging the decisions of those statutory experts with whom they are working with. This is the case when statutory experts reject the acceptance of a homeless person in a statutory service, or do not admit responsibility for them once they release them from hospital. As *warriors*, HPs contest institutionalism and demand statutory engagement with the homeless as a co-partner, a person, and an ontology that needs support as well as structures (i.e. accommodation).

*P5: Homelessness has been criminalized. So again it's sort of perceptions of somebody being homeless, their lifestyle is kind of invalidated. It's kind of a worry that we have this need to fix people's lives, and have solutions and all the answers as*

*professionals. And that's a worry to me. And it's also a worry that we don't have as a society, anything to offer people as an alternative to their exciting lifestyles. People take crack cocaine all night because it's exciting, fun, it fucks them up, that's why they do it. But what are we offering them in return? We're not offering community. We've taken away their communities by breaking up, ...the sites where people used to gather. And we've put them in flats. We've put them in these places and we're saying; This is the alternative! P2: Yeah, I agree with his point completely...There's a lovely law called the Anti-social Behaviour Act, it's come to change people's lives dramatically. People are engaged in street-based activity and so it's criminalizing them. The clients know it's criminalizing them and no one's done anything about it.*  
(Outreach workers)

#### 6.2.3.2. Member of the Ethical Voluntary Sector & Victim of Institutional Domination.

There is a competing construction of HPs as both *members of the ethical voluntary sector & victims of institutional domination*. The conflict is between, on the one hand, dialogical responsibility and on the other, unfaithfulness and detachment from 'real' issues. The essential role of the HP as dialogical companion of the homeless is inherently linked with the ethical nature of the community to which he belongs and with which he strongly identifies; the voluntary sector. Despite being constrained by institutionalism, the HP maintains a positive representation of who she is through asserting her ethical mission and commitment to the homeless whilst calling into question the oppressing statutory agenda. It is here where they draw on a rhetoric of *dialogical responsibility*. Constructing oneself as subjugated to institutionalism is conflicting since it suggests disloyalty to one's ethos, irresponsibility towards the homeless, and giving up on their *personal battle*. They define themselves as a humane and ethical community, and in this way they claim to the statutory other the need of having the voluntary sector as an *equal partner*. Empathy, understanding and a desire to care, are the qualities that they proudly claim as defining of the voluntary sector. This is why institutional regulations are viewed as conflicting, especially for the group of project managers since they are the ones most affected by the need to adapt to institutional regulations.

P1: *And then, four years down the line, I find myself in a job that I can't really agree with a lot of the time. And if I was here another four years, I could probably say, yeah, I'm still doing a good job, 'cause I still care about the people. But fundamentally it's really changed.*

P2: *Yes, and it's going to get worse and ...How do we draw a line?*

P6: *Especially now with the ASBO's and working with the Old Bill so closely, I've got loads of mates that have gone, they've moved on. And that's a real shame because they were bloody decent human beings that really were helping people.*  
(Outreach workers)

P3: *To get lots of little bits of funding, from all over the place is very hard work.*

P2: *So we've got hard bureaucracy on our mainstream funding, narrowing down our options for using it and then we've got additional work now to find the bits of freedom that allow us to do something a bit more creative, a bit more supportive.*  
(Project managers)

#### 6.2.3.3. Essential Helper/Expert & Non-legitimate Practitioner.

The statutory lack of recognition of the epistemology of HPs' knowledge and the significance of their interventions makes unavoidable their identity as *non-legitimate practitioner*. This identity is co-constructed when the discourse of *professional accountability* is put to use by participants. Statutory experts are seen as scrutinizers of HPs' knowledge disempowering them as practitioners. Not being professionally recognised and having to conform to its agenda is experienced as being 'hemmed in by enemies' (training workers). However, through the prevalent use of *discourses of relatedness*, they rhetorically contest the statutory other, suggesting their agenda is damaging towards the homeless and identifying as *essential helpers/experts*. These competing identities tell us about the clash between 'professionalism' and 'practice'. They convey HPs' fights over the legitimacy of their knowledge and search for the recognition of their expertise.

P2: *You have to be able to present a case clearly and give as much detail and don't be afraid. But don't be baffled by clinical phrases. Just say, 'This is what I've seen,*

*This is what I've heard'. These are my concerns, this is what I've noticed over, whatever period of time. And because a lot of doctors and nurses that don't have any ... They have no particular skills that are different to any of us. They have the textbooks ...*

*P 3: They have the medical model ...*

*P2: And they don't have the time.*

*P3: Yeah. Just to tell you a scenario that occurred: I was phoning a GP's office, to get one of my substance use workers to go for induction, and I'm going, 'she's a substance use worker' 'No, she's a care worker.' 'No, she's a substance use worker.' And I'm thinking to myself, 'Why am I justifying that person's title to you, actually? All I want is an appointment'. But it's a barrier that they're putting up, and telling me that this person is not qualified (Mental health & drug misuse workers)*

There are feelings of sadness and concern amongst all groups, because their practice is being usurped by statutory expertise and institutional establishments and is at risk of extinction. It is here where a strong and positive identification as *essential helper/expert* of homelessness co-emerges. Through defending the value of their relational-based knowledge, they collectively aim to achieve respect as a group of practitioners, to protect their knowledge and identity and to claim the essential need for the existence of themselves as a community of practitioners. They constantly assert their difference to the statutory other, positioning themselves as 'us', 'workers' or 'practitioners' versus 'them' or the 'professionals'. There are instances in the group where I use the word 'professional' and they react to it through explicit contestation to such identifications.

They construct their knowledge as 'hybrid' asserting that being a good HP means having 'people skills' and empathy. This expertise is not developed through formal education, but through genuine devotion to the client and sharing of experiences with other HPs. It is based on what is actually going on 'on the ground' and implies an ability to creatively personalize responses to each individuals' needs. The groups question statutory expertise for being based upon academia rather than relational experience with the homeless and for fragmenting the person into different specialities rather than adopting a comprehensive approach.

P5: *When on the street that's where they feel more relaxed...I find, quite free and open discourse on a level which you don't necessarily get in an office environment. That's one of my favourite parts of the job, that's how I find I do my best.*

P1: *I'm very fortunate in that I spend up to 35 hours a week with my clients and I do count myself very fortunate in that because I think that, with that amount of contact at the right level, and the continuity of that, and the trust that's built up with that contact I'm able to see more who my clients really are. (Training & development workers)*

### 6.3. Group Dynamics: Constructing Social Representations of Homelessness and a Concomitant Identity.

In this section, I discuss the dynamics of knowledge production and of interaction within the groups. I explore, *how* the different themes emerged in the discussions and the emotions evoked by them. All these aspects need to be considered in order to understand the organisation of their representational field. The prevalent dynamics amongst group participants were of *consensual agreement*. The four debates were characterised by the construction of a *common understanding* of homelessness and *shared identifications* as a community of HPs. Participants listened to each other and very easily constructed together a common representational field and a strong identification as a unified community. The configuration that the groups gave to the semantic network of their representational field was similar across all groups. All shared the *same structure* of argumentation, type of interrelation between the different themes and rhetorical strategies to question dialogical others' knowledge. At the end of this section I discuss the minor differences across groups.

Participants would agree and take on from others' interventions, which led them to a more elaborate argumentation of others' points and the progression of the debate towards different themes. The strong agreement and consent is understood as an indicator of similarity within groups, of common work patterns and a cohesive identification as members of the voluntary sector. All the groups were marked by solidarity, and expressed concern to be understood and to understand others. There seemed to be a deep level of comprehension and recognition of the reality that others

were expressing, and which all shared. Their representations occurred against a background of questioning institutional practices and statutory knowledge (i.e. policies, statutory definitions of homelessness and services) and of defending their own, whilst simultaneously co-constructing a shared identity. The general sequence of the debate was: 1. A contestation of other's representations of homelessness. 2. An argumentative defense of what homelessness means to 'us'. 3. A critique of statutory responses to homelessness. 4. Contestation of the imposition of the statutory agenda and a justification of having to conform to it. 5. A defense of the value of voluntary sector's approaches and knowledge and the need of the community of HPs to exist. These different narrative strategies are co-constitutive of the diverse identities of the HP.

Although at the very beginning of the discussion, the main concern of the groups was to tell *me* (moderator) about homelessness, the whole debate was characterized by dynamic interaction between participants. They continuously shared their views on homelessness and the difficulties of their job and supported each other in their criticisms to statutory/governmental agenda. The first accounts that emerged consisted of appropriating the views of those outside the reality of homelessness (i.e. statutory sector, the public), contesting and re-accentuating them with 'educative' intentions; with the images of the homeless that HPs use in their campaigns/advocacy. This initial positioning is explicitly aimed at educating the interviewer and is common across all narrative interviews and focus groups. It is understood as a product of the interviewer's co-authorship in the research (as an outsider of homelessness), through participation in the researcher-researched dialogue that occurs at the *inter-subjective* level. Through the process of self-reflection of my relationship with the participants (See Chapter 4 for a discussion on Self-Reflexivity), I realized the interplay of positions as 'outsider' and 'insider'. At the beginning of the focus groups, participants seemed to construct me as an 'outsider' and intentionally responded according to these assumptions, drawing upon the general images of their public campaigns. Take this first section of text from a focus group and see how it reflects the ethos and campaign slogans that appear in the web pages of two voluntary organizations, that participated in the research.

P1: *I think it's quite a broad term. I think people tend to look at homelessness, society tends to look at homelessness as somebody just living on the street. But for us it means, you could be living in a friend's property and sleeping on the floor or you don't have your own accommodation. So it's quite a broad term.*

P2: *Yeah, homelessness is any people who are, who live in temporary accommodation, or in hostels or in bed & breakfast, or on the street, but they might not have ...so yes, a very broad term.*

P3: *I think if it was any different, it would actually be called houselessness as if it was actually not having accommodation per se but is actually homelessness which suggests you don't have a place to call your own. (Training and development workers)*

*'Homelessness is not just about having a roof over your head; it is about being without a home-a place that is secure, safe, decent and affordable to live in.*

*Homelessness is not simply about housing. Each homeless young person who comes to X [Organization Name] has their own history, their own particular needs and their own challenges [...]*

*Home-fullness is a sense of belonging, enabling a young person's personal, social and economic well-being.' (Extract from Organization 1 web page)*

*'[...] the task of getting them off the street for good is a complex one. It is much more than offering a roof over someone's head.' (Extract from Organization 2 web page)*

Just after their first 'educative' account, participants started feeling free to take up tacit positions, involving higher degrees of abstraction. The tone became more contesting and the statutory other became the main dialogical co-partner for the rest of the debate. Participants began drawing on their work experience, voluntary ethos and more elaborate forms of reasoning, which at points become politicizing of the homeless. The dynamics were characterised by a striking process of attempting to legitimize the voluntary sector, resisting the authority of the statutory sector and asserting a community identity as crucial pillars for the care of the homeless. This was the predominant discursive view of themselves that emerged within their plural identification. Their striking contestation to the statutory other reveals how their

knowledge and identity are dialogically co-constructed through and against others' knowledge. Ultimately, it reveals how the discursive character of their representations is founded in their desire to protect their professional aims and values, and their identities from dominant others.

Their concerns about institutionalism and alienation, were frequently permeated by a sense of humour (i.e. there were a lot of jokes about politicians) addressed towards themselves and the more 'extreme' clients. There are two explanations as to why humour permeated the conversation and the anecdotes of relationships with clients and statutory professionals. First, the meaning of laughter is understood as a way of questioning and ridiculing dominant others and institutions (Bakhtin, 1984b). Mockery and laughter emerged, as strategies to bring down the statutory institution together with its authoritative knowledge. Second, laughter also has a role as a way of coping with the drama of the reality that one presents (Jovchelovitch, 1995). The groups used humour in order to deal with the dramatic emotional load evoked by their representations.

Their narratives were simultaneously fraught with competing feelings of passion, frustration anger and fear, which convey the challenges and contradictions of their work. The fervent expression of emotions reveals their strong commitment to homelessness, the degree of care dedicated to the person and of cohesive identification within the community. *Discourses of relatedness* are characterized by expressions of love and passion to homelessness and simultaneous feelings of frustration when they explain their personal struggles to help the alienated other. *Discourses of reification and politicization* are loaded by a plurality of contradictory feelings. One can hear the anger of having statutory agendas imposed whilst not having their knowledge recognised, the frustration of having to battle with institutional barriers, guilt of compromising their ethos, and fears of the disappearance of the voluntary sector along with its expertise. However, one can also hear the strong admiration, respect and esteem that they have for their own expertise and for the community of the voluntary sector. They spoke of the pleasure gained working with the homeless and expressed how proud they are, being members of the voluntary sector community. This strong sense of satisfaction and respect for their own community is at the core of their representational field.

The organization of the representational field is common to the groups. They used the discourses in the same way and so offered the same elaboration of the representations. This is because despite having different job titles, they all depart from a genuine interest in homelessness, and share experience and ethos: to engage the client in the support relationship and to empower her to move on. These aims are also ingrained in the work ethos of project managers, who have a long experience working in different front-line jobs within the sector. Both the front-line and rear-line workers share a need to cope with the conflicting nature of working in the voluntary sector and an experience of clashing with more dominant forms of knowledge (i.e. statutory expertise). There are slight differences between the groups, which are related to their particular experience of the phenomena of homelessness due to their specific jobs and locations.

The group of project managers, presented a calmer and a more conforming discourse marked by constant reference to homelessness laws and complaints about bureaucracy and managerial work. They frequently drew on policies in order to contest the statutory other and to justify having to conform to its agenda. They reconstructed policy prescriptions and bureaucracies with new meanings (i.e. constraining, barrier-like, dehumanizing), and defended the value of their own ethos and knowledge. However, they did this through less intense and heated argumentation than the other groups. This is because they represent the public face of homelessness, and remain responsible for conforming to the institutional agendas/targets. Their argumentation highlights the difficulties of their work where they feel the need to conciliate policy and the need for funding within the voluntary sector. Hence, their debate occurred under a combination of contestation, rationalisation and justification of the need to conform to policy and statutory bureaucracies. Amongst their plural identity the dominant identification that emerged in their discussions was as a *victim of institutional domination*.

Outreach workers were by far the most challenging group and were the most emotionally engaged in political battles. They were the most rebellious and created a highly politicized discussion, marked by strong subversion of institutionalism/policies and fervent defence of their agency to develop their own relational

interventions. They showed very little concern about my presence as a moderator. Their main interest was to exercise their positions and to assert their community identity as independent from the government. Their intellectualised discourse was marked by jokes, mainly towards institutionalism and statutory experts. Mockery for them was a strategy to assert their difference, their ethos and strong identity as creative HPs. The group dynamics illustrated great courage, strength, and confidence in their personal and professional battles. In their argumentation, which was structured around client stories, politics, and critiques to the institutional barriers of hostels they were strongly positioned as *warriors* and *allies* of their clients. They were the group that most denigrated anything related to the statutory sector, and the ones that identified less as *victims of institutional domination*. This can be explained by their very positioning within the context of service provision. They work in the streets away from the head quarters of the voluntary agency where they enjoy freedom to put into practice their agenda. However, it is when putting the client in contact with services (i.e. hostels, drug rehabilitation) when they need to confront the statutory bureaucratic procedures and institutional barriers.

Mental health and drug misuse workers developed a rather more intellectualised discourse. They operated in a reflective mode explaining the causes and consequences of homelessness. They created a discussion marked by the use of psychological jargon and centred on issues of professional accountability and lack of epistemological recognition. Their argumentation is the one that highlights most, the professional barriers encountered in their job, the constant discrimination of their knowledge and the lack of recognition from statutory experts (doctors, psychiatric nurses). Throughout the discussion each of them cited examples of clashes with statutory and/or scientific expertise. Their concern was mainly to have their knowledge recognised and, throughout the debate there was a deep level of understanding between participants coming from a shared practice and experience of encountering medical/psychiatric dominant forms of knowledge. For mental health and drug misuse workers, to represent homelessness was intertwined with a determined defence of their own identity as a social group of *essential experts*.

Training and development workers organised the field of representations mainly around assertions of their views of support interventions fervently drawing

upon discourses of relatedness. The debate was centred on narratives that expressed their passionate devotion to their everyday-experience, training clients and on intellectualised explanations of the aims of their interventions, which were defended as more efficient and ethical than those of the statutory agenda. For them, as for the rest of the groups, putting to use discourses of relatedness when explaining interventions, serves as a way of representing homelessness and simultaneously constructing a non-conformist and ethical identity as a group of professionals independent from the statutory sector. Particularly, they engaged in a continuous criticism of statutory views of training as a way of ‘filling’ clients with content. They contested having to adjust to the statutory agenda of hard outcomes (employment). Instead their narratives were replete with rhetorical defence of training as a means of developing a dialogical co-operative relationship with clients and as a way of empowering. Their argumentation highlights the closeness and emotional rapport with clients and the personal battle to help them become engaged in the different activities and workshops.

#### **6.4. Participating and Observing.**

In this section I present illustrative examples from my participation in HPs’ social milieu. These show how the competing and multiple representations that I found in the focus groups relate to the wider context of their production. I make references to, informal chats with HPs, participation in conferences, project visits and documents, all of which show the dialogicality, contradiction and plurality in ways of thinking characteristics of HPs’ representational field.

##### **6.4.1. Discourses of Relatedness.**

Discourses of relatedness emerged in the many narratives I encountered in the field. For instance, the conference ‘Homelessness and Loneliness: Building Social Capital in the twenty-first Century’ was fraught by assertions of relational support (bonding) and dialogical responsibility with the homeless. The focus was on an approach founded in dialogue and service-user involvement. However, the title of the conference and the debates reveal, contradictory representations of the homeless as both co-participants with agency/voice, and as alienated. Discussions during one

conference seminar ('Making the link between homelessness and loneliness'), represented the homeless as isolated, unwanted and uncared for by society, and lacking in meaningful relationships. The prevailing call for dialogical responsibility to the homeless co-existed with a strong emphasis on society's role in fostering social inclusion which embedded images of the homeless as with neither agency nor participatory investment in the construction of social capital.

Social Capital conference fieldnotes extract:

The conference was introduced by an HP who talked about social capital, contested the ambitious targets set by the Government (i.e. ending child poverty) and challenged HPs to set out their own goals and to advocate for the end of homelessness as understood from the perspective of the voluntary sector: 'Not just rough sleeping, not families living in bed and breakfasts –homelessness.' A speaker asserted the importance of seeing clients as individuals with aspirations and as contributors rather than just service-users. Another HP responded: 'People working in homelessness often don't recognise the value that their clients can bring to others through volunteering'

Extract from project information

'(the project) Recognises that service users are our most important stakeholders and we will continually seek new ways of ensuring that service users have a voice in shaping and participating in the operations of the organisation [...] To actively seek feedback from tenants and create opportunities for tenants to become involved in decision-making.' This co-participation, I was told by the staff, was practiced in a weekly session run by HPs and service users.

During informal conversations with HPs the internal contradictions of discourses of relatedness emerged resulting in a representation of homelessness as a personal battle; a dilemma between on the one hand, dialogical responsibility, and on the other, struggle. In the Employability Conference Program the homeless were portrayed as 'the hardest to help' and in the conference pack you could read: 'The challenge for agencies up until now has been to move the 'hardest to help' towards the labour [...]'

Fieldnotes (21/11/04):

After interviewing Thelma she said that she was burnt-out, had lost any motivation to continue working in the sector. She was tired of seeing clients falling into the vicious circle of homelessness (Support worker)

Fieldnotes (07/11/04):

After speaking with Daniel, he told me that he was moving to do a very different job in the statutory sector. He justified: 'you need to have enthusiasm, illusion, and I've lost it.' (Campaign officer).

#### **6.4.2. Discourses of Reification and Politization.**

During my immersion within the voluntary sector the statutory other was the main dialogical interlocutor in HPs' accounts. For instance, when being asked to write a report on the dietary needs of homeless people I was explicitly told that this was a document that was addressed to the government in order to raise awareness and receive funding. This needed to be done within the statutory framework, so I had to find statistics that could legitimately demonstrate deprivation. Take for example the seminar I attended in the employability conference titled '*The role of the Government*'. Here, I was able to experience HPs' continuous engagement in a political struggle for maintaining the agenda of the voluntary sector. The discussions were fraught with criticisms to the institutional agenda and its impact on the homeless person, who was represented as *oppressed* by institutional barriers and simultaneously reified as an object of political/institutional battles. Discourses of relatedness were drawn upon in order to assert the homeless as equal co-partners and to defend the approach of the voluntary sector.

Employability conference Seminar: '*What practice changes in current government policy are required to support more homeless people move towards training and employment.*'

One participant asserted that at the core of the fight against policy approaches is the fact that 'there is zero flexibility in the system' set by the government (HP11). The impact of institutional approaches meant that: 'clients feel that they do not have

control' (HP12). Picking up on this point HP10 asserted the need to listen to the voices of service users: 'you should make it possible for people to choose what they want to do and where they want to work'. The debate was mainly focused on criticisms of exclusionary practices that do not allow them to be integrated into the job market. Some else pointed out that the consequences of the imposition of institutional goals meant the interruption of services; 'our funding was out, we didn't have good outcomes and the services had to close' (HP 15).

Social Capital conference Fieldnotes extract:

The director of a voluntary agency argued that well-meaning attempts to reintegrate the homeless can be unsuccessful without the person participating in the process of re-integration. An HP on the floor argued that services need to be user led: 'When we come to look at policies, we need to look at what homeless people have to say.' There was a general feeling that policies such as ASBOS criminalise, impeding connectedness and social capital.

The HPs that I met during fieldwork felt that the imposition of statutory institutional approaches meant depersonalization, and neglecting of the voice of the homeless person. However, their desire for professional accountability, meant that they had the dilemmatic need to conform to the bureaucratized practices imposed by the statutory sector. This dilemma also emerged in the Social Capital Conference. One of the breakout sessions was titled: 'Measuring soft outcomes with hard to reach Clients.' Central to the session was a concern with how voluntary organizations struggle to demonstrate the outcomes that they have achieved.

Fieldnotes (10/12/04)

During an informal chat with Jason (key worker) he talked about dealing with statutory experts. He felt frustrated since despite being fully responsible for the holistic care of the client, statutory experts who were only in charge of some aspects of that client's care (i.e. GPs) had the power to decide: 'at the end of the day they have the last word about any decision to be taken about the individual [...] Doctors don't treat us as professionals'.

Fieldnotes (17/01/05):

When Alex (training worker) was showing me the facilities where she teaches music she enthusiastically talked about her job and how X client had learnt to play the electric guitar: 'I do the best and most enjoyable job and I'm in a much better position than my key workers colleagues'. She explained that this was because she didn't need to deal with local authorities, housing benefit offices and so on.

#### 6.4.3. Epistemological and Ontological discourses.

In conference debates and informal chats with HPs, their discussions about homelessness, implied understanding themselves as members of the voluntary sector and constructing a shared identity. This mirrored the inner plurality and contradiction of the identity of the HP that emerged in the focus groups. Conference discussions illustrated well how their identity co-emerged through responding to and re-accentuating imagined or present others' (predominantly the statutory other) representations of homelessness. Despite being organised by the voluntary sector, government representatives had been invited so that HPs' rhetorical responses could be heard. On the one hand, representations of the homeless as oppressed and politicized objects co-emerged with an identification of HPs as *warriors* of the homeless person, whose voice was barely physically present in the conference. On the other hand, a defence of the homeless as equal co-partners, co-emerged with identifications of the HP as an *ally*. See for instance what was argued by some of the HPs when in the conferences they advocated for the breaking of barriers to the employability of the homeless:

'The advantage of employing homeless people in the sector is that they bring an added value. They are from the same class. We are all from the same group. We have a tribe language that we all understand' (HP 17, Social Capital conference)

'We have to make sure that there are good consultation methods to ask a wide range of homeless people what do they think' (about their employability within the voluntary sector) (HP2)

Another two sets of contradictory identifications emerged through narratives that I encountered during my experience in the field were:

*HP as a member of the ethical voluntary sector & a victim of institutional domination*

Extract from the Employability conference programme: 'Overcoming barriers to employability. Achieving customer care while trying to meet targets: Barriers stack up against homeless people. Beyond the personal, cultural and societal factors, bureaucracies and Government policies can also serve to frustrate people's attempts to escape homelessness.'

Fieldnotes (22/10/04): During an informal conversation with Daniel (front-line HP) he said: 'Local authorities see us as hippies'. He said how 'us' (the voluntary sector) had 'difficulties in delivering support and services to clients when working in partnership with statutory services'. He blamed local authorities for not providing enough drug rehabilitation services. He explained how this jeopardized all the support previously delivered by him to the client and the efforts to build a desire to recover.

Fieldnotes (10/10/04): Before the interview Martin (manager of the project) said: 'I want to step away from statutory services since they don't understand what we are doing and think that the work that we do is wrong'. Many times he said that in comparison with statutory bodies, the approach of his organization was 'informal, non-judgemental and non-intrusive' which aimed at 'helping individuals to feel valued, accepted and heard'. I could see how this was materialized when he showed me around the project, which struck me by its openness. It was then that I could experience the approach of the organization, in its open plan design, lack of boundaries between staff and client area, which facilitated many of the client-staff interactions that I evidenced. It was also reflected in a leaflet that he gave me about the objectives of his organization: 'to provide an alternative space for those individuals who are afraid or suspicious, or both, of structured and local authority day centres.'

Fieldnotes (20/11/04): After the interview with Simon he said that he also had a part-time job in the NHS. He told me: 'when I started in the NHS they looked at me with hostility because of my working in X (voluntary) organization'. He argued that his work in the NHS had greatly benefited from his expertise working in the voluntary sector.

Social Capital conference Fieldnotes extract: When a key speaker asserted the need to advocate and lobby for policies that take into account social capital another HP questioned how this could be done without the sector being seen as a 'professional stropky teenager'.

## 6.5. Conclusions.

The analysis reveals that both the content and the organization of the representational field are common across the groups. I present an example of how the knowledge of one community, that of HPs, is characterized by the co-construction of a polyphasic representational field and a plural and shared identity. The ways in which their shared representations of homelessness and identifications as a community are co-constructed reveal ambivalence and contradiction, and ultimately exemplify the link between the plurality of knowledge and the self. Their knowledge and identity are mostly co-constructed through and against the definitions, approaches and interventions of statutory others and the views they have of HPs as a group of practitioners. The dynamics of knowledge were characterised by, on the one hand, the discursive contestation of the knowledge claims of statutory others since these constitute a threat to the groups' identity, projects and search for social/professional recognition and, on the other, the assertion of their commitment to the voluntary practice and ethos, and simultaneous protection of their community identity.

The dilemmatic nature of their representational field and the plural identities that are co-constituted with the use of each of the different discourses, are a reflection of the dynamics of the context of service provision. Within this context HPs struggle to sustain their relational approach, to engage the client to co-participate in the supportive relationship, to obtain statutory recognition of their expertise and to engage statutory experts in their own definitions and interventions. In their everyday work, the challenge for HPs is to maintain a positive community identity, and to bolster their esteem as a group of practitioners that live in a constant struggle with the dominant statutory other. The conflicts of their relation with the contested context of their work shape the plural identity and cognitive polyphasia expressed in the representations they hold. The identity and knowledge struggles that characterize the self and community of HPs function as a resourceful asset from which HPs can draw upon, in order to cope with the contradictions and battles of the context of their work. Ultimately, the critical way they put to use their representations, through rhetorical responses to others' knowledges, reveals a strong tendency to defend their threatened knowledge, practices and community identity as a group of professionals.



## **7. CONTESTED KNOWLEDGES AND IDENTITY STRUGGLES**

In this thesis I have shown the link between the dialogical epistemology of knowledge and ontology of individuals and groups. Dialogue with others in the multiple social positionings in which we live is the terrain where self and knowledge are co-constructed. This relational context is at the heart of social life, since it is constitutive of both the ontological and the epistemological. It shapes the making of self and knowledge and explains their plural and contradictory nature. The internal dilemmas and battles that they contain between different themes, representations and practices do not cancel each other out. Instead, they co-exist within the person, who relates to them as a resourceful asset that is differently put to use to deal with the needs and challenges of the diverse contexts where she lives. My investigation into HPs' knowledge of homelessness reveals how representational fields are at one and the same time, identity struggles and knowledge struggles. HPs' ontological and epistemological battles reflect the dilemmatic nature of their relationships to the context of service provision and their particular location at the intersection between different spheres of knowledge and social sectors. Their multiple positionings and interactions with social actors holding diverse knowledges, projects and levels of expertise, provide the resources for these professionals to construct the plurality of contents and dialogues through which they co-construct their knowledge and identity.

The aim of this thesis was twofold. Firstly, to make a contribution towards the development of the critical potential of social representations theory through a Bakhtinian approach to the concept of cognitive polyphasia and its link to the polyphony of self. I was driven by a desire to further develop the concept of cognitive polyphasia and its co-constitution with identity processes. I wanted to contribute towards an understanding of what drives the eclectic use of representations; the fact that the same individual or group can think in different ways and eclectically use diverse and conflicting contents, practices and ideas about the same object. Secondly, to investigate how HPs co-construct knowledge about homelessness and themselves through critically engaging in debate with the representations of dialogical others. Special attention was focussed on how the co-construction of HPs' knowledge and identity was mediated by their positioning towards others' representations. How they re-constructed them with their own

intentions and values, whilst struggling with the positions and discourses that these others imposed upon them. This highlighted the contested and argumentative nature of social representations. In this chapter, by integrating the empirical evidence with the theoretical propositions, I wish to support my contention that possibilities for critique and contestation in the dialogical encounter with competing knowledge systems lie in our ability to position towards others' knowledges.

## 7.1. Towards a Dialogical Understanding of Self and Knowledge.

Adopting a social representation approach to the study of social knowledge *in context* (Jovchelovitch, 2007) and integrating it with a Bakhtinian perspective, in this thesis I have shown that the phenomenon of cognitive polyphasia and the polyphony of the self are two sides of the same coin. Particularly, I have demonstrated how positioning enables the person to move along many locations and relationships in the social fabric simultaneously existing in multiple inner and outer dialogues where self and knowledge are mutually co-constructed. The dialogicality and contextuality of knowledge leads to a number of important conclusions. These are related to the understanding of the inner plurality of the person and the critical potential of social representations in their mediation of our dialogical relationships with others and the social world.

### 7.1.1. Polyphony and Polyphasia in Self and Knowledge.

The polyphasia of knowledge is rooted in the dialogical ontology of human beings and can only be properly understood within the grounds of the social, dialogical and communicative context of its production. This is a context of multiple ego-alter dialogical relationships, where different ideas and modes of thinking clash and compete over meaning giving way to the emergence of social representations. In order to understand the plurality of knowledge and identity we must first understand

how both are contained in the dialogical triad self-other-object. I have shown how a perspective that takes dialogicality as both ontology and social practice (material, linguistic and non-verbal), ties together the relational and symbolic dimensions, whereby social representations are *constituted and constitute* our experience of the world and self. Against the dichotomy between individual/society that so often has characterized the debate on self and knowledge, the dialogical ontology and epistemology of social representations theory involves the acknowledgement of the conjoint existence of the ego in relationship with the alterity of manifold others. Knowledge and identity are neither centred on individuals nor society, instead, they are grounded in the dialogical space in-between, where ego and alter co-participate in the constitution of each other's subjectivity and knowledge. It is exactly in this space, which the person may not intentionally choose to occupy, where the multiple and conflicting styles of thinking brought by self and others clash and compete to institute their versions of reality and to position the other in the social fabric. Bakhtin's perspective on dialogue, is crucial in this regard since he conceptualises dialogicality of self and knowledge as responsiveness and positioning towards the polyphony of others' voices (1984a; 1986). This implies the recognition of the voice of the other in the back-and-forth- dynamics between each other's voices and positions along which elements from self cross over to others and vice versa. He recognises that the self is polyphonic, inhabited by the 'traces' of others' discourses, with which the person simultaneously exists in dialogue with and responds to in the process of meaning making. This leads to a multiplicity of co-authorships in the co-construction of self and knowledge, and explains the plurality of the ontological, as well as the epistemological. Dialogicality means both containing the alterity of the other but at the same time separating from it through positioning towards the representations that she brings to dialogue. We can clearly see how knowledge and identity are constituted through and against others' 'words' in a tensional struggle to institute one's versions of reality. In this way, the inner plurality of the person and the content and dynamics of her knowledge are bound to the conflicts and diversity of the *dialogical context*; the person's repertoire of internal and external relationships with others, where their different worldviews meet and compete with one another. Polyphony and polyphasia of self and knowledge contain in their very content and dynamics the resources for plural thinking and identity.

Polyphasic knowledge is organized in representational fields, characterized by plural and oppositional themes as well as modes of thinking, living side-by-side within individuals and groups. These differ in their degree of symbolic power. How, at different times, one is privileged over others, needs to be understood in the light of the position we take in relation to others' worldviews. Co-existence of plural and contradictory modes of thinking and identities is possible due to the spatialization of the self alongside simultaneous dialogues where she takes different I-Other positionings. This spatialization is central to the ability of the person to live in simultaneous locations in the social fabric appropriating and re-accentuating the voices of different others, which come to constitute her inner plurality. The movements alongside I-other positionings are at the heart of the dynamics of polyphasic knowledge, whereby particular meanings are eclectically put to use (merging with a particular identity), with different aims- to contest, to negotiate and/or to support others' representations. Positioning mediates the way people are able to think in multiple ways and experience plural concomitant identities. Without the ability to position oneself in relation to the knowledge of multiple others and also re-construct this knowledge, some voices have the risk of being muted. The consequence would be that knowledge would remain the property of one voice. This would result in what Jovchelovitch (2007) identifies as monological segregation and exclusion of forms of knowledge.

### **7.1.2. Socio-ideological Determinants of Knowledge and Identity.**

Related to Bakhtins' view (1986), that the person exists in reaction to others' words, we find processes of constructing knowledge co-merging with processes of identity. The inherent link of the dialogicality of self and knowledge means that in the construction of social representations meanings about others and the world merge with identificatory discourses about oneself. Both the dialogicality of self and knowledge are one and the same socio-ideological process. This process is dependent on a complex tension between privileging one's knowledge under centripetal forces and centrifugal forces of meaning that tend towards the other's views and the position that they impose upon us. These are the internal battles between 'voices' of

dialogical others struggling for hegemony to institute their competing discourses and impose positions on the self, framing the subjectivity of the person and the representational act. The person has possibilities for either being subordinated to the dominant 'voices' of authoritative others, or taking contesting I-positions subverting the other's knowledge and the position it imposes on the self. To construct social representations and identity involves taking different I-positionings, through which the discourses of others are evaluated and re-constructed in order to claim and defend a particular worldview and identity. The person emerges through her participation in dialogical relationships with others, not as a centralized fixed entity, but as one who is constituted and re-constituted through the various positionings orientated towards and at the same time framed by interlocutors' positions and discourses. For every response to another's representations, the new meaning that emerges 'talks' about the referential object, the interlocutors' knowledge and the self of the person. Accordingly, developing a sense of who we are, is always in co-authorship with others, which is bound to the ongoing back-and-forth tensional dynamics between centripetal and centrifugal forces. It is within this context of dialogical confrontation and struggle with others' perspectives, where a plural self and polyphasic knowledge co-emerge. That is to say that, when social subjects dialogically use representations, they do so in order to assert a version of reality and to propose an identity, and through this they have the possibility to reject the positions offered to them by the alter and the representations claimed by them in discourse. This explains the symbolic struggles within representational fields.

### **7.1.3. The Critical Potential of Social Representations.**

Processes of representation embed possibilities for critical engagement with the social world. The critical potential of social representations is neither centred on the individual nor in society, but in the dialogicality between them and is also framed (constrained or facilitated) by structural dimensions. The socio-ideological/dialogical making of knowledge and identity is never a neutral process, instead it is bound to the conflict of worldviews, projects and positionings of different groups, communities and individuals. Hence, it involves positioning with respect to others'

representations in the battle between contested meanings of self and other. Within these 'ideological' battles the person struggles for social significance and social recognition of one's own voice, identity and project. The rhetorical nature of positioning and appropriation opens possibilities to engage, through argument and debate, in a critique of others' discourses. It contains possibilities to take contesting positionings and through re-accentuation find ways to challenge representations that position one in an inferior place perpetuating the status quo. This explains the possibilities to contest forms of knowledge legitimately regarded as containing the 'truth' and that have a privileged relationship to others in terms of the criterion of 'rationality'. In looking at the production of knowledge in focus group conversations, narratives and social practices I found that, along the dialogical tensions produced by the dynamics between multiple opposing positions, HPs' social representations were put to use in order to contest and oppose policy and institutional hegemonic discourses. In drawing on elements of their polyphasic representational field and infusing statutory others' discourse with different intentions and values, they showed their ability to critically engage with relations of inequality with statutory interlocutors. Their knowledge, thus involved polyphasia of ways of thinking, responsiveness to dialogical others, creativity, dynamism, argumentation and debate in the production and re-construction of social representations.

The foregoing features of knowledge and identity confirm important elements of social representations theory and its concept of cognitive polyphasia. They tie up some theoretical 'knots' of the concept through linking conceptualization with empirical evidence from this investigation. With this, of course, I do not seek to 'finalize' the concept. On the contrary, my theoretical contribution to cognitive polyphasia poses new questions and is open to possible and significant developments. What I hope is that in this thesis I have contributed towards a step in the right direction regarding the enhancement of the epistemological credentials of social representations theory. The points outlined above integrate both theoretical and empirical investigation to propose the following:

- I. Relationships are the context of the 'birth' of social representations and the construction of identities. Social representations, however, also constitute relationships and ontologies. The person understood as a *body*

*in relation to others*, is the product of the matrix of a myriad of relationships where one participates (and has participated), and thus embodies the multitudes of others, their discourses and voices. The person therefore, is born of representations that are constituted in and constitute (material, verbal and non-verbal) relationships where she is located and which are expressed in social practices, institutional rituals and so on. Relationships are spaces with potential for both limitations and possibilities for generating, sustaining contesting and/or disrupting meanings. They are the site for negotiability of the knowledges and identities of individuals and groups. Social representations have a relational genesis, are constitutive of social life and enshrine the dialogical repertoire of the person with the conflicts, upheavals, disagreements and harmonies between interlocutors. It is not surprising then that knowledge is polyphasic since social representations contain the different identities and forms of thinking developed in our relationship with others. Therefore, self-other relationships, as well as the enactment of representations in material practices, and their crystallization in the subjectivity and physicality of the person must be taken seriously.

- II. The notion of positioning is very important to the relational. Positioning, gives us an understanding of the self, moving across different relational locations, co-constructing with the other but not being substituted by her discourses. This means that knowledge and identity are neither self sufficient nor completely substituted by another interlocutor's consciousness, instead they are a joint enterprise of multiple co-authors. Others frame our positions, and can impose a particular position onto us, but positions also have potentialities and are the very source for critically engaging with others. The relational is a space where the voice of an interlocutor (institution, authoritative other) can impose particular positions on the self suppressing, sanctioning and/or muting certain voices of the self, limiting the negotiability of knowledge and subjectivities, and constraining the persons'/groups' epistemological and ontological potentials. However, the relational is also a space of possibilities since the rhetorical nature of positioning towards the others'

discourse enables one to enter into the arena of her knowledge, applauding, contesting or detesting it. Positioning is at the heart of the tensions between centripetal and centrifugal forces in the self and explains how certain forms of thinking and being are given way, becoming viable and intelligible in a particular dialogue with others. The theory of social representations would benefit from including positioning as a mediator in the dialogical triad of representations. The dialectics between assimilation (reproduction) and contestation (agency); unity (permanence) and variability/fragmentation (fluidity), is at the very heart of how social representations are formed and put to use. As Jovchelovitch (1995) argues a representation emerges through a process that ‘involves at one and the same time a work of bonding and of differentiation between self and alterity. A representation links self and other and yet, by the same token, it separates self and other [...]’ (p.121).

III. Finally, let me consider the importance of the notion of polyphasia. First, polyphasia is born in socio-psychological processes and lives at the level of performative and linguistic practices (of individuals, groups and institutions), the subjective (emotions, selfhood), the social (social practices) and the material. Polyphasia, therefore, is epistemological and ontological. Failing to recognise its intertwined dimensions would imply falling into the same dualisms from which the theory of social representations has sought to escape from. Second, polyphasia is not only a product of the intersection of the multiple dialogical relationships in which the person is (and has been) engaged, it is a *phenomenon; a source of possibilities* both for the ontology and epistemology of individuals and groups. The contradictions, diversity and dilemmas contained within polyphasia should not be considered problematic incoherence or faulty deviation. Instead, polyphasia is emblematic of the broader connections of the person/group to the social world and to a particular cultural history where conflicts and plurality are the normal order of things. Its plural and conflicting nature is freighted with otherness, and at the same time it enables us to manage the dilemmas that the multiplication of relationships with others in contemporary times bring forward. As paradoxical as it

may seem, the internal conflicts and dilemmas of polyphasia are also the wellsprings of its strength. The positive potentials inherent to polyphasia refer to its function as a repertoire; a capital of meanings and practices that we eclectically draw upon from different positions in order to act intelligibly and functionally in the multiple locations in which we live. And it is through bringing elements from this capital into immediate relationships and contexts that they can take on new meanings and polyphasia can add and modify. The issue of polyphasia should continue to be, I believe, on the agenda of social representations researchers. This is necessary since the very importance of polyphasia is that it ultimately mediates between self and alterity, and allows for coping with the diverse and sometimes dilemmatic relational experiences in which we live (work, support, intellectual exchange, love, moral commitment, institutional).

## 7.2. Contested Knowledges: Representations in the Battlefield.

The other aspect this thesis investigated was concerned with a critical engagement with the broader socio-cultural and political context of homelessness, which plays an essential part in the production of homelessness subjectivities and (material) experiences. Particularly, I focused on social knowledge of homelessness from the perspective of HPs in context. If through my investigation, I was hoping to contribute to a critical social psychology of homelessness I needed to engage with the context where symbolic constructions of homelessness emerge and penetrate practices and relationships constituting the physical and psychological experience of the homeless person. The particular case of HPs working in the context of service provision in London provides valuable insights and modestly contributes to a general social psychology of homelessness. HPs are certainly well placed to explore the production of knowledge of homelessness. They are at the intersection between different spheres of knowledge, moving locations from the front-line of homelessness to the spheres of policy making and the public. Within these locations they confront obstacles to the realization of their interventions and they struggle to

engage others with their definitions and approaches to homelessness. And it is along these multiple locations in which they simultaneously live, where they dialogically relate to others, whose representations and discourses are appropriated and re-accentuated, thus providing HPs with the resources to make sense of homelessness. These plural and conflicting resources are at the heart of the formation of HPs' knowledge and identity, which ultimately shape practices and relationships with clients, potentially enhancing or undermining the health and subjective experience of homeless people.

As I explained in Chapter One, from the outset of this research I did not seek to defend a theory of professional knowledge of homelessness. Instead, I sought to understand the content and dynamics of HPs' knowledge focusing on the interacting dialogue between its constitutive elements and how these were drawn upon and eclectically put to use when making sense of homelessness. Particular attention was paid to how these professionals were able to critically engage in relations of power with authoritative others (i.e. statutory/policy professionals). I was interested in how their dialogical use of knowledge had the potential to contest the hegemonic representations of those interlocutors with legitimated power to lead constructions of homelessness. That is, those representations that HPs regarded as ideological because they constrained their agenda and limited the interests of the homeless person. The aim was to explore how in the making sense of homelessness, HPs were able to engage in socio-ideological and dialogical battles with the voices and discourses of others, challenging and re-constructing the views and approaches these interlocutors strive to impose on them. If social representations are symbolic dimensions of homelessness that are inherently constitutive of the material and socio-psychological experience of the homeless, to look at their content and dynamics is crucial if we want to assess exclusionary barriers and possibilities of fostering their inclusion and participation within mainstream society. This is certainly important since research has demonstrated that exclusionary practices place barriers to the homeless, hence contributing to increased risk of illness and experiences of material deprivation (Hodgetts et al., 2007).

### **7.2.1. Polyphony amongst HPs.**

One of the most important aspects of social representations highlighted in this study is how polyphony and polyphasia of self and knowledge are two sides of the same process. This study has shown that HPs' identity and knowledge of homelessness is a dialogical process sharply framed by the socio-ideological and political battles of the context of service provision. This is characterized by the competing approaches and definitional clashes between the statutory and voluntary sector. The analysis of the interviews and focus groups discussed in Chapter Five and Six, has produced a coherent and similar representational field sharply characterized by cognitive polyphasia, with content and forms of knowledge drawn from the dialogues with the polyphony of others (i.e. the voluntary sector, policy, the statutory sector, the homeless and the public).

The dynamics of their representational field were mediated by the shifting and re-shifting of different positions, from which diverse and competing themes were dialogically put to use, in response to others' representations. Furthermore, a global overview of data points at the co-constitution of a plural identity merging with the polyphasia of their knowledge. The identity of the HP emerged as one side of the same socio-ideological process of knowledge production and it was through argument and debate with others, predominantly the statutory interlocutor that particular meanings of homelessness merged with particular identities of the HP.

Now, how is their representational field organized and which dynamics does it reveal? How is the dialogical use of competing representations 'voiced' from different positions while merging with particular identities of the HP? As argued in the foregoing section in order to understand how HPs live in a sphere of conflict between different discourses of what homelessness is and who the homeless person is, we need to look at the terrain where the constitutive dialogues of the inner plurality of the person emerge. It is in this dialogical space in-between HPs and others, where diverging and even contradictory discourses of multiple interlocutors and the person's evaluation of them compete with each other in the making of representations of homelessness.

At the heart of HPs' knowledge are the disputes for the construction of representations of homelessness with the public and private funding bodies (through educative campaigns, the media and fundraising activities), the government and statutory experts (through policy lobbying, voluntary sector conferences). Particularly, the dialogue with the statutory other appeared as dominant to the organization and dynamics of their representational field. Statutory institutional demands and the hegemony of their definitions of homelessness pose a dilemma and a threat to voluntary ethos and practices. In HPs' knowledge one could also 'hear' the spontaneous emergence of otherizing and alienating discourses embodied in the voices of the lay person. These were reflective of the fact that as well as being practitioners, HPs are lay members of the public and as such also contain representations that victimize and alienate. These commonsensical images of the homeless that had been born of other relations with lay people, were borrowed and used into the immediate interchange of the interview where the HP was simultaneously engaged in internal dialogues with the statutory interlocutor. When being imported into the dialogue they were infused with new values and took on a different meaning. As they lost their previous anchorage, these were put to use, infused with different motivations, such as to advocate and fight for homelessness as a social cause and to justify to the government the need of approaches based on supportive relationships. Whether it was the representations of *what* homelessness meant to them, or *who* the homeless person is, the tensions and conflicts with which their everyday relationships with others are fraught, shaped the content and dialogical use of their knowledge and were ultimately played out in the ontology of the HP. The tensions between the voices that are at the core of their polyphasic knowledge were played out in the production of plural and contradictory identities of the HP.

### 7.3. Dialogicality, Regulation and Ontology.

This study has shown that HPs' knowledge of homelessness and co-construction of identity were built upon dialogical and socio-ideological battles between self and a polyphony of others and were constituted as a response to their representations. The contested and argumentative character of the knowledge and the

identity of the HP appeared as central in the data. Their representational field was constituted of identity and knowledge struggles, which emerged as inherent to the reactive nature of the dialogical person and her capacity to critically engage with the representations of others. However, these dynamics also expressed the simultaneous unavoidable structural need of having to conform to the statutory (and private funding body) frame and the positions that it imposes on the HP. At points, contestation to statutory others' representations and agenda was intertwined with justification of having to conform to their knowledge. The scenario that appeared in the data was a plurality of struggles faced by HPs when making sense of homelessness along which others' representations were continuously evaluated, re-accentuated, and responded to. These battles emerged in a sequence of contestation to others' knowledge, argumentative defense of one's representations, critique intertwined with justification of conforming to the imposed statutory agenda, and a defense of HPs' knowledge, project and identity. They consisted on socio-ideological battles between hegemonic and oppositional representations of homelessness striving to overpower the other and to take the lead in the construction of homelessness. In particular, the statutory interlocutor emerged as controller and regulator of HPs' practice. Hence, HPs fought over the statutory other's limitation and setting of boundaries to HPs' ethos, knowledge and supportive approaches to the homeless.

It is possible to divide these struggles into three sets of battles, which co-existed in conflictive relationship between them, whilst at the same time supporting each other: *battles of humanization & relatedness*, *battles of institutionalization, reification and politization*, and *battles of identity*. The first regards the dialogical responsibility towards the relationship with the homeless, where the HP fights between, on the one hand, humanization, companionship, morality and ethics, and on the other, alienation, victimization and otherization. The second relates to the pragmatics of institutional regulation, where the HP finds herself in a dilemmatic conflict between, on the one hand, bureaucracies and institutional control that limit their supportive interventions and on the other hand, a strong sense of advocacy and responsibility as political representative of the homeless, which results in objectification and politization of the homeless ontology. The conflict between these two battles brings about a third battle related to the 'embodiment' of these contradictions in the ontology of the homeless and the HP. The experience of these

dilemmas in their everyday practices and in their relationship with clients is played out in a set of representations of *who* the homeless person is and a co-construction of the identity of the HP. Certainly, the full significance of HPs' representational field, needs to be understood over and against the co-construction of their ontology, since the production of their knowledge goes hand in hand with the co-production of their subjective experience and their community identity.

### **7.3.1. Battles of Humanization & Relatedness.**

A defence of the need to re-shift attention away from the individual homeless to the sphere of dialogical relationships, emerged through struggles with statutory and public others. They were requested to relate to the homeless as fellow human beings and dialogical co-partners through understanding. This battle was linked to HPs' vocational and ethical ideals in their role as communicators and educators of the public, politicians and the media and was rooted in their positioning at the front-line with the homeless. It reflects HPs' realization of who the homeless are and what homelessness is, that is developed through their relational experience with clients. But this idealist rhetoric was not free from internal contradiction. Its dynamics expressed how HPs' struggle to include the homeless co-emerged through tensional dynamics with excluding and judging discourses. These were anchored in images of the homeless as alienated and deficient and were translated at the level of practices asserting the need to cure. HPs entered in conflict between, on the one hand; the homeless person as an equal co-partner, whole human being, dialogical responsibility, moral commitment, and transformable ontology through practices of healing, humanization, understanding, dialogue and co-operation on the path towards self-actualization, and on the other hand, the homeless person as oppressed victim, deficient/ alienated, a personal battle for the HP, a perpetual ontology judged and in need of curing.

HPs' fight for the dialogical support of homeless people and client-focused approaches is at the core of the debate between the voluntary and statutory sector in the UK. Their concern with the de-otherization of the homeless and emphasis on bridging is also central to their role as translators of homeless issues into the public

sphere, whereby they are fighting to link the domiciled community with the homeless. Certainly, HPs' positioning within these relationships mediated their knowledge processes in the interviews and focus groups. For HPs in the study, meaningful approaches to homelessness can only be generated within dialogical processes of relationships, where both ontology and morality are co-constructed (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). Dialogical responsibility, as is claimed by HPs, is about humanizing ways of engaging with others through companionship and support. They asserted, from positions as fellow human beings and representatives of the homeless, that through this relational process self and co-partner in dialogue constitute each other. It is only within the dialogical relationship that a sense of self-esteem and feeling of belonging can emerge. Indeed, the project of changing ontology is a relational one based upon the crafting of conjoint interventions (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). An approach like this, that recognises the voices of the clients, their diverse experiences, resources and agency, has more potential to work in the right direction towards social change in the status quo of the homeless (Zufferey & Kerr, 2004).

However, HPs' discourse on relational responsibility became at points too moralistic and entered into conflict with victimization where HPs engaged in the same alienating processes that they criticised the statutory and public other for. Here, they put to use representations of the homeless as a personal battle for the HP. Paradoxically, these representations emerged along intertwined positions of the HP as a knowledgeable professional and representative of the homeless. The aim was to assert the complexity of their job in order to defend the need of responsive/dialogical approaches and to contest the dominant and reductionistic statutory/policy definition of homelessness. The ultimate aim was to justify to the statutory other their demands of governmental moral commitment (as dialogical responsibility) and to defend the practical and ethical value of the voluntary sector's relational, supportive and comprehensive approach. In the same way as in their public education campaigns and policy work, HPs' advocacy for the dignity and humanization of homeless people co-existed in paradox with victimization. In this way, claims of moral commitment were infused with a rhetoric of compassion towards the homeless as victims. Indeed, the power of charity advocates to access the media and define homelessness in the UK has been criticised for instituting victimizing images that

remove them from their own ontologies and represent them as pitiful and needy (Hodgetts et al., 2005).

As the data has shown, there is no doubt that despite the fact that HPs took positions as fellow human beings and representatives of the homeless from which they fought for a dialogical ethic of homelessness, they also co-constructed their responsibility to the homeless as conflictive. It was here where victimizing notions of the homeless emerged from their positionings as the mainstream, but this time infused with a different meaning. Here, the voice of the lay person who struggles to relate with the alienated other percolated in a more veiled way. What emerged was a declaration of the difficulties HPs experience in practice when endeavouring to construct conjoint supportive relationships with the deviant other.

Ultimately, the clash of their conflicting images and feelings towards the homeless was translated into the practices they develop. Hence, a defence of healing approaches (practices of relatedness) emerged intertwined with a rhetoric of curing. In blaming the alienated nature of the individual their personal battles with homelessness and difficulties to deliver successful interventions were justified. This mirrors the prevailing Western assumption of the existence of an autonomous self, which in emphasising subjective agency rather than relational one constructs individual responsibility and justifies practices of correction and restoration (curing) (McNamee & Gergen, 1999).

### **7.3.2. Battles of Institutionalization, Reification and Politization.**

The most prevalent battle was between ethics, political control and institutional regulation of the homeless. The homeless were excluded from participation in HPs' judgements and political fights with the government over morality, interventions and policies. These battles disregarded important issues of their identity and neglected their agency to assert their lifeworlds and ontologies. There was a shift from HPs' focus on the social justice of the homeless as a conjoint dialogical action to social control through politization and institutionalization of the homeless. This movement is entrenched in what has been criticized by homeless

people as the enduring transformation of the voluntary sector into a 'homelessness industry', which has led to a growing separation between providers and clients (Daly, 1997).

These battles are rooted in the socio-political context of service provision where fights (verbal and material) between the discursive practices of statutory others and HPs over homelessness are everywhere to be seen. In contemporary times, the voluntary sector is increasingly reliant on external funding and thus is subjected to the political and economic constraints of British society and the domination of its rationalist discourses (Wigglesworth & Kendall, 2000). Dependency on external funding and increased partnerships with statutory agencies pose an imminent risk of proselytization into institutionalism. This also means subordination to the order, control, accountability and competition emphasised by a public sector that is entrenched in a privatization of the welfare system (Daly, 1997). The dilemma for the HP, is that the institutional requirements of state and private funding bodies jeopardize their fight for humanization, and ultimately, their dialogical responsibility. HPs' expressed deep fear of the consequences of this for the wellbeing of homeless people. Within this dilemmatic context, HPs shifted positions as '*knowledgeable professionals*', '*defiant nonconformists*' and '*victims of the institutional power*', from which they engaged in continuous fights for social justice and the recognition of their moral ethos and expertise. But in this paternalistic fight the voice of the homeless was not invited to engage as dialogical co-partner in the struggle with the outside audience. When HPs shifted their positions to '*contractors of the government client*' and '*traders of the homeless product*', their fight for justice became politicized and monological. The unintended consequence was the reification and exclusion of those who are the ultimate cause of their struggles and their existence as a professional sector.

The conflicts that appeared within this battle are rather difficult to reconcile. Bureaucratization, professionalisation (accountability), hard-outcomes, institutional care and the oppression of the homeless by institutional barriers were the main signifiers, giving meaning to the adjustment to practices defined by others. Relational/dialogical approaches, practice-based knowledge, humanization, co-participation of clients, healing and companionship, soft-outcomes and personalized

care were notions put to use when defending the agency and practices of the voluntary sector. Both sets of conflicting signifiers were rhetorically put to use with different aims and emerged as a set of contestations and justifications in the dialogue between the statutory interlocutor and the different positioned-I(s) of the HP. The HP positioned as a contractor of the government is required to be targeted, programmatic and hard outcomes-driven, which results in the regulation of HPs' practices and ultimately the ontology of the homeless person. HPs' humanizing practices and experience-based knowledge is illegitimated and thus required to be substituted by order of bureaucracies and the institutional control of the funding body. Hence, HPs are at the same time, engaged in a fight against the exclusion of the homeless and the exclusion of their knowledge. Theirs is a hybrid knowledge that crosses boundaries of academic expertise. Its disqualification and marginalization is rooted in its very lack of compartmentalization (Sibley, 1995). By not having secure boundaries it is considered illegitimate and thus is left disempowered and with no authority in its relation to expert knowledge (Sibley, 1995).

Nevertheless, the research has given evidence of HPs' ability to engage in discursive and material contestation to the imposition of the statutory agenda and definition of homelessness. Despite statutory imposition of the form and content of service delivery, they find ways within institutional framing to put into practice their ethos and approach. Homeless institutional contexts, as Zufferey & Kerr (2004) have pointed out offer 'both constraints and opportunities for developing collaborative and client focused service provision' (p.352). However, HPs' political and ideological battles meant the objectification of the homeless person. Their fight for social justice turned into a fight for social control of homelessness issues. In being cut off from participating in decisions about their life and about their re-integration into mainstream society, the homeless were disempowered from social change. Indeed, it is argued that the most empowering approach is to treat service users as experts on their own ontology (Boydell, Goering, & Morrell-Bellai, 2000 ). In the advocacy for resources and defence of their expertise, HPs' perpetuate homelessness and increase the separation between service providers and clients (Zufferey & Kerr, 2004). HPs' defence of relatedness with the homeless, which corresponds to a Habermasian dialogical approach to morality (McMahon, 2000) clashed with their monological discourse of justice. Within this, the act of identifying and asserting the principles of

morality concerning the homeless were carried out without the participation of the homeless voice. Despite the fact that their political battle was motivated by the desire to do the right thing for the homeless, it turned into an epistemological and political fight over who was in control of issues of homelessness. Hence, their battle for justice lost sight of its original aim, that was at the core of any discourse of morality, which according to Habermas (1990), is rightness instead of truth and should be dialogical in nature, inviting those affected parties to participate in discussion (McMahon, 2000). These political battles, or monological judgements on morality in Habermasian terms, emerged through HPs' conflicting thinking both in interviews and focus groups, as well as in observed practices during fieldwork. As I discussed in the participative-observation section in Chapters Five and Six, the homeless voice was barely present in the debates of both conferences, and institutional control was in some projects exerted through spatial regulation.

### **7.3.3. Battles of Identity.**

Tensional forces between *battles of humanization & relatedness* and *battles of institutionalization, reification & politization* competed to produce a view of *what* homelessness is. It was out of this struggling relationship that battles containing representations about the identity of the homeless person appeared. The homeless person emerged simultaneously as being; (1) *alienated and politicized* or *recognised as an equal dialogical partner*, (2) *objectified and victimized* or *ontologically recognised*, (3) *whole* or *fragmented*, resulting in a *bifurcated identity*. The conflicting dialogue between the three sets of battles was also played out in a set of co-existing representations of the identity of the HP. This appeared merged with the plural representations of *what* homelessness is and *who* the homeless person is. Hence, the HP emerged simultaneously as someone struggling between being: (1) *a member of the ethical voluntary sector* vs. *victim of institutional domination*, (2) *an essential helper/expert* vs. *non-legitimate practitioner*, (3) *an ally* vs. *warrior*.

HPs' identity emerged as plural and contradictory, since it was co-constituted with the polyphasia of their knowledge of homelessness. Its plurality is rooted in the multiple self-other relations in which HPs are located and reflects the polyphony of

the person. It was through constant shifting of positions towards symbolic interlocutors, predominantly statutory ones, that others' 'words' came to be part of the identity and knowledge of the HP. What we can see in HPs' representations is how their subjectivities and sensibilities are located in the dialogical space between self and others. The type of dialogues with interlocutors and the sequential pattern of argument and contra-argument through which knowledge emerged, was very similar in individual narratives and group discussions. HPs' knowledge and identity construction occurred against a background of critically engaging with statutory and public others' representations of homelessness, of questioning institutional practices and statutory knowledge and of defending their own agenda and ethos. The continuous dialogical response to others, was achieved through rhetorical positionings towards their knowledge claims (i.e. policies, statutory definitions of homelessness and services, public and media images of homelessness). These were re-accentuated with new meanings and intentions since they were regarded as posing a threat to the identities, projects and search for social recognition of the community of HPs. Such rhetorical acts of re-construction were mediated by the adoption of plural and conflicting I-positions, which gave way to the co-emergence of their processes of identity formation. It was through adopting an I-positioning towards the other co-producer of knowledge that a particular identity merged with a particular use of knowledge/representation.

As I have shown in Chapter Five, in the argumentative dialogue with multiple others that inhabit the self, HPs took up interwoven positions within the process of representing. On the one hand, when engaged in battles of humanization and relatedness, they juggled between positionings as *'idealistic'*, *'fellow human beings of the homeless brother'*, *'representatives of the homeless'* and *'knowledgeable professionals'*. On the other hand, when engaged in battles of institutionalization, reification and politization, they took multiple interwoven positions as *'defiant nonconformist members of the voluntary homeless sector'*, *'idealistic HPs'*, *'professional experts of the homeless industry'*, *'victims of institutional power'* and *'members of the voluntary homeless sector'*. At the core of the adoption of those positions were the various battles in which the HP is engaged; the moral fight with the outside audience to become critically aware of and dialogically committed to homelessness; the continuous struggle with the statutory other to defend the project

of the voluntary sector, with which participants strongly identify, and, their yearning for social recognition and legitimacy of their expertise within a context that requires conforming to institutionalism, accountability and control of the statutory ‘financial enabler’ (Daly, 1997). Hence, the HP was simultaneously and conflictingly co-constituted as an *ally* of and a *warrior* of the homeless, a *member of the ethical voluntary sector* and a *victim of institutional domination*, an *essential helper/expert and non-legitimate practitioner*.

#### **7.3.4 Contestation and Critical Potential of Social Representations.**

Social representations have, as we have seen, a contested and argumentative nature. As I have argued in Chapter Three, rhetorical positioning contains possibilities to either contest or legitimate exclusionary and unjust practices. As the particular case of HPs reveals, these argumentative dimensions of social representations are at the core of possibilities of critical engagement and contestation to others’ knowledge, practices and the positions that they impose upon us. HPs’ contesting practices permeated both verbal and material discourse (i.e. conferences, the framing of services within their own ethos, lobbying policy change through campaigns). However, we should not disregard here that agency to oppose and critically engage with the representations of others is not absolute. Their agency emerged inherently linked to the way HPs’ were framed by the authoritative position of the statutory interlocutor, who illegitimizes and scrutinizes HPs’ knowledge and practices. The dynamics of their knowledge reveals how HPs do not have an absolute authorial stance to challenge and contest independently from the other’s position, instead this co-existed and was mutually co-constituted with the power of the statutory interlocutor to impose frameworks, identities and meanings. Additionally, their possibilities for material contestation appeared as being constrained by structural needs such as depending on external funding and thus having to adapt to the agenda of others. This finding points to the need of understanding critical engagement and contestation as relational and inherently linked to material and structural dimensions.

The three battles reveal how the HP emerged struggling simultaneously between competing selves and conflicting discourses. This was clearly evident in the, in Bakhtinian terms, carnivalesque emergence of their identity as fluid, contested, at times contradictory and populated by multiple voices. This is because identity is a socio-ideological and dialogical *process of becoming*, instead of a *state* of monolithic being. However, the plurality and internal contradiction of the HP co-emerged with centripetal forces that reflected tendencies towards unity and a stable frame of reference. Both narrative interviews and focus groups have shown how despite plurality and contradiction there was reasonable coherence within HPs' identity, which was framed by their desire to protect the ethos, knowledge and project of the voluntary sector. They critically engaged with the statutory interlocutor using knowledge in polyphasic ways in order to have their voice recognised, promote positive self-images and support their community identity and knowledge. Focus group discussions have shown very clearly how groups collectively sought to bolster their self-esteem and pride as a community of practitioners. This was also a practice that I observed in individual narratives. However, it was when constructing homelessness together in the focus groups that they were more vocal and felt more empowered to engage in a critical fight over homelessness with the statutory interlocutor.

The production of HPs' representations and identity was permeated by relations of power and symbolic struggles. These, emerged through constant concomitant acts of, on the one hand, contesting statutory institutionalism and representations of homelessness, and on the other, justifying, through critical awareness of their situation, having to be submissive to the statutory agenda. This battle between critically engaging with the relationship with the government and conforming to state institutionalism and representations, takes us back to the historical roots and social context of these representations. We can detect how their battles are echoes of the origins of the third sector as a 'shadowy enclave at the periphery of the mental map of policy makers and shapers', which co-exist with a current amplification of their voice and greater recognition of their central position in the UK (Wigglesworth & Kendall, 2000, p.1). To be an independent sector and, at the same time to increasingly become state-controlled, to be critical advocates and, at the same time, to conform to politician-dominated approaches, to be ethical and

morally committed to a social cause and, at the same time, tending towards the private market and having to adapt to the requirements of an industry, to dialogically engage with the client and, at the same time, to separate from the homeless as 'products' in this dual ambivalent logic in which HPs work develops, we find the dilemmatic experiences and feelings that permeate their representations and identity. The problem of the HP is that of the location where she stands in the margins between homelessness and the outside audience, in-between, on the one hand, the private market and the state and on the other, the third sector. HPs showed critical awareness of the drawback of having a problematic accountability, which can neither be measured by the votes of an electorate or the trading of shares as is the case of the corporate sector (Wigglesworth & Kendall, 2000). Theirs is not at all an easily measurable 'product' since it implies providing socio-psychological and structural opportunities and support for participation in community life, empowering and bolstering the wellbeing and health of homeless people.

Within this context, the HP is in a very difficult situation and is critically aware of the threats to her knowledge and identity. The data has shown how they construct knowledge in competition with statutory others, through appropriating and re-constructing their representations and policy discourses in order to defend their identity and bolster empowering versions of their own community of voluntary sector practitioners. The dynamics of their knowledge have shown that HPs emerged as the sites of socio-ideological struggle in the negotiations of their representations, ontologies and project. These symbolic struggles were very clear in the battles of institutionalization, reification and politization, where it was possible to see how the voices of the voluntary sector and the statutory other disputed for the definition of homelessness. HPs constructed their accounts eclectically using elements from their three sets of battles, so as to contest or justify having to conform to the representations imposed by the statutory other and other private funding bodies. At points, HPs appropriated statutory discourses making them their own through re-accentuating them with intertwined critiques, justifications and infusing them with the ethical values of the voluntary sector. Through critical justification they sought to protect their versions of homelessness, practices and ultimately dignity as professionals and ethical HPs.

In summary, HPs' battles were characterized by the search for social recognition, contestation and justification of having to conform to those statutory representations and practices that were regarded as a threat to their identification and *commitment* to the community of the voluntary sector as well as to the wellbeing of the homeless. Their ideological battles revealed their loyalties to the community of the voluntary sector and its cause, their desires and ideals about homelessness, and their fears about state domination, becoming a corporation and institutionalizing the homeless. HPs made sense of homelessness through and against the positions and representations the statutory other sought to impose on them, which were lived as, discriminating of their expertise, and thus a threat to their projects and self-esteem. Social representations of others and HPs' rhetorical position towards them shape the world in which HPs live, producing their knowledge and constituting their subjectivities. This investigation has, therefore, highlighted how without an understanding of the co-constituency of knowledge and identity in socio-political and material contexts that takes into account the human needs for social recognition, protection of one's identities and projects, and stable frames of reference, we could not explain how people critically use representations to different ends - to contest, critique, to transform - within the polyphony and polyphasia of self and knowledge.

#### 7.4. Prospects for Future Research.

'To every form of knowing there corresponds a set of fundamental relationships between people and between people and the environment in which they live, which is both social and natural. These relationships frame the representational aims of knowledge and need to be understood if we are to explain the rationality of knowledge and what, at times, seems irrational for the observer who does not understand the context in which that form of knowing is grounded. It is the social psychological nature of these relationships, their quality and location in space, place and time that needs to be considered if we are going to be serious about treating social context as more than an added variable to understand knowledge.'

(Jovchelovitch, 2007, p.179)

I hope that my thesis has convinced the reader not only of the value of a social psychology of knowledge in context (Jovchelovitch, 2007), but of the necessity of understanding the ontology of groups and individuals as ‘embodying’ the intersection of the multiple relationships and contexts where they live (and have lived) and from where they ‘borrow’ voices and linguistic/material discourses that co-participate in their constitution. To my view, one of the most significant findings of this thesis is related with how the competing relationships of communication and power where HPs are located in their interaction with the homeless, the statutory sector and the public, provide the contexts (symbolic and material) and dialogues, within which HPs construct their knowledge and identity. Particularly, the analysis revealed that the conflicts posed by socio-political and economic relations of power between voluntary and statutory sector and the dilemmas of dialogically relating to the homeless person, were at the heart of the co-constitution of the inner plurality and contradiction of their knowledge and identity. From the interviews and focus groups analysis to the examples from observations in the field, from collective and individual narratives to discursive practices, the scene that emerges is that of co-existing dilemmas rooted in the; irreconcilability of the voluntary ethos and statutory institutionalism, the personal and public struggle for moral commitment and dialogical responsibility to the homeless, the increasing disappearance of the non-profit and independent nature of the sector in favour of the corporate industry and market arrangements.

All these representational and structural clashes are translated into the relational realm through material, social and linguistic practices discursively constituting the ontology and epistemology of HPs. The plurality and contradiction of HPs’ representations and identities may be regarded as producing bewilderment and a state of multiphrenia (Gergen, 1991). Paradoxically, I believe that the plurality of their knowledge and identity may provide these professionals with the symbolic resources to cope with the challenges they face in the dilemmatic context of their work. As Jovchelovitch (2007) argues: ‘different forms of knowing coexist fulfilling different functions and identity needs. These can be used by social actors as a resource from where to draw answers to the different kinds of demands of the everyday.’ (p.181). Certainly, the plurality of HPs’ knowledge contains possibilities for increasing the social esteem and belonging of homeless people, enhancing their

wellbeing, physical health and ultimately facilitating their inclusion into mainstream society, yet, they also embed potential dangers. These refer to; institutionalization, muting of the homeless' voice, stigmatization, the creation of difference, distrust, exclusion all of which impact negatively on their health and needs. Hence, we need to be cautious when being too optimistic about what the plurality of HPs' knowledge can offer for the wellbeing and interest of homeless people. I strongly agree with Jovchelovitch's emphasis of the need to move away from forms of relativism that unconditionally accept all knowledge as right, good or true (2007). In the case of homelessness my concern is that the contradictions that characterize HPs' knowledge shape their interventions, campaigns, relationships with clients and the spatial construction of services, ultimately framing the experience of homeless people. Research into the cultures of homelessness and health has demonstrated the enactment of representations in relationships, material and spatial dimensions and their consequent 'crystallization' in the subjectivity and physical experience of homeless people (Hodgetts et al., 2007). My research is only a small 'piece' of the big project of developing a social psychology of homelessness; one that looks at its wider socio-political context focusing on HPs' possibilities for challenging the representations of those that are 'stronger' in defining and instituting homelessness agendas and policies. There are still many questions to be answered and amongst the ones risen by this research are: How do the dilemmas embedded in HPs' knowledge frame the material experience of homeless people? How do they shape the production of the subjectivities of homeless people? How do they affect the increasing partnership work and liaison with statutory agencies? These questions need to be addressed in further research. The most urgent one, in my view, relates to how the plurality and contradiction of HPs' knowledge affects the socio-psychological and physical/material experience of homeless people.

That representations are materialized in our lived experience and translated into practices and relationships (Jodelet, 1989/1991) is not something new to the theory of social representations. This study has shown how a system of representations is co-constituted with a sense of self and of community identity, lives within relationships between the statutory sector and the voluntary sector and penetrates HPs' social practices. What has driven my research was a desire to illustrate how social representations co-constitute the epistemology and ontology of

individuals and groups. However, this study is not free from limitations and leaves behind many 'knots' that need to be addressed through future research. These relate with methodological techniques as well as the attempt to develop theory.

First, traces of the struggles and contradictions of HPs' knowledge and identity were observed in practices (conferences, spatial arrangement, client-HP interactions), however, the analysis relied too heavily on linguistic forms of discourse, said little about its material character and nothing about the embodiment of representations. The main research techniques (interviews and focus groups) and the unit of analysis (utterance) offer a limited account of how representations in their materiality in discursive practices permeate relationships and come to constitute the identities and knowledge of HPs. Certainly, not considering the link of representations to embodiment, materiality and spatial aspects means neglecting those dimensions in which human experience and linguistic discursive practices are grounded (Hodgetts et al., 2007; Nightingale & Cromby, 2002). Through focusing on talk and language I have committed to the research tradition of social representations and social psychology in general. In doing so I now share with the discipline, as well as with most of the research done under the umbrella of social representations theory, the guilt of having neglected the link of representations to materiality and embodiment, that is; how the symbolic realm discursively constitutes and is constituted by not only the socio-psychological experiences that we live but also material relations and physicality. Locating the locus of inquiry in the link between these dimensions is an opportunity for social psychology to de-compartmentalize and engage with other disciplines. This is an important step in the movement towards transgressing knowledge boundaries, exclusion and control (Sibley, 1995). I believe that if the theory of social representations wants to contribute to this movement, it needs to progress the forms of its research and methodologies. Much remains to be done in future work, which I believe should learn from more innovative forms of research that are emerging in the field of the social psychology of homelessness (Hodgetts et al., 2007). This work used photo-elicitation techniques in combination with narratives and participative observation in order to explore the link between embodiment, symbolic, material, relational and spatial dimensions of health and homelessness.

Secondly, I have taken the risky, yet I believe necessary, endeavour to further develop a central aspect in social representations theory, the concept of cognitive polyphasia. By linking the theory of social representations with Hermans and Kempen socio-psychological theory of the dialogical self (1993), and with Bakhtin's work on dialogicality, I hope I have contributed to tying some 'knots' in our understanding of the polyphasia of knowledge and its links to the inner plurality of the self. By linking social psychology to the different discipline of literary critique, I hope I have contributed with a step in the direction towards integrative and multidisciplinary research. Apart from its relationships with philosophy and anthropology, social psychology has, for too long, been bound to itself, not endeavouring to link with other areas of the social sciences. This compartmentalization has provided the discipline with an authority over its expertise, yet, I believe that has disempowered it from being able to account for how the socio-psychological experience of individuals and groups is inherently linked to material, spatial and physical dimensions. These are substantive dimensions of human existence, and research on homelessness has given evidence that they participate in processes of inclusion/exclusion, stigmatization, and ultimately in the production of subjectivities (i.e psycho-social and physical health) (Hodgetts et al., 2007). I would contend that social psychology cannot turn its back on these when studying any social phenomena, including issues of homelessness.

Finally, whilst having attempted to contribute to our understanding of the plurality of knowledge and self I am aware that I have also left many shadows behind. One relates to the understanding of the complex tensional dialectics between centrifugal forces in the self, which tend towards plurality, polyphasia, polyphony, contradiction and fluidity and centripetal forces in the self that tend towards unity, permanence and stable frames of reference. I have only briefly addressed this issue in this research (for a discussion see Chapter Three). It is clear to me that these complex dialectics are at the core of our human nature and are grounded in the manifold contexts (material, socio-political, cultural and symbolic) and 'repertory' of relationships in which we are engaged (and have been). The concern is that when being dysfunctional are essentialized as conditions inherent to the nature of the person as a separated entity. I believe that a framework that takes into account all the intertwined dimensions that come to produce the subjectivity of the person is useful

in this regard and the theory of social representations has a potential to contribute towards this.

As this study reaches its end, I am convinced of the importance of *the relational* in the constitution of social life. Social, political, cultural, symbolic, material and embodied relationships are all formative of the ontological, as well as the epistemological. HPs' knowledge of homelessness is constitutive of their subjectivities but also lives in and is constituted by their relationships with homeless people. Although their representations contain promising ideas about dialogical responsibility and humanizing approaches to homelessness, they also point to the worrying consequences that interventions subdued to the rationalism of the market place and its institutional framework have to the identity, well-being, health and possibilities of inclusion of homeless people. Rationalistic and liberalist market democracies such as the UK one, create rigid societies heavily based on targets, numbers, accountability and competition, leaving little space for relational, humanizing and responsive homeless services. Within this political context of privatization of government welfare agenda, quasi market arrangements between the statutory sector as 'financial enablers' and voluntary sector as 'providers' (Daly, 1997, p.172) only rational, and not relational, systems are trusted. Hence, HPs' live in a catch-22 between wanting to put into practice their ethos working in the interest of homeless people and, yet having to secure funding, which involves adapting to the pragmatics of their job and institutional discourses of others framed by the bureaucratic and rationalistic values of the financial market. The voluntary sector lives in a 'shadow state' (Wolch, 1990) in which their dependency on government funding requires them to adapt to the order, control and accountability of the statutory sector, which threatens their autonomy, flexibility, creativity, understanding of local problems in context, and ultimately their agenda of action to achieve social change (Daly, 1997). Policy and homeless welfare interventions will remain excluding and partial if they continue to neglect the importance of relational responsibility and be disconnected from the ontology and everyday life of homeless people. Sensitivity to HPs' knowledge is important since they are directly connected to what happens on the ground. However, I also strongly believe that any conversation about policies and the care of homeless people cannot exclude the participation of homeless people themselves. This would imply ideologically

privileging the voice of elites and perpetuating the same barriers to inclusion that we are attempting to break. Recognising homeless peoples voices remains an essential, if challenging task for us all in mainstream housed society. Dialoguing with their voice, is critical if we want to generate relational responsibility (McNamee & Gergen, 1999).

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## **Appendix 1: Interview schedule.**

### **1. Elicitation phase:**

- “Please, tell me what does ‘homelessness’ mean to you. I would like you to tell me at length about your views on homelessness as if it was a story.”

### **2. Questioning phase:**

- “What do you think ‘homelessness’ means to other professionals working in the statutory sector?”
- “What do you think ‘homelessness’ means to other professionals working in the homelessness voluntary sector?”
- “How do you believe professionals working in the statutory sector see you as a professional from the voluntary sector?”

## Appendix 2: Focus groups schedule.

<b>Focus group schedule: Training and Development Workers (Conducted on the 6th/12/04)</b>
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**Personal introduction.** Aims and objectives of the research.

Participants introduce themselves to the group.

**Section I: The object of work. Comprehensive / holistic view of homelessness Vs individualistic view.**

- I. What does homelessness mean to you? (Personally)
- II. What do you think are the pathways to homelessness? (Causes)
- III. What is what most concerns you about homelessness? (Effects/consequences)
- IV. Which is the best way you can help your clients?
- V. Which do you think are the solutions to end homelessness?
  - a. Which do you think are the benefits of training for your clients? /How do you see training as a way of integrating them into the community?

**Section II: The one-to-one relationship with the homeless.**

- I. How is the relationship with your clients? How do you approach your clients?  
Prompts: Is it difficult?
- II. What is your position in this professional-client relationship?
- III. How does your work differentiate from the work done by other professionals such as key workers/support workers?
- IV. What is what you put into this relationship that benefits your clients?
- V. You have day-to-day relationship with your clients. Could you tell us about the best things and the worse moments of this relationship?

**Section III: Sources of Knowledge / Learning**

- I. What is the feedback that you receive from your clients about how you treat them/perceive them? Prompts: Do you think that they challenge the way you approach/perceive them?
- II. Which are your main sources of knowledge?
- III. How do you best learn about your clients? Prompts: experience, training, academic background, meetings with colleagues.
- IV. What have you learnt from your experience in your current work that other sources have not given you?

#### **Section IV: Professional Identity**

- I. How do you see yourself as a training and development worker? What is like to be a training and development worker?
  - a. Prompts: What do you value of being a training and development worker?
- II. What is like to work within the homeless voluntary sector
- III. What do you think about the homeless statutory sector?

<b>Focus group schedule: Project Managers. (Conducted on the 10th/12/04)</b>
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**Personal introduction.** Aims and objectives of the research.

Participants introduce themselves to the group.

#### **Section I: The object of work. Comprehensive/holistic view of homelessness Vs individualistic view.**

- I. What does homelessness mean to you? (Personally)
- II. What do you think are the pathways to homelessness? (Causes)
- III. What is what most concerns you about homelessness? (Effects/ consequences)
- IV. Which is the best way you can help your clients?

#### **Section II: Homelessness as an organizational issue**

- I. How do you see homelessness in the wider context of the homelessness sector?
- II. How has the way you see homelessness changed since you have started working as a project manager?
  - a. Prompts: what have you learnt from your experiences as a manager?
- III. How has your relationship with clients changed? (Could you please tell us about the differences and similarities between the way you approach/ relate to clients and the way your staff (support workers) do?

#### **Section III: Professional identity**

- I. How do you see yourself as a project manager? What is like to be a project manager?
  - a. Prompts: What do you value of being a project manager?
- II. Could you tell us about the differences and similarities between the work you do and the work done by your support workers?

- III. What is like to work within the homeless voluntary sector?
  - a. What do you reject of/ value of being a professional of the voluntary sector?
- IV. What do you think about the homeless statutory sector?
- V. Could you tell us about the differences and similarities between you as a member of the staff of your organization and professionals of other voluntary organizations?
- VI. I would like to hear about your experiences of having to work with statutory homelessness services. Do you think that they value the work done by the voluntary sector?

**Section IV: Sources of Knowledge/Learning.**

- I. Which are your main sources of knowledge?
- II. How do you learn about your clients?
  - a. Prompts: Experience, training, academic background, meetings with colleagues.
- III. What have you learnt of your experience as a manager of your project that you haven't when you've been working in a more client-centered basis (e.g. when you were a support worker)?
- IV. What have your previous professional experiences within the homeless voluntary sector taught you?

<p><b>Focus group schedule: Mental Health/Drug Misuse Workers 1st/2/05</b></p>
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**Personal introduction.** Aims and objectives of the research.

Participants introduce themselves to the group.

**Section I: The object of work. Homelessness as a drug misuse-mental health problem.**

- I. What does homelessness mean to you? (Personally).
- II. What do you think are the pathways to homelessness? (Causes)
- III. What is what most concerns you about homelessness? (Effects/consequences)
- IV. Which is the best way you can help you clients?
  - a. Section II: Professional identity
- V. What is like to be a drug misuse-mental health worker? How do you see yourself as a professional doing that job?

- a. Prompts: What do you value of being a drug misuse/mental health worker?
- VI. What is like to work within the homeless voluntary sector
- VII. What do you think about the homeless statutory sector?
- VIII. I would like to hear about your experiences of having to work with statutory homelessness services. Do you think that they value the work done by the voluntary sector?
- IX. Could you tell us about the differences and similarities between the work you do and the work other colleagues do within the organization?
  - a. Do you feel that you deal with the worse elements of homelessness?

**Section II: Sources of Knowledge/learning.**

- I. How has your academic/professional/training background helped you to understand homelessness? (Theoretical knowledge)
- II. How has the way you see homelessness changed since you have started doing your job?
  - a. Prompts: What have you learnt of your experiences as a mental health/drug misuse worker?
- III. What do you learn from the relationship with your clients? How has your relationship with clients changed? (Experience-based knowledge)

**Section III: Health as an end to homelessness.**

- I. How do you think physical and mental health helps to end homelessness?
- II. What is like to be homeless and mentally ill/ homeless and drug addict from your professional perspective?

<b>Focus group schedule: Outreach Workers conducted on the 24th/1/05</b>
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**Personal introduction.** Aims and objectives of the research.

Participants introduce themselves to the group.

**Section I: The object of work.**

- I. What does homelessness mean to you? (Personally).
- II. What do you think are the pathways to homelessness? (Causes)
- III. What is what most concerns you about homelessness? (Effects/consequences)
- IV. Which is the best way you can help your clients?

**Section II: Professional identity**

- I. What is like to be an outreach worker? How do you see yourself as a professional doing that job? Prompts: What do you value of being an outreach worker? What is like to work within the homeless voluntary sector?
- II. What do you think about the homeless statutory sector?
- III. I would like to hear about your experiences of having to work with statutory homelessness services. Do you think that they value the work done by the voluntary sector?
- IV. Could you tell us about the differences and similarities between the work you do and the work other colleagues do within the organization?
  - a. Do you feel that you deal with the worse elements of homelessness?

**Section III: Sources of Knowledge/learning.**

- I. How has your academic/professional/training background helped you to understand homelessness? (Theoretical knowledge)
- II. How has the way you see homelessness changed since you have started doing your job?
  - a. Prompts: What have you learnt of your experiences as an outreach worker?
- III. What do you learn from the relationship with your clients? How has your relationship with clients changed? (Experience-based knowledge)

**APPENDIX 3 HAS BEEN REMOVED**

#### Appendix 4: Description of each area of work.

##### Rear-Line

1. Director of Programmes: These HPs do not have much contact with clients. They are in charge of more managerial, funding and administrative activities. They might interview clients and have contact with them, but not on a day-to-day basis. Their duties are more to do with management. However, most of them, have a background doing front-line work with clients. (In this group I also include project managers whose work is office-based)
2. Policy officers: They perform “a lobbying and policy advocacy role.” (Warnes et al., 2003, p.141). Their tasks are to conduct, commission and/or publish research in order to: (1) raise awareness of the causes and nature of homelessness, (2) find innovative solutions to it, (3) raise housing standards (3) share good practice, through informing, supporting and creating dialogue with service providers, policy makers, and housing professionals.
3. Press Officers, media Officers: They are in charge of the design and coordination of political and public campaigns. Only four of the whole set of voluntary organizations that have participated in the study have this type of professionals. Political campaigns consist on lobbying and campaigning work aimed at politicians, local authorities and other decision-makers. Public campaigns also seek to influence the public, changing and informing public opinion.

##### Front-line

1. Project Workers in hostels, day centres and semi-independent housing. This group includes both training and development workers and key/support workers. In general, being a hostel/day centre worker involves, helping to assess and meet the support needs of the residents.

2. Training and development workers: They are teachers that train clients in life skills and literacy skills. They work to provide opportunities for rough sleepers and housed homeless to move away from the homeless culture through exploring new skills and interests.
3. Key/support workers: They work in supported housing where they provide “different levels of support, independence and companionship.” (Warnes et al., 2003, p.138). They are personally assigned to each client to help them getting into other services (e.g. drug rehabilitation programmes, training), they accompany them to the doctor, talk with social workers, doctors and psychiatric nurses from the NHS.
4. Resettlement workers: They work with clients in hostels/day centres, supporting them and helping them to resettle at home. They support in adjusting to a settled form of living, finances, bills and coping with boredom.
5. Project manager: in hostels, day centres, semi-structured housing. They manage the teams of HPs, do administrative and managerial tasks, also develop some of the above activities, and have done it full time in the past.
6. Mental health drug misuse workers: Members of the specialist mental health team who see residents in order to give services to them and to ensure that they take full advantage of statutory services (i.e. NHS). Also members from the specialist substance use team. They do sessions in day centres, hostels or drop-in centres. Both can also work within an outreach team.
7. Outreach workers: These professionals work with rough sleepers on the streets in the early morning and at night. They operate from day centres or from the head quarters of the organization. Their aims are “ (i) to identify people who begin to sleep rough as quickly as possible and to link them to services; (ii) to find, engage and persuade long-term rough sleepers to accept help and move into accommodation; and (iii) to meet some of the most pressing needs of long-term rough sleepers on the streets until they can be persuaded to move into accommodation.” (Warnes et al., 2003, 137)

**APPENDIX 5 HAS BEEN REMOVED**

**Appendix 6: Interview codes.**

1. Advocates
2. General
3. Home
4. Homeless Identity
5. Imposition of Agenda
6. In Need
7. Individualistic Explanations
8. Industry
9. Label
10. Paradigmatic ex.
11. Potential
12. Professionalism
13. Reductionistic Services
14. Support
15. The 'Normal Us'
16. The Homelessness Feelings
17. The Socio-Psychological
18. Vicious Cycle

## **Appendix 7: Focus groups codes**

1. Re-direction/re-building of life
2. Alternative
3. Bridging
4. Co-operation/integrated approach
5. Critical consciousness
6. Dependency/independency
7. Drugs
8. Engagement
9. Feeling of home
10. Hidden homelessness
11. Inexistence/as reality
12. Label
13. Perpetuating ontology/deceitful approach
14. Object of political fashion
15. Existence
16. Ontology/identity
17. Other/outsider
18. Personalization/humanization
19. Policy
20. Professionalism/expertise
21. Responding to the government
22. Responding to the homeless sector
23. Responding to the public
24. Responsibility
25. Secure accommodation
26. Self re-connection
27. Sense of group membership
28. Spatial/home agency
29. Support
30. Targets
31. Translator
32. Vicious circle

