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Translating Religious Conversions to Social Conversions; Money and Social Identity for the Homeless

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Introduction

Walking around Pretoria, the bureaucratic capital of South Africa, one inevitably meets the so-called "street children." Most of them are young black males and old enough to wonder why they have been called "children" instead of young adults.[1] Their backgrounds vary; no two stories of how they came to hustle the streets are the same. Unlike the homeless in Prague or Boston, they are active in asking for change. You can see them in front of gas stations, supermarkets, or fast food restaurants asking you to buy them something to eat: a loaf of bread or a carton of milk. They tell you their stories of poverty, familial strife, and gang life in exchange for sympathy, and their dreams and aspirations for immediate help or something in a future encounter. They are certainly not lazy. After talking to many of them, I often hear stories about their day-to-day lives. I share

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in their excitement when they have been given an opportunity to make some money as a temporary worker. But when I hear the details, it becomes obvious that their social status and vulnerabilities are being exploited as a source of extremely cheap labor.

Unemployment and homelessness are rampant in South Africa (approximately 100,000—200,000 homeless; City of Tshwane 2015, 3). It has become all too easy to give what coins we have in our pockets and feel good about ourselves; an easy way to reduce dissonance from the disparities in standards of living. And yet, the very act is one of power that conveys a vertical relationship in social standing. It sustains a way of day-to-day, hand-to-mouth, living that is just enough for the homeless to remain ignored and hidden from the state. More importantly, it is a consistent reminder of the systemic lack of supporting structures. Reflecting on my encounters, I wondered: could the study of religious conversions be translated into a framework of social conversions, from homeless to home? This chapter is an attempt to make this translation.

It begins by mapping the two dominant paradigms in the study of religious conversions within the scope of "lived religion" and their respective applicability for thinking about the homeless and their social conversion. I then consider various approaches to homelessness and take a more focused look at the 2015 report on homelessness from the city of Tshwane (i.e. Pretoria) in South Africa. The emphasis on social and cultural factors in the report resonates with the contemporary paradigm of religious conversions (Hood Jr. et al. 2009) and lived religion (Ammerman 2014; Orsi 2002). Here, the significance of identity, social support, and continuities in meaning are highlighted. I argue that, for the homeless, changes in identity, their modes of being, and continuities in meaning are circumscribed by the role of money and the cultures of discourse at the individual and social level. In other words, social conversions for the homeless are connected to the relationship between the transformative potential of money and their identity within the city.

"Sudden" versus "Gradual" Conversions and their Applicability to Homelessness

The social scientific study of religious conversions can readily be situated within the broader context of "lived religion" in everyday life. Going beyond normative accounts of what *should* or *ought* to be the case within religious living, the emphasis has been on "everyday practice" and everyday people (McGuire 2008). In contrast to "popular religion" which notes daily practice on the margins outside of religious organization, "lived religion" includes such practices and experiences but also pays attention to practices within religious and sacred spaces (Ammerman 2014). In other words, and as stressed in the introduction, "lived religion" places its focal point on social agents and actors with regard to their experiences, interpretations, expressions and extractions of meaning from various religious traditions and worldviews (Hall 1997; Orsi 2002). Not only does such a perspective highlight experience but it further provides a contextual understanding of religious practices in relation to cultural variations, life experiences, and various circumstances in which religion is lived (Orsi 2002). In this regard, the study of religious conversions and its classical emphasis on personal transformative experiences as well as its contemporary emphasis on sociological and cultural factors configure within the purview of "lived religion."

The social scientific study of religious conversions has conventionally been considered in view of two paradigms. The classical paradigm engages the scenario of "sudden" conversions, which, historically, has been heavily intertwined with the study of religious experiences and their transformative potential. Based on a "Protestant understanding of Paul's religious experience on the road to Damascus" (i.e. the "Pauline experience" Richardson 1985; cf. Cutten 1908; Pratt 1920), many of the earliest psychologists of religion noted the transformative capacity of sudden religious experiences and sought to investigate its preconditions as well as the constituent factors involved in precipitating psychological change. This research led to the pronouncement of negative emotions such as guilt and self-deprecation and their roles in the conversion experience. The emphasis on emotionality and embodiment has been noted within the framework

of "lived religion" as well (Ammerman 2016). Early psychologists have sought to investigate the role of negative emotions within the conversion experience. Edwin D. Starbuck, back in 1899, reported that two-thirds of adolescent conversions were triggered by a deep sense of sin or guilt. William James, from his 1985/1902 Gifford Lectures, distinguished between "once-born" and "twice-born" individuals in which the latter consists of those compelled to convert via crisis. James B. Pratt (1920) noted that many conversions were preceded by feelings of unworthiness, self-doubt, and self-deprecation. These studies further corroborated the James–Starbuck thesis: religious conversions are precipitated by crisis and the burden of negative emotions which are released by sudden religious experiences providing positive relief.[2] The thesis recognized "conversion as a functional solution to the burdens of guilt and sin" (Hood Jr. et al., 212–214).

The classical "sudden" conversion paradigm, in terms of the James–Starbuck thesis, does not provide much assistance in thinking about converting the homeless to home. However, it does touch on its inverse: home to homeless. Just as lived religion involves a consideration of one's emotionality and embodiment, lived homelessness also must take them into account. The emphasis on negative emotions engages the various reasons why those on the streets of South Africa decide to try and make it in a bigger city but end up homeless. During the holiday season, I bumped into a 30-year-old man who needed money to go home to one of the northern provinces. I asked him why he did not stay there, look for work, and be with his family. He told me that if he did, he would eventually steal from them; it was better to be homeless and make his own way on the streets than steal from family and live with the guilt and anger. According to Wan-Ning Bao et al. (2000), the homeless come from various backgrounds and circumstances; not all of them have been disenfranchised because of poverty but have elected to get away from conditions of an abusive home—physically, sexually, or emotionally. This evokes a broad range of negative emotions that may motivate a shift from home to homelessness.

Within the classical paradigm, forms of guilt and emotional turmoil have been linked to unpleasant childhood memories that are sustained over long periods of time. In other words, the lived religion of sudden

conversions is associated with a gradual development and sustainment of negative emotions which lead to an episode of conversion. Chana Ullman (1982) in her study comparing converts to different religious traditions with non-converts[3] found that converts reported a greater degree of "emotional stress during childhood and adolescence" and held "negative perceptions of their parents and a higher degree of absence of the father." Converts also reported more "traumatic events and were more likely to feel that their childhood was unhappy" in comparison to the non-convert sample. Furthermore, converts were more likely to report stress and anxiety, as opposed to a "cognitive quest," as an important factor in their conversion (Ullman 1989, 187–189). In overview, Ray Paloutzian, James Richardson, and Lewis Rambo note that psychological studies of religious conversions (Starbuck 1899; Kirkpatrick 1997, 1998; Ullman 1982, 1989; Zinnbauer and Pargament 1998) raise the possibility that "those who have had difficulties during childhood or adolescence (such as family stress or an insecure childhood attachment) or suffer from feelings of personal inadequacy are prone to conversion because personal or behavioral needs are not satisfactorily met" (Paloutzian et al. 1999, 1060). In this sense, there may be parallels with reasons for leaving home, issues within families, and deciding to make their own way but ending up homeless. That is, the classical paradigm and their psychological investigations into religious conversions not only provide avenues into embodiment and emotionality within lived religion but it also provides insight into various emotional complexities that contribute and sustain lived homelessness.

The contemporary paradigm, in contrast, has taken a sociological perspective and emphasizes the "gradual" longitudinal conversion process. Moreover, while lived religion seemingly highlights individual religiosity, an implicit relationship between individual and the social continues to make itself evident. That is, Durkheim's concept of "*Homo duplex*" emerges with regard to lived religion and individual religiosity in that we are not only individually particular but also constituted by culture and society, which establish the parameters for religious action and its embodiment (McGuire 2008, 13). Research in the contemporary paradigm is primarily sociologically oriented and focuses on "new religious and spiritual movements, many of non-Western origin or influence," Christian

fundamentalist groups and deconversion scenarios. Gradual conversions, moreover, are not defined by any singular experience, as it tends to be the case with the classical paradigm, but "an active agent, seeking self-transformation" and converting over time (Hood Jr. et al. 2009, 215). Starbuck, in addition to his work on religious experiences, discussed "voluntary conversions" as a "gradual pursuit of a religious ideal" (p. 212) and Pratt stated that gradual conversion experiences "were less dramatic, required intellectual seeking, and were hypothesized to be more genuinely characteristic of conversion" than the classical paradigm (p. 207).[4] Within this scope, the contemporary paradigm emphasizes cultural contexts, interpersonal dynamics, and adopts a diachronic perspective of religious conversions as lived religion. In this regard, the same can be considered for social conversions of the homeless.

The contemporary paradigm potentially sheds additional light on social conversions from homeless to home, and the transition from home to homeless may be supplemented by the classical paradigm while benefiting from the emphasis on sociocultural factors in gradual conversions. If the classical paradigm of "sudden" conversion is adopted for the transition from homeless to home, it places an emphasis on singular experiential acts, events, or episodes that would motivate change—either by personal revelation or some act of charity. This view does little in addressing structural causes of homelessness and its lived experience.

The study of gradual conversions dispels with the focus on crisis and existential drama as precursors to religious conversion[5] and highlights environmental circumstances. In terms of social conversions, this negates the necessity of a "crisis" during one's homelessness to motivate a drive to no longer be homeless. That is, there is no need for a prerequisite transformative event or episode to suddenly motivate the drive to change one's circumstances. As noted above, in Pretoria, many are quite active in trying to better their conditions. This shifts the focus from asking the person to change "before the situation can change" (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014, 170) and places the emphasis on structural dimensions of homelessness and the navigation of one's agency within them. Prior to delving further into how the contemporary paradigm of religious conversion can be translated into a framework of social conversion for the homeless, it is useful to consider how homelessness has been addressed.

Approaches to Homelessness

The homeless, without delving into issues of definition and quantification, can be said to connect with society through their marginalized identities and navigated spaces that blur the boundaries between market place and home. However, their conceptualization often dictates how they are approached in policy; that is, conceptualization determines practice. If the homeless are characterized as deviants, then the approach is correctional. They are "threats or potential threats to the public order." If they are conceived as victims, then the approach is rehabilitative. They are bereft of agency at the peril of the "deficient conditions of street life." When considered as citizens, then rights-based approaches come to the fore and they become the marginalized and discriminated, whose rights have been denied or "unsecured by society" (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014, 170–171). The homeless are therefore subject to being framed in a particular way rather than being the authors of framing their circumstances (p. 170). In other words, lived homelessness is subject to the conceptual violence of stereotypes and classification which subsequently dictates how they are treated and approached in policy.

A tremendous amount of literature has been produced regarding what the best approach is in addressing homelessness and how it can and should be implemented at the micro, meso, and macro levels. At the micro level, the literature addresses street conditions, the needs of the homeless, or criminalization policies designed with the intention of removing homelessness from public sight. The meso level considers their families and communities while the macro level addresses state as well as historical and economic factors (p. 171). In the 2015 research report "Pathways out of Homelessness," the city of Tshwane sought to include "all people living on the streets" by drawing on four differentiations of homelessness: Economic, Situational, Chronic, and "Near" (Hartsthorne 1992). It further identifies three dimensions of homelessness and their "pre-phase" conditions. The first is "psycho-social-spiritual," which is characterized as "social and emotional disconnectedness." The second is "physical," which notes the material circumstances of being "homeless or near homeless." The third is "economic" and engages issues around

"employment and underemployment" (City of Tshwane 2015, 57). For the city of Tshwane, five priorities emerge at the end of the report: (1) diverse housing options; (2) economic opportunity; (3) psychosocial and health infrastructure; (4) advocacy, education and awareness-raising; and (5) institutional infrastructure. In composition, the report combines the three levels (micro, meso, and macro) of approach as well as the three characterizations of the homeless as deviants, victims, and citizens with rights to the city. The City of Tshwane report would thus seem to embrace the gradual conversion paradigm by considering various social and cultural factors that have inhibited the homeless from transitioning to a home. Therefore, the issue of homelessness could benefit further from the significant factors that have facilitated gradual conversions and instances when deconversions have occurred.

Conversion and Lived Religion: Lived Homelessness

In Nicole Toulis's 1997 monograph of religious conversions among black Jamaican immigrant women in England, she brings attention to a societal crisis of racism in English society-at-large which affected the agency of black persons. She discussed the continuous negotiations they made with their social surroundings and the stereotyped impositions of identity. In many ways, this echoes the concerns of the homeless. They, too, are in the midst of a societal crisis characterized by the failure to provide sufficient support and opportunities. As a social category, the homeless are faced with negotiating their social surroundings and stereotypical impositions of identity from daily pedestrians on the street as well as top-down policies that guide organizations. In other words, the lived religion of marginalized identities parallels the lived homelessness of "street children" in South Africa.

In her monograph, Toulis describes three "sudden conversion" scenarios of elderly women but notes that "the gains made by conversion are not necessarily permanent and can easily be lost" (1997, 134). While the religious experience motivated each of them to affirm a Christian identity

and respectively join a church community, the lack of social support and racial marginalization within these communities prompted them to leave. For the three elderly women, despite their commitment and affirmation to being Christian, they did not believe in the community after their conversion experience. Their lived religion thereby required "continuous religious work" to nurture, sustain, and safeguard their Christian identity against "threatening social forces" in a reality they were negotiating (p. 162). This "religious work" was not effective until they joined a Pentecostal church that enabled and empowered them to "mediate" the impositions of stereotyped identities in being "black" "Jamaican" "women" through an affirmed "Christian" identity and its respective discourses. The conversions were, according to Toulis, a "rejection of an identity inscribed on the skin for one inscribed on the heart" and the reconstruction of a "black" identity, for these women, could only be accomplished "if one continuously affirms belief" and a Christian identity (pp. 206–210).

For the homeless, the dynamics of identity and religious conversion takes on a different yet parallel consideration. Instead of an identity inscribed on the skin, the homeless have an imposed identity inscribed on their disheveled appearance, owed to living conditions and the spaces they occupy. In order for a rights-based approach to be effective, a shift from an identity based in physical and psychological conditions of being homeless to an identity of dignity and holding rights to the city that allows social support. In the context of lived homelessness—as it is for lived religion—any social conversion is not fully realized without an affinity for a community in which social and emotional support is critical in stabilizing a dignified identity with a sense of belonging to the city.

Social Support, Identity, and Money

Within the contemporary paradigm of religious conversions, Max Heirich's study (1977) noted that conversion among Catholic Pentecostals was most likely to occur with persons who were introduced to the group by friends or spiritual advisors who "facilitated the gradual use of new religious attributions in the process of conversions" (Hood Jr. et al. 2009,

229). By contrast, those who were not introduced to the group by friends or spiritual advisors failed "to acquire the appropriate language (attributions or rhetoric) of conversion." Similarly, David Snow and Richard Machalek (1984, 182) "found that the vast majority (from 59 percent to 82 percent) of Pentecostals, evangelicals, and Nichiren Shoshu Buddhists they investigated were recruited through social networks." The three women discussed by Toulis were also introduced to the Pentecostal church by friends or relatives after their disillusionment with past churches. In other words, a gradual conversion experience is facilitated through other persons (cf. Galanter 1980; Snow et al. 1980, 1983; Stark and Bainbridge 1980; Straus 1979) even if a sudden religious experience prompted the conversion.

The significance of social support highlights a relationship of trust between persons and the broader network. Intensive interaction among group members have been said to increase the likelihood of affective bonding, which not only satisfies various "personal needs" (Paloutzian 2005, 340) but also enables one to reduce any cognitive dissonance that may have occurred during conversion. As social bonds continue to develop, through practice and participation, the religious postulates of a tradition are also gradually accepted. Among converts to Jewish Orthodoxy, attitudes and commitment to the Jewish people increased as their scores on a "Christian belief scale" decreased (Bockian et al. 2005). The homeless in South Africa are aware that shelters are temporary and transitional and that improving their economic status is the permanent solution (City of Tshwane 2015, 38). Moreover, "only a few sit and talk to each other and fewer still [live] together." The homeless community is united in identity and some "have formed a loose bond with another person also living on the streets simply because they share the same sleeping space" (p. 37). In this regard, the homeless also have ephemeral relationships with one another and arguably an even more precarious relationship with shelters and various outreach programs.

The lack of consistent and sustained social support, however, can lead to scenarios of deconversion. For the homeless, this entails going back to old habits that have developed from living on the streets. In religious deconversions, Maria Pia Di Bella has noted how "poor peasants who convert to Pentecostalism" in southern Italy are first marginalized "from

their community of origin" when they decide to leave the Catholic Church and are marginalized again within the Pentecostal group "if they do not speak in tongues," which is often interpreted as a "gift from the Holy Ghost" (2003, 89). This creates a distinction between those who are "saved" and those who are not (the elect and the non-elect) within the congregation. Di Bella states, "members who make no effort to receive the gift are ostracized, and those who do not receive it, despite many efforts, are pitied" (p. 89).

Economically, this form of logic is found within neoliberal arguments about the poor and "pulling one's self up from the bootstraps." Similar economic arguments against the individual that lead to ostracization or pity often detract from addressing systemic failures and emphasize a change in individuals before a change in the environment that enabled their conditions. When social support systems and outreach programs fail the homeless beyond temporary solutions, they invoke the common motif of being "debarred from paradise" found in religious deconversion narratives which are characterized by a sense of disillusionment and abandonment.[6] This has been an issue noted throughout the City of Tshwane report, particularly the continuous harassment by the police and private security, a topic that emerged in my own conversations with the homeless as well. In the Tshwane report, a migrant from Ethiopia states: "They come here. It's very cold at nights and the only blanket you have, they come and take it to be burned or put in their car. Sometimes they hit you, and when they see you are bleeding they can't take you to the police station. They release you because they already hurt you. Many times we get injuries from the metro police and the normal police" (p. 36).

While the issue of police brutality and harassment can be addressed by changing the culture of police departments and attitudes of the police, the sustainment of social support systems and outreach programs are invariably dependent on sources of funding. The combined top-down and bottom-up approach adopted in the City of Tshwane report consistently notes the importance of institutional assistance to support and develop existing programs that concentrate on the homeless. The role of money is therefore critical. One of the recurring themes throughout the report is the necessity of government, non-profit organizations, and businesses to allocate a budget for addressing issues around sustainment: for

social development, healthcare, housing, and economic opportunities (2015, 59). Thus, despite a combined approach, the report is still top-down heavy in its advocacy of money expenditure.

The report does discuss how the homeless look to various means to make and negotiate money. This includes begging on the streets and developing networks for bartering and trading (which at times involves sex work) as well as temporary work through collecting recyclables—looking through garbage bins for cardboard, plastic, or glass to sell—or washing cars, working construction sites, filling taxis, and selling illegal substances (p. 39). The utility of money among the homeless is also negotiated by various outreach programs that provide free meals and the availability of drugs which function as appetite suppressants (ibid.). In this regard, the relationship between individual and society can be conveyed through the dynamics of money which simultaneously serves as a "source of our vulnerability and the practical symbol allowing each of us to make an impersonal world meaningful" (Hart 2010, 158).

A top-down approach to the allocation of money gives primacy to various organizations and institutions. This creates further dependence on such programs and renders the homeless as passive agents, which reinforces an identity of homelessness. Programs that have helped the homeless with money, "assuming with cash they would feel better about their situation, showed that the experimental group had a slightly more favorable life satisfaction and enjoyed their family contacts more than the control group" (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014, 164).

Although the differences were not significant, the long-term effects of a sustained basic income for the homeless have not been thoroughly investigated. A basic income would certainly provide the homeless with a greater sense of agency and responsibility. However, a source of income should not be a substitute at the expense of various forms of social support and outreach for the homeless. Both bottom-up and top-down approaches for monetary assistance to the homeless should be adopted. Concentrating on one over the other prevents any meaningful change for the homeless to identify as dignified persons with rights and agency to the city. Lived homelessness therefore notes the connection between money, social support, identity, and meaning.

Conversion and Continuities of Meaning

One of the prominent features to emerge from the study of religious conversions and lived religion is the continuation of meaning systems. A conversion or deconversion may include an affirmation or denunciation of a religious identity, a religious community, or an accepted range of religious postulates and axioms. However, it does not necessarily entail a fundamental change or loss in meaning systems or prior beliefs. A convert does not merely take on a new set of beliefs but they are new insofar as they are understood from the convert's established beliefs (Norris 2003). "From within a pre-existing worldview and identity, a convert chooses his or her adopted religion because it corresponds with ideas or wishes that have arisen within an existential psychological context" (p. 179). This alludes to sustained habits of one's embodiment and three aspects of continuities in meaning: a correspondence with "pre-existing ideals and wishes, performance choices based on pre-existing cultural conditioning, and understanding and experience colored by embodied association" (p. 179).

For example, Mary Ann and Van Reidhead (2003) point to such continuities in their account of a woman who converted to Catholicism from Jehovah's Witness and then decided to become a nun in the Benedictine monastic order. They note that the convert discussed the "profound ongoing impact of her Jehovah's Witness upbringing on her understanding of religion" (Buckser and Glazier 2003, xviii). That is, despite her conversion experience and decision to become a nun, she maintained a sense of meaning and beliefs from her experience in the Jehovah's Witness tradition.

Such continuities of meaning in lived religion are also applicable to the homeless, especially those who have been chronically homeless for long durations. Even if social support and outreach programs can bring those living on the streets into a shelter or assistance program, the homeless will have embodied and enculturated habits of thought, morals, values, and beliefs due to being homeless. Herein lies the question of transitioning to another identity within the broader social landscape.

Given the dynamics of variable conversion scenarios, it is worth asking the question about what it is that changes in conversion. Studies of gradual conversions have noted impermanence and the phenomena of converting to different religions several times over (Hood Jr. et al. 2009, 217). This does not entail that gradual conversions fail to lead to cognitive changes, but it highlights that sustained participation is necessary for a gradual change to occur in the adoption of a community's postulates, axioms, values, and more. Psychologists of religion have noted that "significant modifications of self-definition, self-confidence, and sense of purpose" can occur over time, but dramatic changes in personality or self-transformation have been subject to question (Paloutzian et al. 1999, 1065).

To bring this into sharper focus, the types of belief that are subject to change can be considered. What levels of meaning and personality are impacted in conversion? According to Paloutzian et al. (1999, 1066), personality is no longer restricted in its definition to "traits" but is considered as "a blend of activity on three levels." This has allowed research on personality to expand beyond its classical conception through the "Big Five." The "three levels" model accommodates psychoanalytic theory, cognitive behaviorism, and humanistic approaches. The first and most basic level of personality is characterized by the Big Five.[7] There has been very little evidence to suggest any change at this level of personality in both "sudden" and "gradual" religious conversions.[8] What does change at this level is the form of discursive expression that the traits will take (i.e., in a way consistent with the new religion), not the traits themselves (Paloutzian 2005, 332). That is, the way one expresses one's personality can change but the personality itself, in terms of the Big Five, does not.

The primary changes that occur during conversion or deconversion fall within mid and global levels of personality and meaning. The mid level includes the broad and narrower purposes one strives towards (e.g. "to minister to other people in order to bring them into this family of faith"), specific goals (e.g. "to do my job well as an evidence of faith"), values, and attitudes expressed in terms of novel "ways one may wish to be" (e.g., "I want to be a good Muslim"; Paloutzian 2005, 332; cf. Emmons 1999) as well as the feelings and attitudes towards behavior (Hood Jr. et al. 2009, 212).

The most profound change that occurs during conversions is at the global level, which includes "overarching life guides such as self-definition and identity" (e.g. "Before I was a Christian, now I am a Jew"), "overall purpose" (e.g. to fulfill God's mission), a "new life narrative that highlights the importance of this turning point in the story and its consequences, and that which serves as the ultimate concern (e.g. God or other supreme entity)" (Paloutzian 2005, 332). In this regard, the global level includes "self-defining personality functions (purpose in life, meaning, and identity)" (Hood Jr. et al. 2009, 212). The changes that occur at these levels are further noted by changes in, or the adoption of, discourse and rhetoric "that allow them to see themselves and the world transformed" (p. 228; cf. Gerlach and Hine 1970).

Changes in discourse have also impacted cultural orientations of self in relation to perceptions and interpretations of reality. For example, in New Guinea, Robert Priest (2003) discussed how the incorporation of the term "sin" changed the "direction of blame" for Christian converts. He states that converts have come to "see themselves as culpable for actions they previously would have attributed to witchcraft or spirits" (Buckser and Glazier 2003, xvi; cf. Priest 2003) and that "the idea of self as sinner is presented as an emergent understanding" of the "word of *Apajui*," which roughly translates as the "word of God" (Priest 2003, 96).[9] Roger Ivar Lohmann (2003) further states that conversion in New Guinea "is not a matter of rethinking the nature of reality, but of "turning the belly," changing the individual's relationship with the spiritual being who direct his or her volition." According to Lohmann, "the old spirits have not ceased to exist for Asabano; they are merely ignored." He argues that "true, voluntary religious conversion [should] be measured in terms of this change in relationships with spiritual beings" (2003, 109).

The changes that occur at the mid and global level of personality are changes in goals, purposes, values, and definitions of self which come to be represented in discourse and the selective adoption of particular practices (Anderson 2003). Although changes in discourse may indeed reflect changes at the mid and global levels, a change in the use of language alone does not necessarily entail a change in meaning or belief. That is, language alone is insufficient to determine a change in beliefs (Bae 2017), which is also to reconfirm the sustained continuities in meaning and

belief among converts. That is, conversions and changes at the mid and global levels of meaning are not total transformations of personality. Nonetheless, the introduction of new forms of discourse, avenues of meaning, and consistent usage does provide alternative vehicles for conceptualizing one's identity, goals, and sense of purpose. Changing the language among the homeless and policy makers is thus one among several factors that can be addressed in order to have a significant impact on eradicating homelessness in the city. As Simon Coleman (2003) noted, conversion, in this sense, can be considered in terms of a change in metaphorical frameworks by which people understand and discuss their personal identities, social experiences as well as their sense of belonging.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to translate the study of religious conversions as lived religion into a framework of social conversions for the homeless. Beginning with the applicability of the two paradigms in the study of religious conversions, the classical paradigm highlighted the potential significance of negative emotions in transitions from home to homeless while the contemporary paradigm emphasized the importance of sustained social support in conversions from homeless to home. Not only did the latter engage the necessity of continuous support and stability for the homeless but it further noted the significance of meaning and identity within this dynamic. The focus on social support highlighted the importance of money and the allocation of funds in top-down approaches based on budgetary needs of organizations and institutions as well as bottom-up approaches in allocating a basic income to the homeless. The significance of money was then related to the importance of meaning and identity. A top-down approach further instills an identity of being homeless and cultivates dependence on impersonal organizations. A bottom-up approach, by contrast, enabled personal agency to navigate the city and build up familial and social relations. In this sense, money was related to the development of a meaningful identity as well as the potential for deconversions. That is, among the homeless, the point of relapsing into previous habits and issues of identity—rooted in a sense of being socially

isolated and living in marginalized spaces—is intimately tied to the process of developing an identity as a dignified person with rights to the city. In other words, the ways in which money is distributed *for* the homeless and the language *about* the homeless impacts the agency and language *of* the homeless and circumscribes how the social construction of their identity unfolds.

Notes

1. The 2015 report from the City of Tshwane notes that the biggest echelon of the homeless, 33.4 percent, is the group aged between 20 and 29; the second (21.4 percent) was those 65 or older (2015, 62).
2. In a study of 2174 cases of adolescent conversions, Elmer T. Clark (1929) reported that one-third (32.9 percent) of them were "sudden" and precipitated by fear or anxiety. 41 percent of these conversions happened during revivals, which were assumed to be high in emotional content.
3. Converts to Jewish Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Bahai, and Hare Krishna (40 total) in contrast to 30 religiously affiliated non-converts. The study controlled for sociodemographic variables such as age and education, excluded any conversions motivated by marriage, and took into account high and low degrees of religious commitment characterized by attendance in religious services and voluntary participation in religious activities.
4. The study of religious experiences that once accompanied the classical paradigm has since evolved with modern technology, and inquiry has been extended into meditation and prayer, temporal lobe epilepsy, near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, and drug-induced religious experiences. Moreover, the debates about religious experiences have taken on the characteristics of the nature versus nurture debate in discussing whether there is a perennial, cross-cultural universal, dimension to religious experiences which stands in contrast to the constructivist position that highlights the cultural matrices and constructed realities that distinctively shape personal lives in the context of lived religion.
5. The emphasis on crisis has been noted to be a predominantly Protestant Christian phenomenon and not necessarily applicable to conversions to other religions; Larry Poston (1992), in his study of conversion to Islam in western contexts, notes that the emotional and crisis-precipitated conversion scenarios in Christianity were not common among converts to

Islam. (Cf. Gorusch 1988; Hood Jr. et al. 2009; Paloutzian et al. 1999; Taves 2009). Not all conversions, however, to Protestantism in the United States were precipitated by crisis. In Clark's study (1929), noted above, 66.1 percent of the 2174 participants were characterized by a "steady, progressive, slow growth" without a particular crisis (Hood Jr. et al. 2009, 214). John Seggar and Philip Kunz (1972) also reported the predominance of gradual conversions in their study of Mormon converts and the lack of reported personal problems prior to conversion. Tom W. Smith's study (2006)—with a sample of 1328 American adults—reported that although "approximately half who indicated … a religious or spiritual experience that changed their lives indicated that a personal crisis triggered it" the other half stated that their religious experience was the result of "gradual and routine religious practices" (Hood Jr. et al. 2009, 220–221).

6. Norman Skonovd's 1983 study also found similar results in former members of various fundamentalist Christian groups whose deconversions were prompted by a lack of social support, which led to reflection, disaffection, and withdrawal, followed by a "cognitive reorganization" (Hood Jr. et al. 2009, 233–236).
7. The Big Five traits: Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. These personality traits which represent patterns of one's individuality are considered along a continuum (e.g. introversion to extroversion) rather than an either/or dichotomy. While there are other models of personality, and a range of dissenting views, Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo state that they have used the Big Five model "because of its clarity and succinctness in documenting a set of fairly stable traits that comprise elemental personality structure" (1999, 1066; cf. Digman 1990; McCrae 1992). McCrae and Costa Jr. (1997) have argued that the Big Five model and personality structures are universal. In addition to the established utility of the Big Five on Americans (US), while remaining aware of linguistic variability and control for consistency, they also investigate German, Portuguese, Hebrew, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese samples to make their claim of universality. In other words, the Big Five is suggested to be a useful measure for investigating personality structures across cultures, although further scrutiny and research may be required.
8. Paloutzian et al. (1999, 1065); the authors review evidence from conversion and personality research and state that certain personality types may

seek particular new religious groups which attract and reinforce those types within the culture of the group. Moreover, the Big Five is said to develop through adolescence and young adulthood before stabilizing between the ages of 25 and 30 and remaining "more or less fixed afterwards" (Paloutzian 2005, 332; cf. Caspi 2000; Costa Jr. and McCrae 1994; McCrae 1992; Paloutzian et al. 1999).

9. Numakuk, in her forties, says: "[When] they announced the word of Apajui, I discovered about myself (*dekagmamawamiajai*) that I was a sinner" (Priest 2003, 96).

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