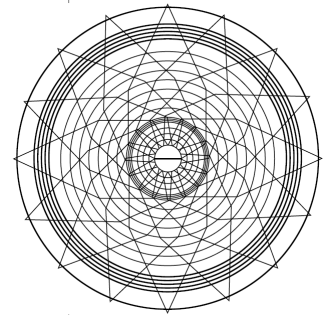


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Critiquing Hegemony and Fostering Alternative Ways of Thinking Homelessness: The Articulation of the Homeless Subject Position in the Greek Street Paper Shedia



CRITIQUING HEGEMONY AND FOSTERING ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF THINKING HOMELESSNESS: THE ARTICULATION OF THE HOMELESS SUBJECT POSITION IN THE GREEK STREET PAPER SHEDIA

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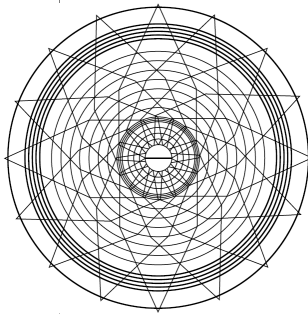
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Abstract:

The article deploys discourse theory to study the construction of the homeless subject position in the Greek street paper shedia. After a brief outline of the relevant parts of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory, the article first reports on the theoretical work that outlines the elements that construct the homeless subject position, keeping in mind the existence of a hegemonic version of this homeless subject position, which is driven by stigma and othering. While mainstream media often replicate this problematic representation, street papers offer counter-hegemonic (and more respectful) articulations of the homeless subject position. Through the analysis of shedia's coverage, three nodal points of the hegemonic discourse on the homeless were identified: the absence of the home as stigma, the lack of agency and the political identity of the denizen. The counter-hegemonic discourse, that can also be found in shedia, comprises three nodal points that are the inverse of those of the hegemonic discourse: the alternative home, the attribution of agency and the political identity of the citizen. Arguably, this case study is relevant because it shows the mirror-image-logics of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic representations, and the significance of using high theory to further our understanding of social practices.

Keywords: homeless, construction, discourse theory, hegemony, street paper, home, house, agency, citizenship



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“Who among us, in his idle hours, has not taken a delicious pleasure in constructing for himself a model apartment, a dream house, a house of dreams?”

—Charles Baudelaire
(quoted in Benjamin, 1939/1999: 227)

1. Introduction¹

Homeless people are very much a part of modern (urban) life. As reported by numerous sources (e.g. United Nations, 2019; FEANTSA, 2019), homelessness is on the rise internationally, driven, inter alia, by the capitalist logic of the housing market that renders accommodation in big cities increasingly inaccessible for moderate incomes. Albeit visible, met regularly on the streets or when traveling with public transport, homeless people, referred to also as *ribauz*, *lumpenproletariat*, untouchables and underclass (Snow and Anderson, 1987: 1336), remain socially invisible, expelled from the social imaginary.

There is an extensive academic literature on homelessness, where approaches oriented towards causes, consequences and solutions have a strong presence—combined with foci on particular societal groups and geographies— as we can see in Levinson’s (2004) two-volume *Encyclopedia of Homelessness*, or in McNamara’s (2008) three-volume *Homelessness in America*. Among these publications, Snow and Anderson’s article “Identity Work among the Homeless” (1987), is one of the early publications that focused on the identities of homeless people, showing the complexities and diversities that characterize this social group, but also doing what still happens only too rarely—listening to homeless people—which also gently counters the significant stigma that this group is confronted with, on an almost permanent basis.

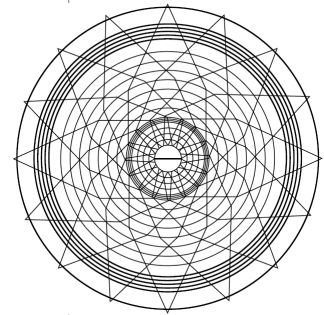
This article takes a similar approach to that of Snow and Anderson, by deploying discourse theory, a theoretical framework that is rooted in political philosophy, to better understand the discursive construction of the homeless subject position in the Greek street paper *shedia*. In particular, Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) discourse theory has the capacity of theorizing the discursive-political struggles that can be found in *shedia*, as this magazine shows the articulation of the disempowering hegemonic discourse on homeless people, attempting to dislocate it and offering an alternative, counter-hegemonic discourse, centred around three nodal points: the home, agency and citizenship. The case of *shedia* shows the importance of studying representations and practices that generate more empowering and humanizing understandings toward particularly vulnerable and stigmatized social groups.

¹ Shorter versions of this article have already been published (see Carpentier, Doudaki 2019; Doudaki, Carpentier 2019).

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2. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory

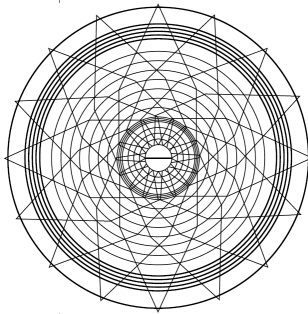
In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) provide an outline of their discourse theory, which is embedded in a post-structuralist and post-Marxist agenda. In contrast to many other approaches in discourse studies, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory uses a macro-textual and macro-contextual (see Carpentier, 2017: 16-17) definition of discourses as frameworks of intelligibility. Discourses thus are seen as necessary instruments that give meaning to the social world, without denying their material dimensions. This also implies that discourses provide subjects with points of identification, which Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 115) call subject positions. Similar to Althusser's notion of interpellation, these subject positions offer subjects the building blocks of their subjectivity, as discursive structures for the construction of the self.

Moreover, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) emphasise the structural openness of discourses, which are always vulnerable to re-articulation, avoiding an ultimate and total closure of meaning. Discourses are often coherent entities, gaining their stability from privileged signifiers—or nodal points—but this stability is never to be taken for granted, as discourses can change, become insignificant or disintegrate. This contingency also impacts on subject positions, that can never totally saturate the subject, as there are always a multiplicity of subject positions at work, and subjects always construct unique identificatory relationships with these subject positions. But at the same time, subject positions exercise considerable power, by providing frameworks of meaning that structure people's subjectivities, how they see, feel, experience and think about others and themselves, and which subjects and groups they like or dislike, consider friends or enemies, or consider even human or not. Of course, subjects do not identify with all discourses and subject positions. In some cases, they will, but in other cases they might distance themselves, remain insensitive or become hostile towards other discourses, which implies, as Van Brussel (2018) has argued, discursive recognition without identification.

Finally, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) also strongly thematise the political dimensions of the discursive, as discourses engage in struggles with each other, over the establishment of hegemony. Not all discursive struggles result in hegemony, as some struggles simply continue without any discourse achieving victory, but in some cases, a discourse manages to gain a dominant position and transform (itself) into a social imaginary that can benefit from the luxury of taken-for-grantedness, normalisation and eventually sedimentation. But in this scenario, as the below example of homelessness will illustrate, even counter-hegemonic discourses are able to contest the hegemonic discourse and offer points of resistance, creating the threat that the once victorious discourse could be removed from its (discursive) throne.

3. Constructions of the homeless and the home

One area where we can see this struggle at work is in relation to the subject position of the homeless person. The homeless is a subject position, contested, fluid,



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contradictory, as well as an object of identification and dis-identification, acceptance and rejection, but still very real in its existence. As a subject position, it is particular, because it is articulated through a series of disempowering signifiers that together form a stigma. The vortex of this stigma generates strong absorptive forces that tend to reduce the individual to this one subject position, ignoring the multiplicity of subject positions that make up a person's subjectivity. This reduction can even be found in (some of) the academic literature on homelessness, which in turn has provoked a series of critical reconsiderations of what is called *homeless identity*, since it is often presented "as constituting a discrete and one-dimensional identity that people avoid or embrace" (Parsell, 2011: 443).

The homeless stigma is simultaneously discursive and material, affective and cognitive, temporal and spatial, dealing with absences and presences, working with selves and others. It is an assemblage of material routines, sleeping places, "*tattered and soiled clothes*" (Snow & Anderson, 1987: 1339-1340), interactions with companions, social workers, police officers, kind or aggressive passers-by, policies aimed at objectivation, disciplining, invisibility, removal and criminalisation, all structured through the absence of one crucial discursive-material component: the home². Snow and Anderson (1987: 1340) describe how central antagonism is to this assemblage of homelessness:

Actual or threatened proximity to them not only engenders fear and enmity in other citizens but also frequently invites the most visceral kinds of responses, ranging from shouts of invective to organized neighborhood opposition to proposed shelter locations to 'troll-busting' campaigns aimed at terrorization.

Even if the subject position of the homeless is 'only' part of the assemblage of homelessness, it still merits our attention, because of its centrality to the operations of the stigma. Furthermore, through this examination, the workings of the hegemonic forces that attempt to construct this subject position through the stigma, objectifying and dehumanising homeless people, denying them access to the signifiers of agency and citizenship, and reducing them to passive denizens, become visible³. Also the resistance against the hegemonic articulation of the homeless, attempting to subjectivise and humanise them(selves), makes this a highly relevant component of the assemblage of homelessness, and important to study.

In the construction of the subject position of the homeless, the absence of the home—and in particular of its material component, what McCarthy (2013: 54 – referring to Swain, 2011) calls "*rooflessness*"—plays a crucial role, both in articulating the subject position and in organising the logics of stigmatisation. Here, we should keep the centrality of the home in Western imaginaries in mind (Felski, 1999/2000). In this imaginary, the home is the house, a material shelter that generates a private sphere for

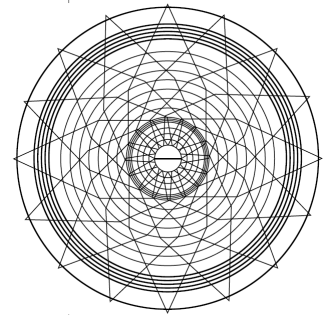
² The home is in itself an assemblage, consisting out of a house, combined with a series of signifying practices and affects, as will be argued later.

³ Denizenship originally (see Hammar, 1989) referred to the (reduced) rights of permanent residents in a foreign country. Here, we use it in the expanded meaning, as the reduced political, civil and social citizenship rights (see Marshall, 1992) within a populace. Turner (2016) calls the latter denizenship type 2.

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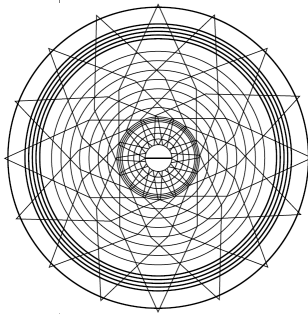


the (bourgeois) nuclear family, a process that Hollows (2008: 10) called the “*familialization of domestic culture*”. The home is also an archive and storage space, containing a multitude of objects, tempting Maleuvre (1999: 115) to the following description: “*it is as an owner of a great many objects that the bourgeois individual inhabits the home. To dwell is to possess. Home and property strike a perfect constellation in the concept of the private collection.*”

The (possession of the) home itself functions as a normative ideal, which is actively imposed as one of the requirements of modern life. Societal groups that are outside this hegemonic discourse (and its materialisation into a home) are, in different degrees, subjected to interventions that aim to align their behaviour with this hegemonic discourse. Powell (2008: 88), for instance, describes how the nomadic life of Roma and Travellers exposes them to societal pressures to “*conform to a sedentary way of life*”. The sedentarist hegemony—with sedentarism defined as “*the system of ideas and practices which serve to normalise and reproduce sedentary modes of existence and pathologise and repress nomadic modes of existence*” (McVeigh, 1997: 9)—not only affects Roma and Travellers, though. Also, the subject position of the homeless is articulated through this anti-nomadist discourse, where the lack of a home is a sign of “*failure and degradation*” (Hughes-Edwards, 2006: 122), and “*representations of homelessness can often work to reaffirm idealized notions of domestic life in which the home is equated with ‘safety and security’ and the streets with ‘fear and danger’*” (Hollows, 2008: 121, with reference to Wardhaugh, 1999: 96).

The central position of the home in Western imaginaries is not without contestations. Two key contestations are important here, as they also have the potential to impact on the stigma articulated with the subject position of the homeless. Morley’s (2000: 47) emphasis on the mobile home as symbolic space (and not so much a place) represents one type of contestation, exemplified by this citation: “*home may not be so much a singular physical entity fixed in a particular place, but rather a mobile, symbolic habitat, a performative way of life and of doing things in which one makes one’s home while in movement.*” Even if there are many—pleasant and unpleasant—ways of organising and experiencing mobile domesticity, the more positive evaluation of mobile domesticity also offers the potential for more benevolent articulations of the homeless subject positions. The second contestation focuses more on the problematisation of the home as the site of disciplining interventions, unequal power relations and violence. Here, Haraway’s (1991: 171-72) description of the home, which allows the questioning of the safety and tranquillity of the (bourgeois) home, can be used as an illustration of this contestation:

Home: Women-headed households, serial monogamy, flight of men, old women alone, technology of domestic work, paid homework, re-emergence of home sweat-shops, home-based businesses and telecommuting, electronic cottage, urban homelessness, migration, module architecture, reinforced (simulated) nuclear family, intense domestic violence.



4. Media constructions of the homeless

There are many locations where the discourses on the homeless subject position circulate, but if we look at mainstream media, homelessness is not a frequently covered issue; when it is addressed, the hegemonic discourse of homelessness is largely reproduced, conveying “*mainstream society’s messages of power, influence, and authority*”, since “[b]y exercising our power to name, we construct a social phenomenon, homelessness, the criteria used to define it, and a stereotype of the people to whom it refers” (Daly, 1996: 9).

The mainstream media coverage of homeless people is aligned with the hegemonic discourse of stigmatisation, as outlined above. Various studies in US television showed that homeless people are portrayed as a “*threat*” to the well-being of society, largely through “*them versus us*” articulations (Whang & Min, 1999a; Shields, 2001). Even when the representations of homeless are not negative, as in the case of the Slovene media that Hrast (2008) studied, they still tend to employ narrow definitions of homelessness and engage in non-critical approaches, picturing state policies and actions as satisfactory and sufficient, thus not motivating societal and political change.

In mainstream media’s coverage, episodic frames dominate, focusing on the tragic death of an anonymous individual or on charity work being done to support homeless people (especially around the Christmas holidays periods) (Howley, 2003: 280; Hodgetts et al., 2005: 45). The processes and signifying practices of othering are evident even in more sympathetic approaches, since the homeless are then reduced to being victims and helpless, dependent for their salvation on society’s benevolence, while the rest of society is assumed to be healthy and powerful (Whang & Min, 1999a). However, as Schneider and her colleagues argue in their study of the Canadian press, “[a]lthough the representation of homeless people as needy and deserving seems positive and sympathetic, both representations work to keep people who are homeless on the margins of society, controlling them, disenfranchising them, and denying them full participation as citizens” (Schneider et al., 2010: 166).

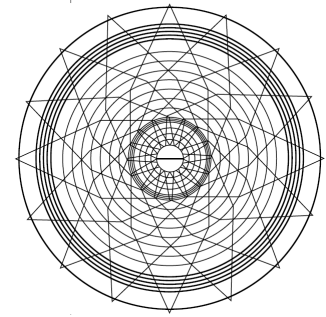
When the homeless are presented as “*lackers*” and “*unwilling victims*” (Zufferey, 2014; Rosenthal, 2000) they tend to be portrayed as “*deserving*” (see e.g., studies in British and Australian media (Platt, 1999; Zufferey, 2014)). Reversely, when they are portrayed as “*slackers*” (Zufferey, 2014; Rosenthal, 2000) or as “*scroungers*” (Platt, 1999: 106) they are usually seen as “*undeserving*”. In the latter cases, responsibility, both in terms of causes and treatment, is attributed to the individual, and disconnected from any structural dimension (Whang & Min, 1999b; Shields, 2001). Within this context, any acknowledgement of the “*collective responsibility for action to address the societal causes of homelessness*” becomes irrelevant (Hodgetts et al., 2005: 46).

Homeless people as subjected to different forms of symbolic violence, and even—to use Tuchman’s (1978) concept—symbolic annihilation. Research on electronic news media in Brazil showed that homeless people are portrayed as not entitled to rights, being at the same time a threat to the rights of others. “*In addition to the violence*

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contained in its rights violation, the homeless population is still subject to symbolic violence concerning its representation”, stemming also from the denial of self-representation (de Melo Resende, 2016: 610).

Furthermore, in mainstream media, ‘experts’ dominate as sources on homelessness. When news about homelessness appears, the homeless remain largely absent, which renders them voiceless (de Melo Resende, 2016; Hodgetts et al., 2005), whereas various authority holders speak on their behalf or (more often) against them. In the cases where homeless people are given the opportunity to speak, their role is usually “*limited to the devalued voice of experience*” (Schneider, 2011: 71), which contributes to the construction of the dominant discourse of the homeless and the perpetuation of their marginalisation and stigmatisation.

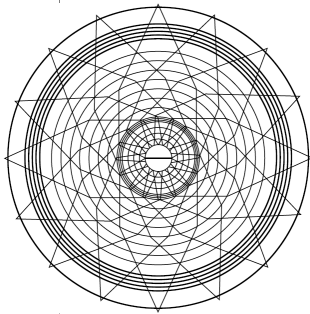
5. Counter voices: Street papers

The mainstream media coverage, and its alignment with the hegemonic discourse of stigmatisation and sedentarism, is not the only media environment that allows for the circulation of the homeless subject position. Some media publications explicitly resist the hegemonic discourse of homelessness, and engage in a discursive struggle over the construction of this subject position. The most poignant example is the so-called street press, which made its appearance in the late 19th century, but has been proliferating from the late 1980s and 1990s onward.

Street papers, circulating most often in the format of magazines or newspapers, demonstrate considerable diversity as to their format, design, content and operational models, but also consistency in regards to their approach and philosophy. They do share a common main purpose, which is supported by their distribution model, and which is to support homeless and other socially excluded people to find their way back into society, through employment (Harter, et al., 2004; Boukhari, 1999; Howley, 2005). Homeless and poor people are the sole vendors of these editions, having the opportunity to gain some income and potentially reconnect with society.

At the same time, street papers have a strong focus on the coverage of homelessness, poverty and social exclusion, broadening the scope of the latter by bringing more inclusive perspectives of their constituents and dimensions, and raising awareness on social inequality and injustice (Harter et al., 2004). By bringing in the voices and perspectives of the homeless and poor people, but also of activists, artists and civil society, street papers broaden the perspective of what homelessness and social exclusion is, and highlight the structural dimensions of causes and effects of the increasing social and economic inequalities. As Howley (2003: 288) argues, “*street papers challenge the basic assumption that capitalism is a viable, let alone an equitable system of human relations*”.

However, there is a need to be careful of univocally celebrating street papers, especially when considering the actual range of opportunities that is offered to vendors to express themselves. Torck (2001) argues that the space given to the vendors’ voices in street papers is generally limited, and restricted to specific writing genres, such as



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personal narratives, a restriction that in fact perpetuates their stereotypical representations. In many cases, street papers' vendors are not part of the management and editorial teams, which raises questions about how participatory and grassroots-based these publications are. Moreover, the search for sustainable (business) models has driven some street papers towards (more mainstream) content of general interest, moving away from content that is advocating for homeless people. For example, the London-based *The Big Issue*, whose model has been considered successful in achieving high sales, has been criticised for focusing too much on news about entertainment and the arts, not exhibiting sufficient interest in issues of homelessness or poverty and in hosting the vendors' original voices (Torck, 2001).

These tensions and debates reflect the different, and to a certain degree, competing visions of the street papers' mission, and relate to their efforts to balance the provision of employment opportunities to the homeless (arguing for a business-oriented model) and the coverage of issues related to social and economic injustice, by hosting the voice of the communities affected (arguing for an alternative media organisation model, promoting participation in management and content production, and non-hierarchical organisation). Still, even when considering this diversity, street papers have the capacity to move away from the hegemonic discourse on homeless people, and offer different, more respectful articulations of this subject position.

6. Countering stigmatisation: A case study of *shedia*

In order to exemplify how these counter-hegemonic articulations work, how an alternative articulation of homeless people is constructed, but also how we can still see (traces of) the hegemonic discourse on the homeless, we will focus in this case study on *shedia* (σχεδία, meaning raft), the only street paper currently operative in Greece. It circulates in the form of a monthly magazine and its first issue was published in February 2013. It is operated through the NGO Diogenes, which was established in 2010, in Athens, with the aim to support, through a wide range of activities, the efforts of homeless and socially excluded people to (re)integrate into the social tissue. *shedia* is a member of the International Network of Street Papers (INSP).

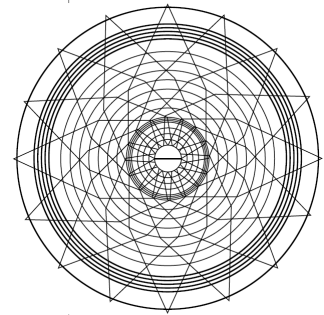
Following the model of street papers around the world, *shedia* is sold by its network of vendors in public places, in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. Its network of vendors includes: homeless, long-term unemployed, people living in poverty, refugees, asylum-seekers, and people struggling with drug addiction. *shedia*'s vision is a fair world, "without poverty, in which each individual has access to a safe home and enjoys the right to live with dignity, as an equal member of our society"⁴ (shedia, 2017). The street paper's main priority is "to support our fellow citizens experiencing poverty and social exclusion in their most extreme forms to support themselves. Activating the people we are addressing and trying to support them, is a fundamental component of our interventionist approach" (shedia, 2017).

⁴ All quotes from *shedia*'s articles and website that are included in this text have been translated from Greek to English.

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Shedia had 186 active vendors in 2017, whereas it has employed 486 vendors since 2013. Its vendors sell the magazine for 4 euros, with 2.7 euros per issue going directly and indirectly (social insurance) to the vendor. In 2017, *shedia* had eight full-time and two part-time employed members of staff, 32 voluntary content contributors, and 31 volunteers supporting *shedia*'s activities. There were also a number of other occasional volunteers and contributors. *shedia*'s revenue comes mainly from sales and subscriptions, and, to a lesser degree, from donations, advertising and fundraising activities. In 2017, its monthly average sales were 23,000 copies (*shedia*, 2017).

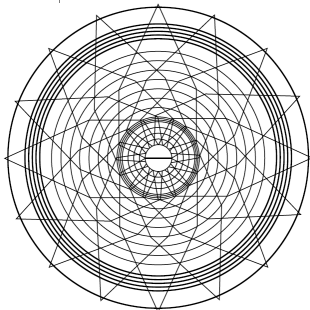
7. Homelessness in *shedia*

For the purposes of our study, we examined the *shedia* publications over a period of one year (July 2017 – June 2018); 11 print issues and 726 pages in total were analysed through textual analysis (Saldaña, 2009). An inductive approach was used to identify the elements and nodal points of the articulation of the subject position of the homeless identity, using the discourse-theoretical notions as sensitising concepts (Blumer, 1969).

As the analysis demonstrated, *shedia*'s signifying practices show the duality of the positions that subjects (individuals, or, in this case, organizations) can take towards discourses, identifying with some, and recognising the existence of others—in the latter case, without identifying with them. In *shedia*, we can find the recognition of the hegemonic discourse on the homeless subject position, but *shedia*'s articles dislocate this discourse in favour of a counter-hegemonic discourse, that moves away from the objectivation of homeless people, focusing on their subjectivation. In *shedia*'s coverage we can see three nodal points of the hegemonic discourse on the homeless at work: the absence of the home as stigma, the lack of agency and the political identity of the denizen. The counter-hegemonic discourse also has three nodal points that are the inverse of those of the hegemonic discourse: the alternative home, the attribution of agency and the political identity of the citizen.

7.1 From the bourgeois home to multiplicity and dignity

The material absence of a home is crucial in the construction of the homeless subject position, and forms one of its nodal points. The *shedia* articles make visible, and critique, the existence of a hegemonic discourse that articulates the home in ways that lead to homeless people's (symbolic) annihilation. At the same time, *shedia* supports an alternative (and counter-hegemonic) discourse on the homeless subject position, proposing broader and more fluid approaches of the home, instructed by the homeless people's living experiences, and more symbolic and affective understandings of the value of home.



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One discursive element of the hegemonic discourse of the home is permanent residence, preferably through ownership, as the benchmark of a successful and socially acceptable life. It is the precondition of the public component of someone's subjectivity and the key to accessing the services and facilities of organised society. Moreover, the hegemonic discourse embraces a dichotomic logic—either one has a permanent residence or not—excluding thus the possibility of a 'homed' person with a 'normal' life to be found without home at some point of his/her life, a reality which *shedia* frequently brings in its texts. As it is recurrently pointed out, "[b]eing without a roof can happen any moment and without having made mistakes" (issue 53, p. 21). In one of the stories about a *shedia* vendor that lost his home, we read:

V.S. is leaving again to work in a ship for 15-20 days. As a sailor, he leaves often shedia [raft] for a while to board a normal ship and to work. When the journey is over, he puts back on the red vest and 'docks' from post to post. A few days ago, he informed us that he will be homeless again and will live on the bench. He had been on the street also in the past. Through the income from shedia and the occasional journeys with ships, he could rent his own place. Lately, however, he could not make ends meet and was found on the street again (issue 53, p. 62).

Another element of the hegemonic discourse is that the home is constructed primarily, or exclusively, as property focusing on its economic value. This construction of home as property, organised around the capitalist logic and the dominant model of the housing market, prioritises its relevance as a source of profit. In *shedia*'s articles, this sedentary discourse is confronted via a harsh critique against the capitalist housing policies, which reject affordable housing (as it is not profitable), and facilities and shelters for the homeless (as they undermine the economic value of the surrounding houses). Frequently, international experiences are presented in *shedia*,⁵ to make the perverse and anti-social consequences of these policies visible, as they nurture increasing inequalities, at both international and intersectional levels, between the privileged and the dis-privileged, and thus increase the levels of homelessness. As it is explained by Chuck D, a member of the rap music band Prophets of Rage (and frontman of Public Enemy), which was created by musicians active in issues of poverty and social inequality, in an interview to the American street paper 'Street Sense', presented in *shedia*:

It is the truth of blacks in America, man. You will find out that 60 percent of your extended family is on the cusp of eviction. You lose your job and then you have unforgiving banks; you have empty buildings and houses — more empty buildings and houses than you have people that are outside of them on the street, that's troubling (issue 54, p. 61).

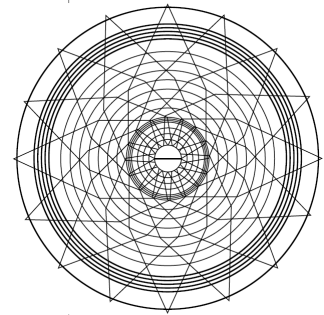
Moreover, the encroachment on public space, and its privatisation, are problematised, where, for instance, urban public spaces become inaccessible for homeless people, while they remain underused by the population at large.

⁵ This is facilitated also by the service of free articles provided by the International Network of Street Papers to its members.

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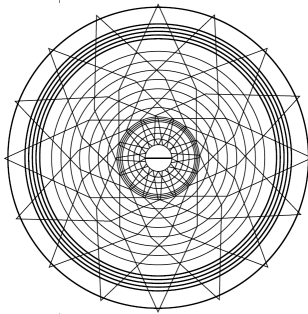
The confrontation of the hegemonic discourse by *shedia* relates also to the questioning of the safety and tranquillity of the (bourgeois) home. Its immobility and fixity is sometimes related to its being a place of isolation and inactivity, or a dangerous and violent place, which forces its inhabitants into homelessness, either due to domestic violence and toxic family relations, or to social/external factors of conflict and war. Eleni's—one of *shedia* vendors'—experience was that of domestic violence:

My childhood was not rosy. I was beaten up heavily by my brother. I even ended up in hospital. My parents would see it but they would not react; I could not stand it anymore and left home, while I also dropped out of school. I was only 12 years old. I had already started taking drugs (issue 55, p. 66).

The *shedia* articles propose an alternative discourse, which still positions the home as a nodal point of this discourse, as it is manifested in its regularly published news on its vendors that either managed to get a house (and “*escape from the street*”), or on the vendors that either lost their house or are on the verge of losing it and are in need of support. One of *shedia*'s big achievements, as it is celebrated in the magazine, is that in the first five years of operation 45 of its vendors managed, “*through their small revenue from shedia to leave homelessness behind and get (rent) their own place*” (issue 56, pp. 45, 70). Simultaneously, *shedia*'s discourse on the home produces a more empowered subject position of the homeless. In this alternative discourse, the home is defined as a symbolic space, which opens up opportunities for articulating it as mobile and multiple. Not restricting the home to the house renders the home flexible and hybrid, adjustable to people's needs and living conditions. Here, the home can include temporary and/or transit places, the neighbourhood and the surrounding natural environments. Sometimes home is simply what one carries with him/her, consisting of his/her valuable belongings. It might not be the home of choice, or the ideal home, but the home one manages to create or inhabit after abandoning an abusive parental home, or it might be the temporary shelter that still offers safety. This articulation of the mobile, transient home entails the awareness of fragility, precarity, contingency and multiplicity in relation to the home, which functions as both a burden and a liberating force, as a disabling and enabling condition for the homeless.

Together with the multiplicity of home, the perspective of homelessness also broadens up. A homeless person is not simply someone “*without a roof*”, but someone deprived of dignified living conditions: it is “*the one who sleeps on the bench*”, and “*the next one who lives in 'his' house homeless, without water, without electricity, without love*”, and “*that one who lives among us, but reached the point to have decided that there is no reason to live*” (issue 57, p. 6); it is also the refugees living in camps, the “*immigrants who are detained (because they lack legalization documents)*”, the “*families who live in unsuitable shelters*”, and “*the people that belong in the category of 'hidden homeless'*” (issue 54, p. 36).

The articulation of the home as symbolic space, which we can find in the articles, moves the definition of the home away from its economic value, and sees it as the benchmark of a dignified life, focusing on the quality of life. This articulation entails the



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experience of home as an affective space that provides love and safety. In this sense, dignity gains priority over the house that stops being a home, as in some cases, life on the streets or in a shelter is safer and more dignified than that of a violent and toxic home environment. For example, as we read in *shedia*, the “Violence Against Women Centre” in the city of Pakistan, Multan, becomes the (temporary) safe-haven, offering legal, medical and psychological support to thousands of women-victims of (domestic/sexual) violence, who come to the centre with “*torn noses, fractured ribs, broken fingers, bruises, faces in blood, swollen eyes*” (issue 55, p. 48).

In *shedia*’s texts, the struggle to maintain or create a home is largely the struggle for a dignified life, which aligns with the consciousness regarding its contingency: a home, as also a dignified life, is not a given and once achieved, is not fixed or permanent. This struggle is depicted in one of *shedia*’s reflections about how its vendors have been helped, during the five years that the magazine has been operational:

while we have a fairly precise idea of the number of our fellow citizens who, through shedia managed to escape from the street, the bench, the guest house, the temporary shelter, there is no precise number of the people (and they are many) that managed with this small income not to end up on the street, to escape eviction. People who owed much rent [...] and managed with this small income to cover part of their debt, redefining the relationship of trust with their landlord and ensuring their stay at home. Or even [...] how many people managed through this process to reconnect the electricity in their home [...] and who [were] one step away before ending on the street (issue 56, p. 43).

Another element in this shift away from the home’s economic value is the articulation of the home as a memory with high affective value. In this re-articulation, the home—often either lost or forcefully abandoned, and usually romanticised—becomes the synonym of childhood, a safe haven, and a family space that offered in the past, and could offer again, love and happiness. In one *shedia* vendor’s story—rendered below—about a New Year’s Eve of the past, he describes how he is frequently attracted to where he grew up and what feelings are evoked by this (physical and mental) journey.

Patisia [region of Athens], close to noon. At a small park across my family home. Something was pulling me there often. You see, the family chain does not break. A sudden pull and you are immediately back [in time]. Feelings, coffee and cigarettes. Getting a cigarette from dad’s [cigarette pack]. Imagine, when you peel the plastic cover from the pack, getting the chill. Imagine, with the first puff (issue 55, p. 21).

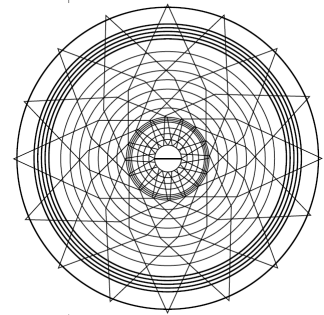
7.2 From removing to attributing agency

The subject position of the homeless is also articulated around his/her agency or lack thereof, which is the second nodal point. In the hegemonic discourse that we can find in the *shedia* articles, the homeless become objectified, and represented as inactive, useless and weak. Their subject position is articulated largely through their lack of agency, lack of purpose in life, non-embeddedness in, or disconnection from, the social tissue, and lack of capacity to function as ‘productive’ members of society.

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Shedia attempts to dislocate this hegemonic construction. One of the strategies that it employs is to counter the attribution of individual responsibility to homeless people. *shedia's* articles emphasise that the responsibility for the homeless persons' disempowerment lies with the political-economic system, and not with the individuals themselves. As Tom Morello, the main guitarist of the band, Prophets of Rage (and ex-member of Rage Against the Machine) argues, in his interview in the *Street Sense* magazine,

homelessness is an issue of "unethical" priorities, which are set by the people on top. "Homeless do not have lobbyists in Congress. Poverty and homelessness is a crime, which means that there are criminals who are responsible for it. We are an incredibly rich country, but there are people who live on the street, which are seen as a kind of sub-humans that is undignified even to look at" (issue 54, p. 60).

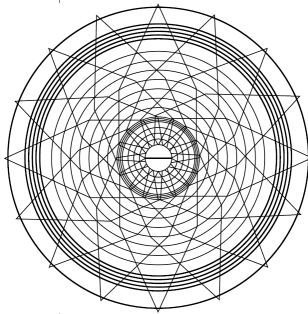
Relatedly, in the *shedia* articles we can find the critique on the combination of low wages and unaffordable housing, especially in the prosperous mega-cities of the West, like in New York, Paris, Toronto, etc., which still makes it impossible for employees to have a "decent" residence. As we are informed by one *shedia* article:

According to the organisation Coalition for the Homeless (CfH), in the beginning of 2015 there were 60,000 homeless in the city [New York]: four fifth of this group consisted of families, while in this number were included 25,000 children. In fact, 10 per cent of adult homeless are employed, without however being able to pay the rent, which becomes unaffordable for an increasingly larger part of the city's population. These numbers, which are increasing every year in double-digit percentages, have already surpassed the record recorded during the years that followed the stock market crash of 1929 (issue 52, p. 43).

The need—and the social responsibility—to support homeless people in regaining voice and visibility, is also explicitly addressed, both as a critique and as action taken, by civil society, activists and artists, trying to raise awareness, to destigmatise, and to practically support homeless people. The guitarist of Prophets of Rage is quoted as saying:

Well I can tell you, if I were president, I would make it job one to have zero tolerance for homelessness in the United States of America. Homelessness is not something that happens, homelessness is a crime. It's almost a war crime, you know, that there's almost this kind of disposable part of humanity. We spend money on battleships and we spend hundreds of millions of dollars on presidential and congressional campaigns while people live in the street. It's outrageous. And I think that any decent society, any humane society, would first and foremost make sure that everyone has a place to stay, everyone has enough to eat, everyone has an education and that everyone has a chance (issue 54, p. 62).

The *shedia* articles also invoke an alternative discourse that focuses on the homeless' agency, resilience and (social) activity—including their possible employment—while still acknowledging the limits to this agency. One element of this construction is related to the homeless person taking on particular roles, such as employee or expert. The articles refer to homeless people who work, and whose income is not sufficient to



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allow them to maintain a residence, and to those who function as tour guides, taking visitors to the backstreets of central Athens in *shedia*'s "Invisible tours" project. In another example of expertise, from the international experience, Jessica Turtle, one of the founders of the Museum of Homelessness in London, explains in an interview with *shedia*:

We make sure that the people who have experienced homelessness in the past or who are now homeless are in control of this process (running the museum). We have a core group of people who have experienced this situation, and who make all the strategic choices that involve the museum. We do not have a curator who decides on behalf of the people whom the museum represents. [...] The homeless people themselves are the ones who create the museum and are responsible for its actions. Their voices are the most important part of the process (issue 54, p. 36).

The homeless are also articulated as having agency by stressing that they engage in particular activities, involving both physical/bodily and intellectual activity, ranging from sports to capacity-building seminars and the arts. Still, these are mainly initiatives organised by *shedia*—or by collaborating or similar organisations, in Greece and abroad—in an effort to help homeless people socialise, empower themselves and (re)connect with society. *shedia* attributes, for instance, a lot of importance to the Greek homeless football team, created through its founding NGO "Diogenes", and the team's participation in the Homeless World Cup, which is seen as a substantial means to activate and socialise individuals living on the streets. A third way in which homeless people are portrayed as having agency is through the possession of particular characteristics. They are, for instance, presented as having a developed sense of solidarity; they are seen as helping one another and other members of society, being especially supportive of people in need or in a weak position. For example, Dimitra, sharing one of her experiences as a vendor of *shedia*, talks about how she was helped by a homeless man, who was, at that time, unknown to her:

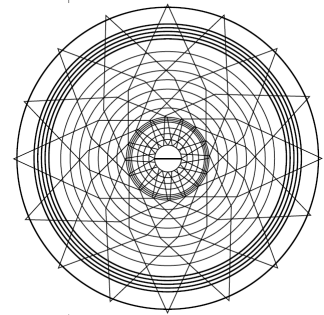
Weird post, eyes, ears, nerves on the edge. A drug user is approaching me. I go further, he is covered in blood. He is coming near me, he looks like he is under the influence, he starts telling me things. It's not that I have something against these people. I understand that they also carry their own cross. Still, I felt threatened [...]. That moment, Mr. Nikos comes, homeless, permanent in Omonoia [downgraded square in central Athens]. I didn't have any relation with him. He is pulling the bandages off his [the user's] arm, I freeze. His arm clean and healthy as it could be. Mr. Nikos tells him [the user] that, if he comes near me again, he will have to deal with him (issue 56, p. 51).

Homeless people are also represented as resourceful, and being aware of how they are seen by others. They may even perform the hegemonic homeless subject position, in order to help fellow citizens. For example, a man in a wheelchair wrote to the magazine about how a homeless person offered to help him, when he could not pass with his wheelchair, as the pavement ramp was blocked by a fancy car. The homeless person then forced the car owner "to come out of his hole", by leaning on the car and activating its alarm; the owner, infuriated by the fact that a "street person" would touch his car, rushed to take his vehicle and leave (issue 58, p. 12). Another agency-enhancing

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characteristic is the homeless' resilience against material, but also psychological and social hardships, which is seen as sometimes to exceed that of people in much better financial and living conditions. There are, for instance, a number of stories in *shedia* about (homeless) vendors consoling people who would confide in them their physical or mental health problems.

At the same time, even if the *shedia* articles systematically highlight the structural causes of homelessness, and focus on the homeless' humanity, or on their efforts to tackle their problems, the articles still articulate homeless people as in need of help, even if it is a different kind of help than the one that is found in the hegemonic discourse. The main aim of *shedia*—to “*help people help themselves*”, which aligns with the broader vision of street papers around the world—lies in the acknowledgement that homeless individuals have the agency to take control of their own lives and become empowered, but they still need society's assistance to do so.

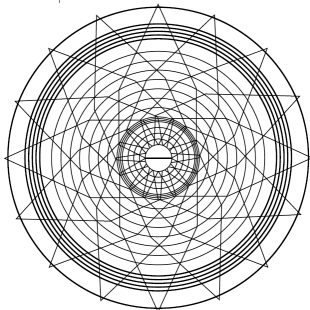
7.3 From denizen to citizen

The hegemonic discourse on homeless people also affects the public/civic component of this subject position, as they become disconnected from the polis and its (full) citizenship. As is the case with the other nodal points of the hegemonic discourse on the homeless, *shedia* recognises the existence of this hegemonic discourse, but simultaneously attempts to dislocate it. Part of the hegemonic discourse which *shedia* attempts to counter is the homeless people's invisibility. For example, in the interview of the co-founder of the Museum of Homelessness in London, Jessica Turtle, who is quoted as saying:

Homelessness is a part of our life. In the United Kingdom it has increased per 134% within the last seven years. Still, it is usually hidden and people who experience homelessness are most of the times ignored. We want to render the invisible visible and we believe that [...] the lives that are lived at society's margin are valuable and that homelessness is a part of our culture that must not be ignored (issue 54, p. 35).

Matina, one of *shedia*'s vendors who has been homeless describes her experience as dismemberment: “*Homelessness is a dismemberment. My face and my personality had been dismembered*” (issue 56, p. 47). Dismemberment, which captures this reduction of citizenship to denizenship, is experienced on a dual level. It concerns the individual sense of the self, the private part of one's subjectivity, and the experience of losing, or being disconnected from, a part of one's body, and thus as sheer disability. It also concerns the public part of one's subjectivity, as the homeless person is being ostracised from the polis.

Subjected to the combined experience of invisibility and dismemberment, certain groups of homeless people, such as the refugees, live in a state of exception as citizens, deprived not only of home, but also of citizen rights, having their citizen identity annulled. As director Marilli Mastrantoni argues, when interviewed by *shedia* about her theatre-documentary project ‘Camp Europe’:



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people locked in camps lose their civil and human rights, they are transformed from political bodies, that is citizens, to simple bodies, to materials, to numbers. The refugee loses his existence as a citizen and his identity, he is in a place in which he is found in a permanent transit [...]. You do not have a status, therefore you have nothing (issue 59, p. 30-31).

Denizenship, linked to the rather oppressive state policies, affects the more traditional political and civic citizenship rights, but also what Marshall (1992) called “*social citizenship rights*”, depriving homeless people of social insurance, healthcare, education and employment. The situation in Russia is presented as an example of social citizenship rights deprivation for the homeless, in one of *shedia*’s articles:

A homeless in Russia is not just a person without a home. In Russia, almost all social services provided by the state and medical healthcare are based on the place of permanent residence on which each citizen is registered [...]. If for any reason a citizen loses his registered permanent residence, he is essentially put at the margins of society, since he cannot get legal employment, free healthcare, submit an application to the judicial authorities, register his marriage, send his kids to school (issue 60, p. 39).

Another level of rights discrimination relates to the restriction of access to the economic activity of the polis, for example to the banking system and its services, which largely affects homeless people. A *shedia* article discusses the issue of “*cashless societies*”, a phenomenon manifested in wealthy western societies, and its repercussions for vulnerable social groups. As it is mentioned in the article, which quotes the leader of the campaign “Kontantupproret” (Cash Uprising), in Sweden, Björn Eriksson:

Not everybody in Sweden shares the same enthusiasm for the imminent disappearance of cash, regarding it as a tool of social exclusion. [...] “A world without cash would make the life of those who are already vulnerable, more difficult. Today, banks refuse to issue cards to many people: to newly arrived immigrants without work permit, or to people who have a history of addiction or a criminal record” (issue 60, p. 23).

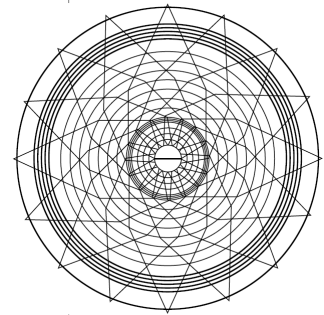
Through the hegemonic discourse, homeless people are constructed as a threat to other people’s safety (as thieves and/or being violent⁶) and health (as carriers of diseases). They are a threat and miasma, also due to their very existence and visibility in the city, as their material presence (and the presence of facilities for the homeless) threatens the economic value of the house-as-property, and frustrates city-branding initiatives. These problematisations make homeless individuals lose the right to inhabit not only private spaces, but also public spaces. Moreover, the homeless are not only objectified and stigmatised, but become, more and more, criminalised (e.g. the practice of not allowing homeless persons to sleep in parks and on squares in residential areas, is becoming widespread).

⁶ *Shedia*’s articles do contain a few references to incidents with homeless people as perpetrators, but they are exceptional.

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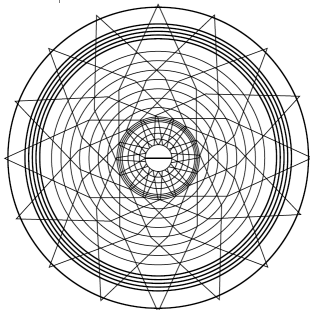
Shedia's articles also contain an alternative discourse, which starts from the (re)humanisation of the homeless, and which invites for a reconfiguration of citizenship, towards a more inclusive and diverse version. These articles construct citizenship as affective⁷, through the stories they contain, describing the homeless' feelings, needs, (lack of) well-being, and their everyday lives and living conditions, often told by the homeless themselves. By positioning the homeless people in the centre of these stories, their human face—largely lost through the processes of stigmatisation and objectivation—is reconstructed, also by referring to particular characteristics, such as civility, kindness, helpfulness and solidarity (as outlined above). Small stories by vendors, like the one that follows, show the hardships and pleasures of everyday life, and the human face of homelessness, but also the changes in life (and how both homeness and homelessness can be temporary). Nikos' story starts with him desperately looking for a protected place to spend the night, as it is snowing and it is very cold:

Winter of 2011. [...] I get mad at the other homeless who keep the good posts. Suddenly, I stop and my eye is shining. In front of me a fur coat, yes, a fur coat! I was looking at it, I don't know for how long, astounded, being careful, at the same time, that somebody does not approach and get it from me. [...] Winter of 2017. Behind the windows of my suite (former laundry room) on the fifth floor with no elevator. A cup of boiling-hot coffee to blur the window and make drawings, one-two books on the table, and among them a shedia (issue 56, p.12).

In *shedia's* articles, the homeless are not critiqued for their weaknesses and addictions; rather, the texts provide the space to explain the motivations and reasons behind addiction, to sketch its multi-layered reality, and to generate understanding that legitimises the use of more inclusionary models of citizenship (accepting that citizens can have problems and still remain citizens). For example, the consumption of alcohol (and other substances) appears often in the homeless' stories; the problems it creates are not concealed and alcoholism is not glorified; at the same time, the nuances of the ways that alcohol becomes a refuge, or solace, in dealing with the physical harshness of being a homeless person (exposed, for instance, to cold, rain, no regular access to food and (warm) water), but also the emotional and psychological hardships of loneliness, fear, and despair, are explained. As one homeless man confesses: *"I am an alcoholic. This is my demon. It is my personal devil [...]. It is my helper. Your demons, you embrace them"* (issue 56, p. 35).

Shedia's alternative discourse, secondly, builds on pluralist forms of citizenship, not only by articulating homeless people as one of the many different groups of citizens, but also by showing the internal diversity of the homeless, rejecting their homogenisation, and instead emphasising the cross-cutting connections with many other identities. Homeless people appear as members of diverse social groups, countering the stereotype of the anonymous individuals that exist—disconnected from the social—as a separate (social) category. In this context, the subject position of the homeless intersects,

⁷ See the academic literature on affective citizenship, for instance, Mookherjee (2005) and Di Gregorio & Merolli (2016).



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for example, with the subject positions of the immigrant (especially the ones who have no 'legal papers') and the refugee (especially when living in unsuitable accommodation, in camps and temporary settlements). Moreover, the articles show that homeless people can be well-educated, or, as already mentioned, they can be people with employment who cannot afford accommodation. Homeless people can also be couples with children and pets, and families that are forced to live on the streets due to economic reasons, or forced displacement (e.g. due to conflict and war). This subjectified articulation of the homeless then also includes representations of the homeless as responsible and attentive people, taking care of their children, other family members or their pets, supporting and helping others in need, being socially aware and displaying solidarity. For example, a *shedia* article which concerns the importance of pets for homeless people brings in a story from Montreal:

In the premises of "Dans la rue" (a support organization for homeless youth) [...] Nikolas and Angie are waiting for the vet who will examine Batman, their rabbit [...]. Nikolas and Angie adopted Batman last December. "This is our little one!", says Angie smiling, putting her hand on her round belly. The young couple, 20 and 22 years old, will soon become parents—a new phase in their life that they will start together, also with Batman [...]. [One of the organisation employees is explaining that] "we have many young people for whom their pet is their only friend, therefore they often put it above themselves. It is also much safer to sleep in the park with your dog" . [...] A study [...] showed that the homeless young people with a pet have three times less chances to manifest depression or to adopt potentially dangerous habits, like the use of substances, or to engage in criminal activities (issue 54, pp. 45-46).

8. Conclusion

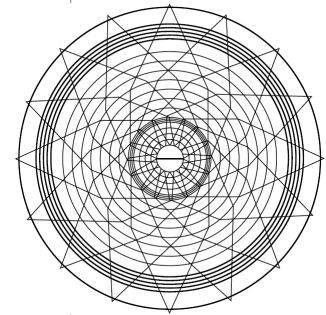
Shedia is a location where the disempowering and stigmatizing — and sometimes fear-inducing, sometimes criminalising, sometimes patronising—hegemonic discourse on the homeless subject position is structurally contested. The magazine offers a significant counter-voice for a deeply problematic form of othering, firstly by rendering the hegemonic discourse visible and then, secondly, by dislocating a multitude of its discursive elements. And, thirdly, *shedia* also invokes a counter-hegemonic discourse, by re-articulating the three nodal points of the hegemonic discourse. The (signifier of the) bourgeois home as economic asset is opened up, to demonstrate a variety of homes, where the home becomes articulated as a symbolic-affective space. The agency that the homeless subject position lacks, becomes reinstated. And the denizen, having his/her political, civic and social rights denied, is transformed into a citizen again.

From a broader perspective, this study also demonstrates the relevance of using high theory—in this case Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (1985)—to further our understanding of social practices, and support empirical research. This cross-fertilisation allows not only a better understanding of the structural processes in social practice, but also contributes to the further development of theoretical frameworks. This case study also shows the importance of studying resistant practices and political struggles, as they

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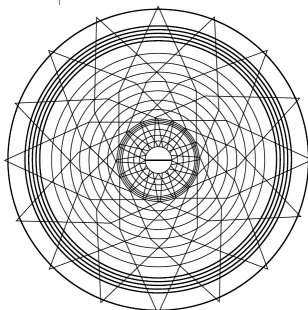
show the contingency of the social, and bring hope for generating more empowering and humanising frameworks of intelligibility into thinking (and feeling) the identities of stigmatised groups.

Moreover, this case study is also relevant because it analyses how resistance can produce a mirror image of the discourse it is resisting, with the three nodal points still very present (even if they are inversed). This comes with a cost, for a number of reasons. Through this photonegative logic, the hegemonic discourse still obtains a presence, offering itself for identification⁸. A second issue is that the magazine's articles still, to some degree, confirm the modernist hegemony of the home and sedentary life, pushing more nomadic lifestyles out of the picture. Finally, some of the very dark sides of the homeless subject position get filtered out of the alternative discourse, even if there is attention for the milder dark sides (e.g., alcohol abuse) that can still be integrated into the alternative discourse. Despite these issues, it is hard not to see *shedia* as a materialisation of the hope for a more respectful way of thinking about homelessness and (thus) for a better life for homeless people.

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⁸ At the same time, *shedia*'s approach brings out the distinction between discursive recognition and identification very clearly. As this distinction is still underused in discourse theory, it has high theoretical relevance.



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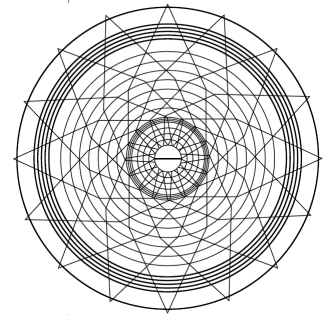
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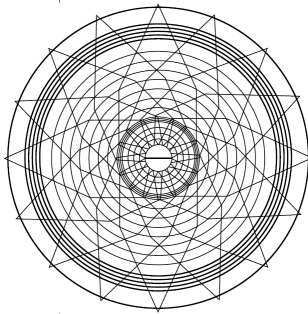
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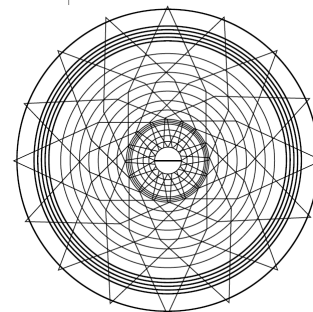
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КРИТИКА ДОМИНИРУЮЩЕЙ ПОЗИЦИИ И ПОДДЕРЖКА АЛЬТЕРНАТИВНЫХ СПОСОБОВ ВОСПРИЯТИЯ БЕЗДОМНОСТИ: ФОРМУЛИРОВАНИЕ ПОЛОЖЕНИЯ БЕЗДОМНОГО СУБЪЕКТА В ГРЕЧЕСКОЙ УЛИЧНОЙ ГАЗЕТЕ SHEDIA

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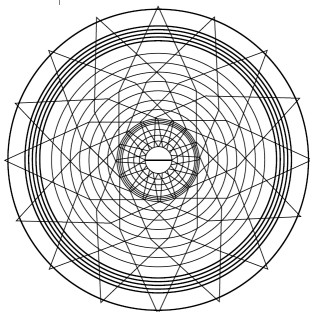
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Аннотация:

В статье используется теория дискурса для анализа конструирования положения бездомного субъекта в греческой уличной газете *Shedia*. После краткого обзора основных частей теории дискурса Лакло и Муфф (1985) в статье излагаются теоретические наработки, описывающие элементы, при помощи которых конструируется положение бездомного субъекта, с учетом существования доминирующей позиции, в основе которой лежит стигматизация и другие факторы. Если традиционные средства массовой информации воспроизводят проблемное представление этого явления, то уличные газеты напротив предлагают противоположные доминирующим (более корректные) формулировки положения бездомного субъекта. При анализе освещения этого явления в газете *Shedia*, было выявлено три основных момента в доминирующем дискурсе о бездомных: стигматизация отсутствия места жительства, отсутствие социального влияния и политической идентичности. Дискурс, противоположный доминирующему, также представлен в *Shedia* тремя ключевыми моментами: альтернативное место жительства, приписывание социального влияния и политической идентичности. Мы полагаем, что это исследование может считаться актуальным, поскольку оно показывает зеркальные отличия между доминирующими и противоположными им представлениями, а также важность использования теории высокого порядка для углубления нашего понимания социальных практик.

Ключевые слова: бездомные, конструирование, теория дискурса, доминирующие представления, уличная газета, место жительства, жилище, социальное влияние, гражданство



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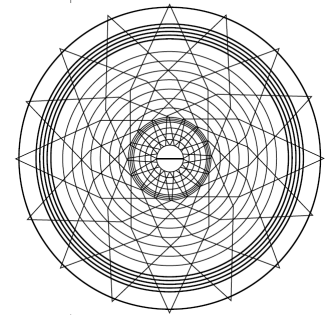
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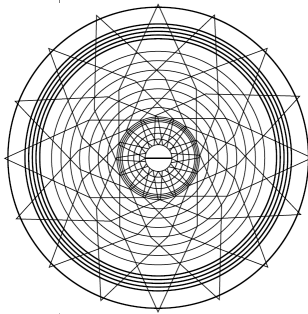
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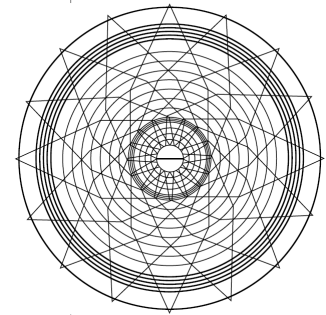
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