Whose Future, Which Freedom?

The role of the future in explaining the experiences and expectations of welfare recipients regarding the proposal of unconditional social welfare

Name: Daan Tielenburg

Student ID: 10474161

Supervisor: Pepijn Olders

Second Reader: Dorine Greshof

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University of Amsterdam

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Abstract

This research is concerned with experiences and expectations of welfare recipients regarding the recent proposal in several municipalities in the Netherlands to alleviate the conditions that are attached to welfare. Through a theoretical consideration of a basic income and its premises, the case is made to take into account both the principles upon which a policy justifies itself, and the social context in which these principles become embedded. This means that, to get a clear picture of the principles of justice upon which this policy proposal is based, a discursive analysis of the proposal is conducted. Besides that, through an extensive examination of the lifeworld of welfare recipients, both by interviews and participant observation within the 'Bijstandsbond', the social context in which these principles become embedded is sketched. Instead of only focusing on the effect that this interaction could have for welfare recipients, this research also adopts a perspective on the future. In trying to disclose the future as an epistemological domain that has the potential to reveal implicit critiques of the present, this research explores in what ways certain alternative discourses have been silenced, and what these discourses say about the underlying mechanisms that produce present subjectivities. This research thus ultimately tries to shed light on the possible implications that the unconditional social welfare can have for the group of welfare recipients themselves, while at the same time it tries to probe and explore a methodological shift from past to future.

Table of Contents

I.   Introduction

In 1978, a book called '*De stagnerende verzorgingsstaat'* appeared under the supervision of the sociologists Jacques van Doorn and Kees Schuyt. This is one of the first works in which we could see the turn to what is now called an 'activating welfare regime' (WRR, 2006). Because of an economic recession more people needed to rely on social services, while at the same time the government had to cut down. The problem, however, was not only the increased pressure on social services, but a more fundamental one. According to van Doorn, the welfare state "makes citizens into weak and dependent people", which results into "state paternalism" and "welfare patronage" (Van Doorn & Schuyt, 1978, p. 41).

      This diagnosis is still prevalent in current conceptions of what a welfare state is, and more importantly, what kind of citizens it should contain. Thus, on the one hand, the government retrenched spending and created conditions for anyone who did an appeal on social services, while at the same time it tried to involve citizens and activate them (Verhoeven et al., 2013). This activation, however, takes place through a moralizing discourse, wherein citizenship is a central notion (Tonkens, 2008). Instead of the juridical status that citizenship signified before (Marshall, 1965), it now also receives meaning as a *process of identification*, that is, it refers to "how people experience themselves in collective terms" (Bochove, 2012, p. 98). Also *activity* becomes a central notion connected to citizenship, which refers to "the practice of active involvement in the political community" (Ibid.). By shifting the notion of citizenship to a process of identification and activity, the term becomes moral (Bochove, 2012), meaning that it aims at providing perspectives of the good life and lies an emphasis on the duties and responsibilities that people have towards their community (Verhoeven et al., 2013). Whereas the classical concept of social citizenship (Marshall, 1965) was connected to the granting of social rights, allowing individuals to lay their claim on collective facilities, this new concept of citizenship mainly emphasizes the duties and responsibilities citizens have towards their community. This new way of conceptualizing collective existence critiques citizens for making a too generous use of the provisions of the welfare state. Instead of relying on the government, citizens should take their own responsibility for their communities' and own well-being (Verhoeven et al., 2013).

      What the introductory lines show, is that every policy is predicated upon assumptions about what a good and just society is, and what the role of a citizen should be within this

society. We have to keep in mind that an 'activating welfare regime' exists as an empirical reality that can be studied, and as such its developments can directly be seen in the light of current policy ideals and the reaction to this of citizens. I am concerned here with a plan that probably will have profound changes on society, but nevertheless remains a plan. Doing social research to an empirically non-existent entity seems a highly problematic endeavor because of its hypothetical character. However, it is exactly the choice for a topic that is hypothetical, that enables me to steer this research both in a socially relevant and scientifically important way. This is so, because first of all, a critical analysis of something that does not exist yet, hopefully can lead to adjustments and refinements that will make it more viable and sustainable when implemented. And second, because a social analysis of a hypothetical situation has serious epistemological implications that need an expanded methodological toolkit to account for.

To begin with the second point, this thesis has as its axiom the possibility of research into an empirically non-existent entity, and its focus is on the role of the future in constituting the present. Instead of focusing only on the 'now', or 'what was', the focus is also on 'what could be'. Drawing on the field of future studies, I regard the future as constituting an epistemological domain that produces knowledge that says something about present social reality. The way people talk about the future and how they construct preferable scenarios for themselves, or how they disregard other scenarios, also carry with them certain implications for how they experience the present. The question is what these implications consists of, and if they can provide us with analytical usefulness. The expanded methodological toolkit must be understood in terms of a focus on future narratives, and these future narratives must be understood as possibly containing an alternative critique of present social structures.

This leads me to the first point, namely that of the social relevance. Instead of focusing on a system that is empirically existent, the focus is on a hypothetical scenario that does not exist yet. This scenario is connected to the current welfare state and could be considered as an answer to its supposed shortcomings.

As I sketch above, every policy is predicated upon notions of the good, as the turn to an activating welfare regime illustrated. This applies also to a hypothetical scenario. The critical analysis of a hypothetical scenario helps to uncover the principles upon which a plan is based. This is important because principles of justice constitute a certain social framework in which individuals are seeking to live their lives. The point for now, is that principles of justice that have their basis not in the empirical reality, but in some transcendental theory, become embedded within a social context, and once there, will be influenced by this context

and vice versa. In other words, for a policy to succeed, it is vital to take into account the social context of which these principles will form an important part. Critically reflecting on a hypothetical scenario thus has as its merit that by laying bare the principles that form the basis of a policy proposal, one can also reflect on the possible social structure these principles are likely to produce and what the consequences could be for citizens that are part of this societal structure. In this way, policies can be implemented with a more firm and stable basis, since they take into account not only what is good for an individual, but also what is good for an individual inside a social context[1].

This is the theoretical and methodological background against which I conducted my research. That means that on the one hand, the subject is considered from the perspective that every policy is predicated upon ideas of what a good and just society is, and as such, we should take both these principles of justice and the social context in which these are embedded into account. On the other hand, the above posed methodological shift from past-oriented – to a more future-oriented approach is adopted to see whether this shift entails any analytical usefulness and can help us to critically reflect on this interaction between social context and principles upon which a policy justifies itself. In light of the recurring debate on the possibility of a basic income, and connected to this, the recent policy proposal of several political parties of different municipalities to alleviate the rules and conditions that are connected to welfare[2], we can consider the above posed social relevance and scientific challenge more explicitly. In other words, the concrete aim with which I am concerned here, is the extent to which the future imaginations of welfare recipients about unconditional social welfare say something about the present welfare state. This aim both captures the scientific challenge as it involves the possibility of the future as an epistemological domain, and the social relevance as it tries to shed light on the hidden presumptions upon which this specific policy proposal of unconditional social welfare is predicated and the implications this can have for the group of welfare recipients themselves. The scientific and social relevance thus imply one another, since it is precisely by means of the methodological shift from past to future that I aim to identify alternative discourses that would have been obscured otherwise, and thereby possibly revealing the underlying mechanism upon which this alternative discourse is based.

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[1] Meritocracy for instance, from an individual point of view, might have an acceptable principle of justice (those who work the hardest, climb the highest), but is very likely to produce a social structure of injustice (see Swierstra & Tonkens, 2008)

[2] In Dutch: Regelvrije/arme bijstand

Empirically then, this research was conducted within an organization, called 'De Bijstandsbond', that helped people who experienced problems with the system of social security. Within the realm of social security, definitions of what a good life and what a good citizen is, are prevalent everywhere. As such, it provides a good case to investigate in what way the principles upon which certain policies are predicated, become embedded in a social context and what the consequences are of this interaction for the context and principles alike. The recent policy proposal of unconditional social welfare is affiliated with the premises of a universal basic income[3]. This means that in paragraph two, I will reflect theoretically on a basic income and specifically on the problem that the notion of freedom constitutes when considered from within a social context. Then, after some notes in paragraph three on the interdisciplinary approach that is adopted, I will, in paragraph four, elaborate more broadly on the problem that this research is trying to address, and why this is socially and scientifically relevant. In paragraph five, I will expand on the methods used, and explain why certain choices were necessary to most adequately answer the above posed problematic. Then in the sixth paragraph, through an investigation of the lifeworld of welfare recipients and their expectations about what unconditional social welfare could bring for them, I try to empirically show in what social context the principles of unconditional social welfare become embedded, and in what way welfare recipients critique this context through their future narratives. To identify the principles we are dealing with, I furthermore engage with a discursive analysis of the policy proposal of unconditional social welfare. In this way I aim to identify struggles that might have their basis in the principles upon which this policy proposal is built. In the conclusion I will reflect both on the scientific implications of the future as a epistemological domain, and on the socially relevant effect that unconditional social welfare might have on the group of welfare recipients and what this could mean for their relationship with society.

II.   Theoretical Framework

2.1 Basic income and the problem of stability

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[3] Off course, a basic income is supposed to be granted to everyone, irrespective of their labour market position and as such marks a big difference with this policy proposal. However, the fact that this basic income is not universal and only applies to people who do not have a paid job, doesn't mean that it does not have any analytical usefulness. Especially since I'm concerned with the lifeworld of welfare recipients solely, I regard this proposal as representative for the possible implications a universal basic income can have for this group of citizens.

Although there are several justifications for a basic income[4], it is safe to say that all these justifications coincide on the freedom-enhancing aspect of this idea (Muñoz, 2014). For the fact that freedom is a central notion, we can identify two main reasons. First of all, basic income advocates believe that an unconditional policy gives people the freedom to say 'no' to undignified, bad and unwanted formal and informal jobs (Van Parijs, 1995; Wilderquist 2013), since it provides freedom from wage labor and marketable work (Maskivker, 2012). Second, a basic income provides people with the means to live their own life according to their own principles and values, that is to say, this policy helps people to pursue their conception of the good, whatever that may be (Van Parijs, 1995; Birnbaum, 2011). In other words, the central axiom from which a basic income starts, according to Van Parijs and Birnbaum, among others, is that it fosters a commitment to neutrality[5] among different conceptions of the good that individuals harbor about their goals, because of its unconditional character. It is undesirable to encourage policies that favor a conception of the good over other possible forms, because citizens should be free to choose whatever life path they want to take, irrespective of their tastes and values. Enhanced freedom is thus predicated upon the principles of neutrality and unconditionality, but it is exactly this postulation, that one could enhance freedom by giving everyone an equal amount of money so that they can do with it whatever they want, that starts to become shaky when one takes into account the possible social reality that can or will be constituted.

The problem that is constituted by the principle of neutrality can be illustrated best by posing the following counter-intuitive question: can we really claim that the work of a volunteer within the red cross is of equal worth compared to, let's say, 'a dope-smoking PlayStation addict' (McKinnon, 2003: 153)? In other words, a rigorous commitment to neutrality leads to a situation where one cannot make qualitative distinctions between different conceptions of the good. However, intuitively one would surely give more credit in terms of worthiness to a Red Cross volunteer, than to a dope-smoking PlayStation addict. Furthermore, doesn't the unconditional character of a basic income produce and sustain parasitic relationships since some will free ride on the productive efforts of the rest (Van Donselaar, 2008)? Neutrality and unconditionality thus are possibly able to produce a social reality where a) we can make no distinction between different conceptions of the good since

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[4] Van Parijs centers the most important justifications for a basic income around 4 different concepts: liberty, equality, community, efficiency (see Van Parijs, 1992, p. 9-29).
[5] This idea of neutrality has as its roots John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (1971) and (further elaborated) *Political Liberalism* (1993).

this would violate the principle of liberal neutrality, and b) some people will live off the work others perform.

Next to that, a basic income can run into serious problems when implemented, since it assumes and needs certain moral and social dispositions that help to produce the conditions needed for its support and sustainment. However, such moral and social dispositions are predisposed to violate the principle of liberal neutrality since it inevitably puts forward a certain conception of the good that is needed to lend the basic income its support. The unconditional character of a basic income is likely to violate the principle of neutrality and therewith seems to strike right into the ethical core of the system.

What indeed seems to be the most pressing, and at the same time most underexplored problem, is stability, which is, to speak with the words of Muñoz (2013, p. 2), "[the question] whether unconditional income policies can be designed to generate the motivational conditions that make possible their own support". No matter how good and just a policy proposal is in ideal terms, it would indeed be useless when it cannot constitute itself as a system that generates its own support over time. In other words, agreement in conceptions of justice can never be the only prerequisite for a viable human community because these conceptions should also be in accordance with human inclinations (Rawls, 1971). Also, the future stability of the proposed policy depends on the motivational conditions that make them viable. The motivations of people influence the stability of a basic income since these motivations are not static and unalterable. This also means that these motivations can be subjected to ways that either improve or affect the stability of institutions. Seen from this point of view we are confronted with a normative dilemma, namely if and how the state should motivate people in order to generate the conditions that sustain the support for its institutions (Muñoz, 2013, p. 5). After all, by taking measures that would motivate people, the ideal principle of neutrality is harmed. But, if one would choose not take such measures, there is a good chance that the motivations of people are not contributing to the viability of the policy, and as such, is not very likely to be stable in the near future.

As the above paragraph illustrates, stability is here conceptualized as the motivational relations between citizens and its institutions that are needed to sustain these institutions. Motivational refers here to a disposition inside individuals that should be present, if we want a policy measure to succeed. In other words, stability becomes only possible as a precondition for any successful social policy when there is a certain degree and a certain form of solidarity[6]

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[6] I'm aware of the fact that motivational conditions cannot readily be equated with the notion of solidarity. However, by motivational here I mean the extent to which an individual is willing to support the present

within the political and civic community. Solidarity can be conceived of as "the *values and belief systems* that underlie the contributions of people to the well-being of an individual person or group, the *practices* that stem from these values and belief systems, and the *(in)formal regulations* to which these practices can lead" (Komter et al., 2000, p. 11; original emphasis). Solidarity thus refers especially to the concrete feelings and practices that may lead to social binding. Within the context of a basic income one could be called an unsolidary member of the political community (and therewith shake the grounds of stability upon which the institutional framework rests) when "someone who is able to perform paid or unpaid labor [and] who confines her or himself to receiving and spending UBI, refuses to do some work or pay some tax when the financial base of UBI happens to be under high pressure" (De Beus cited in Muñoz, 2014, p. 18, see footnote 11). After all, if one would refuse work in order to sustain the financial base in a critical period, the system would collapse, meaning that everyone would lose their basic income.

The question, however, how to achieve solidary members, is a question that is prone to cause problems, since it is here that the ethical core of the ideal principle is harmed. To understand what this entails, it can prove instructive to elaborate on Baldwin's work on *The social politics of solidarity* (1990). Through his extensive historical study on the welfare state in Denmark, Germany, England, France and Sweden, Baldwin shows under what condition implemented social measures will contribute to solidary relationships between different classes in society. According to him, it is exactly because of the fact that the welfare state has an obscure mechanism of distribution, that people have a sense of solidarity towards each other. Because the welfare state is very complex in its nature, it is very difficult for citizens to exactly calculate whether their input matches the amount of money to which they are entitled. There is thus always a lack of clarity concerning the relationship between how much somebody is handing in and how much somebody receives. According to him, the blurring of the costs and benefits makes that many conceive of themselves as winners, without exactly knowing how much one wins in relation to other citizens. It is this mechanism that is underlying the proliferation of the realization of solidarity and as such it provides the welfare state with the support that it needs to prevail (Baldwin, 1990).

De Beus (1995) takes up Baldwin's analysis and transposes it to the discussion on the possibility of a basic income. According to him, a basic income makes a lot of the

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institutional framework, presumably because he regards it as just and favorable. This also inevitably entails a certain degree of solidarity, be it out of self-interest or out of a sense of justice.

complicated regulations that are now part of social security unnecessary, since an UBI[7] provides everyone, irrespective of social and economic situation, with a social minimum. Some say, that it is exactly because of this clear and simple character that an UBI deserves preference. However, according to de Beus, it is because of the simple character that a basic income brings to light a clear distribution of winners and losers, and as such generates little solidarity. This means that advocates of a basic income find themselves on a crossing where they either have to stick to the ethical justifications *an sich*, which means that they'll keep arguing for a simple, neutral and 'pure' basic income that runs the risk of undermining solidarity, or there will be a more stable basic income that reproduces solidarity, but which is therefore inherently more complicated and contains a lot of (in)formal rules and obligations (De Beus, 1995).

We can now conceptualize stability as a concept wherein the moral justifications on the one hand, and the social conditions needed to produce support on the other, come together. A policy is stable when people agree beforehand with the principles of justice upon which it based, and after that, a policy will stay stable when it generates conditions that are experienced as preferable by individuals. This in turn, will generate support for this policy and its associated institutional framework. Stability mediates constantly between 'the ideal and the real', that is to say, it aims to give the ideal a solid foundation within the real, but by doing so it also inherently transforms the ideal. More concretely, the ideal principle of neutrality that is based upon some abstract moral justification seems to produce a social reality wherein the just and neutral institutional framework is unable to sustain itself. In the case of the basic income this means, that when we would implement a pure basic income, based upon full neutrality and a minimization of the rules, there is a good chance that solidarity between different groups of people will decrease.

2.2 Beyond the agency-structure binary?

The point of this debate is to illustrate how morality, that is, what is good or just for a human *an sich*, is entangled and caught up within a social context that is part of one's reality. We then could indeed choose to conform ourselves to the realist camp of philosophers such as Raymond Geuss, who explicitly rejects politics as applied ethics and finds ideal theory useless as a starting point for thinking about the real world of politics. According to him we should rather look at how social, economic and political institutions work at a certain moment in

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[7] Universal Basic Income

society and what motivates an individual to act. This 'contextual' approach has as its axiom the idea that understanding politics, "means seeing that such statements have clear meaning at all only relative to their specific context, and that this context is one of historically structured forms of action" (Geuss, 2008, p. 14). Although one could surely see merit in this realist approach as opposed to the more principled 'transcendental' political and moral theory, this approach is still caught up in the same logic. We could either have an abstract principle that guides the way how societal institutions are formed, which then in turn structures and molds social relationships; or we could pose that it is the social reality itself that should guide us in establishing the right and just institutional framework, from which we then can deduce momentarily (since it is relative to the context) some abstract value or norm. In either case: both are based upon a linear idea of time, that is, we can only explain, comprehend or analyze, when we take into account 'how this came to be'.

Nancy Munn (1992, p. 93) points us to the importance of "the deconstruction of basic sociocultural processes through which temporality is constructed". According to her, there is "insufficient theoretical attention to the nature of time as a unitary and focal problem" (Ibid.). Several authors who were heavily occupied with working towards a synthesis between agency and structure, put a more explicit temporality back into social analysis with their visions of social life as constituted 'in time' (Hodges, 2008, p. 401). Bourdieu (1977, p. 9) for instance, stated that interaction among humans as a form of practice is "inscribed in the current of time, (…) with its rhythm, its orientation, its irreversibility". Also Giddens, within his theory of structuration, did a similar suggestion, stating that the flow of time underlies the vital process of historical reproduction. For him, "[a]ction or agency (…) does not refer to a series of discrete acts combined together, but to *a continuous flow of conduct* (Giddens, 1979, p. 55; original emphasis). In other words, the entangled notions of temporal flow and socio-historical change, according to Hodges,

> lie at the heart of temporal modalities of contemporary anthropological theory. (…) [A]ll such approaches are underpinned by a tacit unspecified temporal ontology that is evoked through a common root vocabulary of process, flow or flux – itself implying, and facilitating in an unspecified way the notion that time involves 'change' (2008, p. 402)

What we have seen, is that the recognition of the problem concerning the principle of neutrality and the problem it constitutes within the social realm, can lead us into several directions. We can choose to either conform ourselves to a realist approach as proposed by

Geuss (2008), or to a more transcendental approach, as for instance proposed by Rawls (1971). However, as we've noted, both are based upon the same logic and choosing between them thus only turns this logic upside down. We can also try to conceive of the problem dialectically, synthesizing between structure and agency, as Bourdieu and Giddens famously did. However, we should take into account that this problem of structure-agency is haunting social science for decades, and still is; next to that, there is Munn's statement that we should aim to deconstruct the ideas of time upon which theorists base there explanations of sociocultural processes; and last, we can recognize that two key players in the debate around structure-agency have 'a fluid underlying process' as their foundational understanding of time. In other words, it might prove fruitful to radically rethink the linearity of time as a constitutive force of the social processes of which individuals are being part, because it is exactly this conception of time that underlies the current paradigm of the agency-structure binary.

2.3 Rethinking the present

Within psychology there has been a shift that has the nature of what some scholars already call "a paradigm shift" (Poli, 2014) and is likely to produce a heated discussion. In a recently published paper by Seligman et al., (2013) the argument is made that there is need for changing the discipline of psychology from a primarily past-oriented field to a primarily future-oriented one. While, simply stated, every human being has the capacity to anticipate and imagine the future (and is thus inevitably a part of the human mind), much of the psychological theory and practice renders human action as determined (or at least influenced) by the past. This is why much of the mainstream psychology views anticipation as "a violation of the natural law because the future cannot act on the present" (Seligman et al., 2013, p. 119). Seligman et al. (2013, p. 119) however, pose a different view and assert that

> prospection involves no backward causation; rather, it is guidance not by the future itself but by present, evaluative representations of possible future states. Viewing behavior as driven by the past was a powerful framework that helped create scientific psychology (…) [but] accumulating evidence in a wider range of areas of research suggests a shift in framework, in which navigation into the future is seen as a core organizing principle of animal and human behavior.

The shifting of focus from past to future thus results in a radical reconfiguration of an entire conceptual framework. A future-oriented approach lays a special focus on expectations that helps to reconsider the role of past experience, which is now not only a force that directly

influences and molds present behavior, but also becomes information about possible futures (Poli, 2014).

It is not only psychology that has turned towards the future however, but also recent publications within economic theory, anthropology and sociology have cast their eye on the future as a possible theoretical framework that can cast new insights on these respective disciplines (Beckert, 2013; Appadurai, 2013; Wright 2010). Beckert (2013) for instance, suggests the need to include fictions in the architecture of economics and makes a strong case for a reconsideration of the way in which economics look at the future (Poli, 2014). In clarifying his concept of fictional expectation he asserts that "it is the future that shapes the present – or to be more specific: it is the images of the futures that shape present decisions" (Beckert, 2013, p. 221). Also Appadurai (2013, p. 285) notes that "the intellectual infrastructure of anthropology (…) remains substantially shaped by the lens of pastness [and] the subjects of anthropology have increasingly been those of the present and of the world we live in". According to him,

[we have to develop] a general point of view about humans as future-makers and of futures as cultural facts (…), we need to construct an understanding of the future by examining the interactions between three notable human preoccupations that shape the future as a cultural fact: (…) imagination, anticipation and aspiration (idem., p. 298).

Wright (2012) then, tries through his concept of 'realist utopias' to explore "a broad framework for thinking sociologically about emancipatory alternatives to dominant institutions and social structures (…)" (Idem., p. 1). Imagining new institutional frameworks can be of assistance on dealing with problems, which are connected to the form that political institutions have historically taken in the West (Poli, 2014).

This wide range of topics, illustrate how a methodological and epistemological shift from past to future has found resonance within different fields. As such, it opens a whole new field of knowledge that is predisposed to reconfigure the agency-structure binary, and thus can provide ample opportunities for emancipatory practices. In what way does this shift to the future have implications for the agency-structure binary and where lies its emancipatory merit?

Instead of looking at a subject that is either subjected through subjectification, or actively deconstructing by opposing societal norms[8], we can, by conceiving of a subject as *also* capable of imagining future scenarios, disclose a new domain where the subject is not inherently caught up in this binary. Answers people give on hypothetical questions can roughly be divided in two categories. Either these answers reinscribe the present into future and thus reproduce current dominant discourse, or they are conceived of momentarily outside structural influences and as such provide alternative futures that could possibly have emancipatory force. Concretely this means that the question becomes whether future imaginations have a component that is outside of dominant discourse, and if this is the case, what this component says about current truth regimes that produce present subjectivities.

Imaginative practices then, can a) be the product of past and present and as such only a depiction of societal circumstances on the future, which thus means that these imaginations do not carry any more emancipatory force than a good analysis of the present, or b) are a means through which a person can momentarily transcend its position within the structure of society, and where he/she, outside the reach of determining influences of values, norms and culture, can sketch a future that has the potential for emancipation. This potential lies in the imaginative practices and their possible hysteresizing[9] effect, meaning that a future narrative can make one aware of the inherent potentials of change that are prevalent in the present.

To summarize and conclude on the theoretical considerations that are proposed so far, this framework aimed to illustrate a) how reasoning based on abstract morality constitutes a problem within the social realm, b) that this interconnectedness between morality and social reality is predicated upon the structure–agency binary, and c) that, to possibly overcome, or at least better comprehend this binary, a shift from a primarily past-oriented approach to a more future oriented one could prove fruitful. In other words, we have to analyze the interaction between a social context and a principle of justice that becomes embedded in this context. However, instead of only aiming for an integration of these two notions, we have to go beyond a binary understanding of the present and integrate it with a methodological shift to a more future-oriented perspective. This way of viewing the problem calls for a strong interdisciplinary approach, and it is to this issue that I shall now turn.

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[8] Subjection is here used in Butler's sense: "[it] signifies the process of becoming coordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject" (Butler, 1997, p. 2). Deconstruction is here the repetition of subversive gender performances that aim "to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (Butler, [1990] 2008, p. 202-203; original emphasis).

[9] The concept of *hysteresis* refers here to the reflexive intervention on a normally prereflexive action, presumably thus enhancing the agency of habitus (see Bourdieu, 1984, p. 142).

III.   Interdisciplinarity

Social security is a subject that is inevitably multidimensional, or "wicked" (Rutting, De Ro, Blad et al., 2014: 26), since it encompasses many aspects of society on many different levels. For the purpose and feasibility of this research I explicitly looked into the moral and social preconditions for unconditional social security concerning people who are in welfare themselves. This means that on the one hand it analyzes on what justificatory grounds a certain policy measure is introduced, while on the other hand, it takes into account the social structure in which this measure is embedded and the possible new structure it is able to produce. Put differently, this research tries to integrate principles of justice with the cultural norms or societal factors that influence the expression of these principles.

Two things come explicitly to the fore in the theoretical framework and the continuing interplay between the moral and the social dimension. I conceptualized these dimensions as what is good for an individual *an sich*, and what is good for an individual inside a social context. To generate stability for any institutional framework, it needs to be in accordance with certain principles of justice, and after that, it needs to be able to sustain itself. A basic income is predicated upon the principles of equality and freedom, but these principles, when implemented without any adjustment, are predisposed to constitute a societal context wherein it will not be very stable. Taking into account the social consequences of political-philosophical ideas, is indispensable for the succession of these ideas. This also means that from a theoretical point of view, one has to integrate philosophical ideas with sociological insights. In other words, ideas and the people that endorse those ideas are inevitably linked to a particular context, meaning that we have to analyze also this context to grasp the implications of an idea. By showing how a basic income seems to run into serious trouble when analyzed from within a social context, my aim is to show how the recent proposal of unconditional social welfare is also predicated upon ideas that have implications specific for the social context of welfare recipients.

Also, from a methodological point of view, it was necessary to expand the epistemological basis upon which the research could be firmly built. Making use of the discipline of future studies, I transposed some of its methods to get a clearer and broader picture of the problem. Because focusing on the problems that welfare recipients experience did not capture fully the subject, I probed a different epistemological domain, that of the future, which I predicated upon insights of the discipline of future studies. In transposing its methods (see Inayatullah, 1990), I got a clearer and broader picture of the problem. After all,

a future scenario concerning the way how you would like it to be, also to a certain extent indirectly refers to what you do not like here and now. Thus taking into account future narratives could possibly shed light on undesirable facets of present social reality, which could then in turn become objects of scientific analyses. Adding the future as an epistemological domain can lead to the constitution of new units of analyses that would have remained hidden otherwise.

## IV.	Problem Definition

<u>4.1 Main goal and research questions</u>

Through a theoretical consideration of the inherent problems of a basic income, I thus suggest that the 'social' and the 'moral' are mutually constitutive of each other. To not acknowledge this, is a problem, since every notion of justice carries with it certain advantages for one group and disadvantages for the other. Or so to say, a policy proposal that justifies itself on the grounds of freedom is not value-free and as such exerts control over one group of people while producing freedom for others. The point is to illustrate that the way freedom is conceptualized by the policy advocates of welfare reform runs the risk of undermining solidarity with the group for whom this very policy proposal seems to be the most pressing, that of welfare recipients.

This research has as its main focus the recent policy proposal of unconditional social welfare and how this proposal is related to the lifeworld of welfare recipients. From the perspective of welfare recipients themselves, it tries to show in what way the current system of welfare is influencing their life, and what the alleviation of the rules and control, which are now an important part of the system, would mean for them. Besides focusing solely on their experiences, the emphasis also lays on their expectations, and more importantly, how these expectations are related to their experiences. In other words, I'm interested in what way the future narratives of welfare recipients can be of use in analyzing the present, and specifically, how we should view these narratives in relation to the recent policy proposal of unconditional social welfare. In this way I'll try to grasp the possible implications for the social relations that could result from this plan of unconditional social welfare and the consequences for the welfare recipients themselves.

After outlining the main features of the problem(s) this research tries to explore, we can now sketch the question that forms the ground from where I'll try to partly answer the above posed problematic: To which extent do the future imaginations individuals hold about

unconditional social welfare say something about present social reality? To answer this question my research is structured around two subtopics which together aim to produce the most comprehensive and complete answer.

The first subtopic deals with the construction of welfare recipients through the policy proposal of unconditional social welfare. By discursively analyzing the different policy proposals made by several political parties within multiple municipalities, I try to show in what way the welfare recipients and their problems are being depicted, and more importantly, what the implications are of this depiction for this group of people. By analyzing the way how the political parties frame the problem, the principles upon which this policy proposal predicates itself can become apparent.

Secondly then, we focus on how welfare recipients themselves experience the rules of the system they are subject to and the obligatory reintegration projects they take part in. Through their eyes, my aim is to give a description of the general feeling that prevails under welfare recipients, and the daily struggles they have to engage in. Their experiences are compared to how the policymakers frame the situation of being in the system of social security. The question is whether the problems welfare recipients experience are in accordance with the way the problems are posited through the dominant discourse of the policy proposals and whether the image of the welfare recipient that the political parties put forward resonates with the image that the welfare recipients have of themselves.

The last subtopic concerns itself with a focus on how welfare recipients conceive of the future. This means that there is an emphasis what expectations welfare recipients themselves have of unconditional social welfare. Next to that, I focus on what according to the people who are in welfare would be the most appropriate solution and how they see their most preferable future.

4.2 Social and scientific relevance

This leads me to the main social relevance of this work. The empirical reality in which an individual has its place, the social context, must be part of any analysis that tries to form principles according to which a society should develop its institutions. I thus in this sense agree with the realist approach of scholars such as Raymond Guess (2008) who explicitly rejects political theory that has its grounding in some abstract ideal morality. However, I differ from his view in the following sense. Instead of posing the counter-logical conclusion that political theory should start from real politics relative to its context (Geuss, 2008), thus turning the causal relationship between the ideal and the real only upside down, I propose the

inclusion of ideas and visions about the future into one's framework of analysis. This can provide researchers and policymakers with a tool that is able to effectively critique the present from a different perspective. Instead of only asking 'what is wrong at this particular point in time with your current situation', one should involve welfare recipients with questions such as 'what would you think that these plan means to you in the future' and 'what kind of measures would provide you with a preferable future'. These are only examples, but the point is that taking such a perspective is possibly able to 1) better accommodate social policy to the expectations of the people and as such provide a more stable institutional framework and 2) disclose a new domain from where reflexivity can lead to emancipatory practices that have the potential to transform present social and political institutions.

Here then also the scientific relevance becomes apparent, since this research tries to probe a different means to critically reflect on the present. Including the hypothetical scenarios that people construct for themselves, that is, focusing on how the future is talked about, we could disclose an epistemological domain that is able to deconstruct the present and lay bare certain truth regimes that would have obscured these alternative futures otherwise. This new way of transforming the present by conceptualizing the future not only matters socially, but also scientifically, since it discloses a whole new epistemological domain and as such also reconfigures our relation with the society from a ontological point of view. In other words, instead of a human being that is radically free, discursively constructed, role constituted or social-economically determined[10], a human being is here posed as *also* capable of imagining future scenarios. Including the future as a domain of knowledge can possibly shed new light on all these different ontologies and the structure-agency binary that underlies them, and can push future research in illuminating and unforeseen directions.

V.   Methods

4.1 Research Strategy

The subject of this research is the possibility and consequences of unconditional social welfare for the group of welfare recipients. The fact that unconditional social welfare is an entity that is empirically non-existent (yet), did not mean that it was not possible to bring it down for empirical theorizing, though for this to be achieved, it implicated a specific set of methods.

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[10] These ontologies can be attributed to, respectively, Sartre, Foucault, Goffman and Bourdieu.

My aim is to gain insight into the future, "not [as] forecasts but [as] images of the possible that critique the present" (Inayatullah, 2004, cited in Watson, 2009, p. 3). Possible worlds however, "do not await discovery in some remote or transcendent depository, [but] they are constructed by the creative activities of human minds and hands" (Doležel, 1998, p. 14). So instead of predicting the behavior of people and making assumptions about what they might do when presented with a rule-free system of social welfare, the focus lies on the assumptions an individual him/herself makes. Since the focus here lies not on measuring an objective reality, but rather on understanding and analyzing subjective variables, a qualitative approach suits best. And although modelling behavior is off course an important and not to be underestimated component of predicting the possibility of the succession of certain policies, I agree with Inayatullah (1990, p. 120; original emphasis) that such empiricist prediction orientation "reinforces *what is*, the present, the status quo". The focus lies rather on *how* the future is talked about, and if there is a possible discrepancy between the imagination people foster and ideal theory upon which unconditional social welfare is based.

Thinking about the future from within the present is thus inherently non-metaphysical, which means that we make it a potential tool of empirical theorizing (Doležel, 1998). Because of this non-metaphysical character of possible worlds my stance towards these entities would be 'constructionist'. Examining unconditional social welfare through future scenarios that people construct for themselves, means that there is a strong emphasis on understanding, that is, an emphasis on the subjective meaning of imagination. An interpretive perspective privileges the subject, and as such, is able to recover the deeper reality that was concealed by frames of meaning imposed by the dominant culture.

However, since the aim here is not to merely understand and interpret the way people give meaning to unconditional social welfare, but also to analyze how these meanings constitute and produce the social world as comprehensible, it was necessary to complement this interpretivist epistemology with a post-structural[11] framework. Truth then "is not something to be recovered through empathy with the object of research, nor something to be found with enough variables, but rather [the production of] regimes of truth which define the way we see and speak" (Inayatullah, 1990, p. 128). I will thus complement an interpretivist epistemology with a post-structuralist framework, since this combination enables me to give insight in the subjective imaginations and ideas of individuals, while at the same time it gives

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[11] I am well aware of the fuzziness of this concept. Here by post-structural I mean nothing more than laying an emphasis on the way subjects themselves are produced by regimes of knowledge (Foucault, 1969)

me tools to critically reflect upon these imaginations that individuals put forward. In this way, I can bring to light mechanisms of power that produce present subjectivities.

4.2 Research Design

The experience of welfare recipients and the attempt to gain insight into their lifeworld is based on an intensive and rigorous analysis of a single case. Also the data is collected within one location, namely 'De Bijstandsbond'[12], where I was able to observe and experience to a certain extent the lifeworld in which welfare recipients find themselves. Since cases are often associated with the study of a single location, such as an organization, it is tempting to see this research as providing case-study evidence. However, the defining characteristic of a case-study, according to Bryman (2012, p. 67; my emphasis), is a clear emphasis on the "intensive examination *of the setting*". This so called 'idiographic' (ibid., p. 69) approach is above all highly attentive to the unique features of the case, wherein the case thus forms an important object *an sich*. The concern here is not with the 'Bijstandsbond' as such, but rather with the generation of statements that are (partly) applicable irrespective of time and place. The 'Bijstandsbond' has to be viewed as a location that constitute the background of the findings and is thus not a unit of analysis.

Thus, in Bryman's (2012, p. 69) words, this approach is also 'nomothetic', and because of that, it is not very helpful to think of this study solely as a case-study. Instead of pin-pointing it down on one specific design, we could say that this study has elements of both the elucidation of unique features to the case, and of generating statements that more universally applicable. It is not possible to generate findings concerning the way how future narratives say something about the present, without reference to the special characteristics of the lifeworld of welfare recipients and how this is related to discursive practices within the policy domain. The crucial point is that instead of the organization itself, it is rather the sample that I collected through this organization that forms my unit of analysis.

The qualitative nature of this research has the advantage of not being preoccupied with most of the formal criteria that quantitative research is subject to. In other words, since the use of more formal instruments of data collection was avoided, the 'ecological validity' (Bryman, 2012, p. 62) is rather high. This is important, since this research is primarily concerned with gaining insight into the lifeworld of welfare recipients, and as such, it is important that the instruments "capture the daily life conditions, opinions, values, attitudes and knowledge base

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[12] For further notes on setting, population and data collection see corresponding section 4.5

of those we study as expressed in their natural habitat" (Cicourel, 1982, p. 15). It is not about the production of technically valid findings that function as artefacts and have nothing to do with what happens in people's everyday lives, but rather about producing socially scientific data that is applicable and does justice to the everyday lifeworld of the individuals' natural and social settings (Bryman, 2012). Exactly because I'm also concerned with a methodological shift from past to future, it is important that the alleged usefulness of this shift has a solid grounding in the empirical data

4.3 Research Methods

One the hand I thus want to sustain a high ecological validity, while on the other hand, the nomothetic character of this research needed to be preserved. This stance had inevitable consequences for the methods that are deployed and which were deemed most useful to adequately gather and produce relevant social scientific data. Also the fact that most of the data was collected at one location, the 'Bijstandsbond', had methodological implications. The two units of analysis, lifeworld of welfare recipients and how they made sense of future scenarios, and secondly, the construction of social phenomena by policy-making welfare reformers, asked for three different methods.

First of all, since I had the opportunity to gain access to the 'Bijstandsbond' and was able to walk along with their daily activities, a big amount of the data[13] was collected through participant observation. This I complemented with four in depth unstructured interviews and a considerable amount of informal conversations with both volunteers and clients, as well as ongoing discussions between volunteers, which I mainly observed and sometimes probed. Secondly, I gathered policy documents concerning proposals for an experiment with an unconditional social welfare system in four different municipalities[14]. I conducted a critical discourse analysis in order to analyze the embeddedness of discursivities in social practice and bring to the fore the constitution of present subjectivities.

This combination enabled me to the stay close to the two principles I stated above that were important to me, namely that of ecological validity and that of the nomothetic character of research. After all, participant observation has a naturalistic emphasis that confronts

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[13] Approximately twenty hours of research was spend as a participant observer within the 'Bijstandsbond'
[14] At time of writing there were more municipalities that proposed an experiment with unconditional social welfare, but these municipalities had the most concrete plans, meaning that the already filed in motions to start the experiment. Furthermore, choosing these four municipalities also made it possible to show that there was a general consensus throughout the socialist/liberal left, since in every municipality it was a different political party that proposed the experiment. The names and political parties were, in no particular order: Zeist (Groenlinks), Wageningen (D66), Doetinchem (PvdA) and Zaanstreek (SP)

members of a social setting in their natural environments instead of disrupting the normal strain of events (Bryman, 2012, p. 494). This is extremely important when one wants to gain insight into the lifeworld of respondents, since it is more prone to encounter unexpected events, and also the closer contact with people for a longer period of time with the possibility of doing re-interviews has the advantage of greater empathy.

Although this method thus enabled me to get a fairly genuine outlook on the problems and issues welfare recipients were dealing with in their daily life, it proved less fruitful for an analysis of what and why certain future scenarios were chosen or rejected. Simply put, what a more unconditional welfare system would mean for welfare recipients was an issue that remained largely resistant to observation and as such was largely achieved through the unstructured interviews and informal conversations. Most importantly, by using these two methods comprehensively, I could incorporate relevant observations into the interviews and thus probe certain issues that would have otherwise remained hidden. To keep this flexibility and to be able to move from observation to interviews, the unstructured character of both interviews and observations was essential.

Since an unconditional social welfare system is not out there to study as an existing objective entity (yet), but since it does exist as a plan in the imaginations of both policymakers and welfare recipients, I also used a critical discourse analysis of the gathered data. I deemed this useful because such an analysis stresses the fact that linguistic action is constituted by virtue of social purposes and institutional conditions, and that it has as its focus "the *why*", that is, the purposive nature of actions (Brünner & Graefen, 1994, cited in Keller, 2013, p. 13). Incorporating discourse analysis thus opened up a path that would have otherwise remained closed. By focusing on how unconditional welfare is talked about, that is, by focusing on how a non-empirical future establishes and presents itself as a discursive practice, the concept of unconditionality becomes empirical and is thus brought down for theorizing. The discursive practices about unconditional social welfare constitute and construct the world in meaning (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64), it reproduces or transforms society, and it achieves the construction of social identities and production of social relationships between individuals (Keller, 2013, p. 25). In other words, to gain insight into the real consequences and implications of an imaginative future scenario, that is, to make something non-empirical part of the empirical world, the deployment of discourse analysis as a complementary method was indispensable.

<u>4.4 Operationalization</u>[15]

Starting from this axiom – the interaction of the principles of justice on the one hand and the social context in which these principles become embedded on the other – my aim is to explore the consequences of the recent welfare reform proposal of unconditional social welfare. Through participant observations within an organization that helps welfare recipients and several in depth interviews with welfare recipients themselves, and through a discursive analysis of the policy documents of political parties that proposed the welfare reform, I was able to discern several dimensions that made up the three central concepts of this research. Since this operationalization was done only after the collection of data, a lot of the themes that came to the fore during the interviews and in the discursive analysis figure as an indicator. This approach means that this research can largely be seen as inductive, since I try to conceptualize and theorize on the basis of the gathered data. However, an important part of this research, is that I try to ground a social scientific account of a social world in the perspectives and meanings of participants in those worlds (Bryman, 2012, p 709). In other words, this approach should rather be viewed as abductive, since I try to develop a theoretical understanding of the social context of welfare recipients and the implications of unconditional social welfare, seen from the perspective of the welfare recipients themselves. This theoretical account is thus to a certain extent grounded in the worldview of the ones I research, and as such is worth distinguishing from induction, as it tries not to lose touch with the world as it is seen by those whose voices provided the data (Bryman, 2012, p. 401).

The most important concepts of this research are the lifeworld of welfare recipients, and how this lifeworld is related and influenced by the interplay of principles of justice on the one hand, and the social context in which they become embedded on the other. Munoz (2012) and de Beus (1995) have showed us in what way a basic income can become very unstable when one takes into account the social context in which its principle of neutrality becomes embedded. In the same way, this research makes two things apparent. First of all, through discursive analysis I showed that the proposal of a basic income mainly justifies itself on the concept of freedom, whereby every individual should be granted the freedom to live its life according to their conception of the good. However, this concept of freedom becomes embedded in a social context that will influence this conception of freedom and the interaction of both freedom and the social context make up how welfare recipients experience their situation.

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[15] See appendix 9.1 for figure

The basic themes that came to the fore during the interviews and observations were stories about endless control and degrading practices. Most respondents showed forms of alienation from society, indicated by notions such as 'not getting along' and 'having the feeling that nobody wants me'. Next to that, the combinations of bureaucratic rigidity, while at the same time the experience of a situation of persistent unemployment, resulted in feeling of uselessness, not believing that this system could make it any better.

In the discursive analysis recurrent themes were 'taking responsibility' and 'making use of the initiative again'. Citizens were posed as inherently 'venturous', and as such they shouldn't be restricted in 'developing oneself'. These notions were grounded in freedom, whereby freedom was mainly understood as the absence of restrictions to live a life according to one's own conception of the good. However, besides the prominent attendance of freedom as a justificatory principle, there was also a moralizing discourse, constructing an image of the citizen, which was deemed preferable in the eyes of the policymakers.

Besides focusing only on the present situation, I also include the future as an epistemological domain that could have something to say about present social reality. Drawing on Inayatullah (1990), among others, I view the future in a post-structural sense, meaning that it might be able to lay bare certain mechanisms that contribute to the way individuals experience themselves. This domain must be regarded as something that constitute a new kind of knowledge that would be obscured when one would only take into account the present. In other words, including the domain of the future might influence the way how welfare recipients experience the presence, and such provides a domain from where we could rethink this present.

4.5 Population and Sampling

The discursive analysis of policy documents that advocated unconditional social welfare served to see whether there was a discrepancy between the welfare recipients and the way the policy advocates thought these welfare recipients felt and how they then constructed and put forward a certain image of this group. The data for this discourse analysis I collected systematically. There are five city councils that proposed an experiment of unconditional welfare, and I choose as my unit of analysis the motions that where filed in favor of this experiment and the accompanying news message that explained and clarified the filed motion.

To gain access to the lifeworld of welfare recipients and to investigate how they experience their present situation and possible changes for the future, I conducted all my fieldwork within the organization of the 'Bijstandsbond'. This organization helps welfare

recipients with everything related to social security and offers support for people who experience problems with the system, such as cutbacks, and also provides people with legal support if necessary[16]. The people who work there are all volunteers and are welfare recipients themselves. This way of doing research had the considerable advantage of confronting respondents in a more natural and informal setting, as I explicated in the paragraph above, which was desirable since gathering insight into the lifeworld of the respondents was the central point. The fact however that all my fieldwork was conducted within this single organization, also implicated some issues with sampling, which in turn influenced the way the data is related to the research as a whole.

Since in this research the operationalization was only conducted after all the data was gathered, and theoretical considerations were changed and adapted to significant features found in the data, that is, since there is a strong emphasis on iteration, a theoretical sampling approach would prove most appropriate. However, since the concept of a basic income or unconditional social welfare is such a 'fuzzy' and wide range concept, I had to establish an a priori criterion for selecting cases and respondents; in this instance, that of being a welfare recipient. This meant there was a considerable barrier to the grounded theory approach I initially aimed to adopt, since it is difficult to attempt a generation of a well-grounded theory within a fairly limited group of respondents that was fixed within an a priori framework. When adopting a theoretical sampling approach there is an emphasis on iteration between sampling and theoretical reflection, which means that the criterion of your sample evolve with the theoretical ideas that emerge from the data. Although this research can indeed be characterized as iterative in the sense that it aims to change and adapt the theoretical framework according to what appears from the collected data, there was no "sampling on the basis of emerging concepts" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 73).

With the notion of Hood (2007, p. 152) in mind that there is a tendency "to identify all things qualitative with grounded theory", a restatement of what the character of this research is, seems necessary. Whereas grounded theory thus presupposes a sequential sampling process whereby sampling is conducted in order to develop theoretical categories and inferences, the a priori character of my sampling process constituted a too narrow background on which a fully grounded theory could be able to develop. In line with Bryman (2012, p. 422), who draws on Hood (2007), the qualitative model of my research should rather be viewed as generic

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[16] http://www.bijstandsbond.org/activiteiten/wiezijnwij/wiezijnwij.html#

inductive[17], meaning that sampling is conducted purposively (as with theoretical sampling) but not *necessarily* with regard to the generation of theory and theoretical categories. In other words, what constituted the main difference between my approach and one that could truly be named grounded theory, is that although this approach is still relatively open ended and underscores the generation of concepts and theories, it does not involve a going back and forth between theory and sample (Bryman, 2012).

4.6 Data analysis

This research had to deal with three different sets of data. First, field notes that were the result of the participant observations, second, recorded interviews, and last, policy documents of city councils. This meant that I had to use different methods of coding, since the nature of the collected data was different within the three sets.

The coding of the recorded interviews proceeded through two different stages. First, as initial coding system, I used open coding, and gave nearly every sentence a corresponding word/code. This was necessary to avoid at first stage a so-called 'self-fulfilling prophecy', that is, the risk of picking the corresponding parts in your data with your a priori knowledge of the case, and as such, possibly reproducing the already present knowledge and seeing your hypotheses confirmed. When coding line by line, there is less risk of losing contact with the data and the perspectives and interpretations of those being studied, which is especially important in the light of the high ecological validity that I aimed to sustain. After the open coding I used focused coding, emphasizing the most common codes and those that seemed to me the most revealing about the data. Focused coding helped me to make sense of the bulk of codes that resulted from the system of open coding and required me to decide on which codes made the most analytic sense to categorize the data completely and incisively (Bryman, 2012, p. 569; Charmaz, 2006).

The field notes that were the result of the informal conversations and participant observation were not suitable for open coding, since the notes itself were already a kind of coding, prone to my own interpretation, memory and interest. This being the case, I used thematic analysis to group and systematize the collected notes. Here I did use an iterative approach in the sense that I identified themes that came to the fore during the interviews, but also within the theory and vice versa. Also for the discourse analysis I mainly used thematic

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[17] I still see my approach more as abductive as I stated in paragraph 4.4 on operationalization, but since it refers here only to a model that is not *necessarily* occupied with the generation of theories, I don't see it as contradictive or inconsistent with my earlier statement.

analysis, because I was interested in how certain issues that came to the fore during the interviews and observations were being posited by policymakers, how this related to the lifeworld and experiences of welfare recipients, and what we could possibly abstract and theorize from this relation.

4.7 Ethics

Although indeed the search for a certain degree of objectivity is one of the most indispensable responsibilities of the scientific community, and which I tried to account for in the above written sections, a researcher also has a certain responsibility towards their subjects of research. This means that we have to be sensitive to the effects of our actions upon those we study in order to guarantee their rights and integrity as a human being. In this sense, ethics in this research is regarded as the conviction that "truth is good, [but] respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human dignity leaves one ignorant of human nature" (Cavan, 1977, cited in Bulmer, 1982, p. 66).

The reason to lay an emphasis on this, is because ethics play a large and precarious role in this research and this had considerable consequences for the way the research was conducted, and influenced certain choices that were deemed inevitable to make. Both interviewing and participant observations carried with them certain ethical problems which have set limits that could not be crossed.

We have to take into account that the respondents I encountered, experienced a constant scrutiny and supervision in their daily lives. As I described earlier, the current system of social security in the Netherlands is based upon controlling mechanisms and techniques of surveillance, whereby every alleged breaking of the rules can result in cuts in the payment of welfare recipients. This being the case, participants in interviews were extremely cautious, assuring more than one time the fact that this interview would remain anonymous. This also meant that sometimes I had to make the choice to not record an interview, since this made some of the respondents more at ease, which meant that the story was more likely to be genuine and less likely to be self-censored out of self-protection.

However, although the genuineness of the stories narrated is undoubtedly important, I nevertheless always had an overt role as participant observer. Both the employees of the organization, and the people that visited this organization knew that I was a researcher. This was deemed important because it gave the respondents some control over what they were willing to tell me, and also gave them the opportunity to ask me afterwards for certain corrections or omissions concerning the story they told me. Done in this way, I both captured

the stories of a lifeworld I wanted to investigate, while I stayed sensitive to the wishes of my research-*subjects*, which thus not reduced them to mere objects.

Then, a last remark on the role that my own positionality as a researcher played. Becker's (1967, p. 33) paraphrase of Shakespeare captures it well: "To have values or not to have values". However, I agree with him that this problem, whether a researcher should have certain personal commitments when entering the field or that he has to be technically correct and value free, is largely an imaginary one, since it presupposes that it is indeed possible to do research that is in no way influenced by personal and political sympathies or affiliations. The question therefore becomes not necessarily if we should take sides, but rather whose side we are on (Ibid.). In other words, since this research gives credence to a subordinate group within the hierarchy of society, there is risk of falling into deep sympathy with the people we are studying (Becker, 1967). This research then runs the risk of being biased, in the sense that it gives a one sided perspective on the problem which is very complex and multidimensional nonetheless.

However, the question is not whether I took a side (I inevitably did, since it was my aim to give insight into the lifeworld of a part of the population that has remained obscure as a subject in dominant political discourse), but rather whether the fact that I took the side of welfare recipients distorted this research to such an extent as to make it useless. The impossibility of presenting a balanced picture means that the emphasis should lie on what the limits are of the things we studied, in this case the lifeworld and experiences of welfare recipients and the subjectification of them through dominant political discourse. The fact that this marks a boundary beyond which my study cannot be applied, is not an unsurmountable problem that makes it any less scientific, but must just be regarded as a warning that the findings of this research have been constructed through the eyes of welfare recipients, and how things look from their vantage point. And certainly it would be preferable to study the case of social security through the eyes of the people who are leading reintegration trajectories as well, but this means no more than, to speak with Becker's (Ibid., p. 42) words one last time, "that over the years "one-sided" study will provoke further studies that gradually enlarge our grasp of all the relevant facets of an institution's operation". Hence, more work needs to be done.

VI.   Results

In this section, the gathered data from the discourse analysis, the interviews and the participant observation will be presented. In the first paragraph, I will briefly give some notes and explanation on how the data is related to the respondents, and how the references are related to the different sets of data that make up my research.

Since this research tries to analyze the interaction between the social context of welfare recipients and the principles upon which the proposal of unconditional welfare justifies itself, two different paragraphs are devoted to these two units of analysis. In the second paragraph I present the findings of the discourse analysis, and reflect on the implications this can have. Then, in the third paragraph I give a sketch of the lifeworld of welfare recipients and try to show how they experience the current system of social security. In the fourth paragraph then, this case of social security is viewed through a perspective of the future, sketching the way how welfare recipients see their future and what according to them could be better or worse. In the fifth paragraph I summarize the findings and try to account for these findings in a more abstract sense.

4.1 Research process

In order to conduct a discourse analysis I collected the filed motions that proposed an experiment of unconditional social welfare and the accompanying news messages that explained these motions. I choose four different municipalities, since these municipalities represented different political parties who filed the motion that proposes an experiment. The names of Zoomermeijer (2015), Giebels (2015) and Kroon (2015) correspond with respectively the PvdA, D66 and SP. These people were the ones who wrote the news message, but did proclaim the (local) party's standpoint on unconditional social welfare.

The respondents for the in-depth interviews were all gathered through the organization of the 'Bijstandsbond'. To keep it as anonymous as possible I termed these respondents R1, R2, R3, and R4. Neither of these persons were completely new in the system of social security, but not more than roughly six or seven years, with the exception of R4, who was a long-term welfare recipient. Although this influenced his perception of the future, as he was very cynical to politicians who proposed any reform of the system, he could share with me a lot of experiences and insights, since he knew the system through and through. This is why I still regard him as a representative and valuable source, and as such he was not omitted. Furthermore, all respondents with whom I conducted an in-depth interview were male and above forty years old. I'm hesitant here to give more information for the reason I stated in section 4.7 on ethics.

I also conducted a lot of informal conversations with people who visited the 'Bijstandsbond', and I observed and overheard the stories people told, and the struggles they experienced. In total, I spend five days at this organization, adding up to an average observation time of around 20-25 hours. The stories and experiences that resulted from the observations, and from the informal conversations, I marked with 'field notes Bijstandsbond', along with the corresponding date.

4.2 The desired citizen

The discussion around unconditional social welfare is surrounded by the concept of freedom. Different parties refer to this concept as a way of justifying their views. What we see more concretely, is that there is an inclination to connect social security with an inability to make choices and a diminishing freedom to act.

The city council in Zeist for instance, by making a case for unconditional social welfare, asserts that this policy measure stimulates social welfare recipients "to get active", whereas before, the strict rules "inhibited their own initiative" (Groenlinks, 2015b). According to this party, "a loosening of the rules will lead to a more active stance of welfare recipients, which will enhance their chances to escape social security" (Ibid.). Another city council of Doetinchem even goes as far to say that rules and the distrust that accompanies those rules, have a "paralyzing effect", which hinders the ability of people to transcend the welfare system "on their own strength" (Zoomermeijer, 2015). In the city of Wageningen they agree, and they underscore that the situation of welfare recipients is dominated by "oppressing measures imposed through governmental authority" whereby there is "no space to take control into one's own hands" (Giebels, 2015). What they put forward in these policy proposals is an image of the poor, or rather an image of the average welfare recipient, which structures and mediates our perception of reality. We have to keep in mind then, that the way welfare recipients are conceptualized has direct implications for how the preferred welfare reform is organized.

According to the different city councils, being a welfare recipient has the inevitable side effect of the constitution of passive and paralyzed citizens that are unable to construct their life courses for themselves. This view, that the welfare system creates passive citizens is not new, but what changes here, is that the supposed problem is not an inherent characteristic disposition of being a welfare recipient as such, but rather the constricting and oppressing rules that accompany this position. In other words, what makes people inactive is not the fact

that they are subject to welfare, as was previously believed, but instead, they argue, it are the conditions that are attached to welfare that keep people in this state of inertia.

This shift from an individual deficit to a systemic deficit opens up a path that has remained hitherto closed. By aligning the conditionality of welfare systems with the passiveness of its recipients, the advocates' aim is to disrupt the somewhat essentialist conception of "the lazy welfare queen/king" (Schram, 2000), and displace it with an alternative image that opens up the possibility of reorganizing the way how welfare can be reduced. Consider for instance the following statement made by the (leftist) green party:

Do you want to be dependent on the government and lie lazily on the couch? Do you want to be a fraud and collect tax revenues as much as possible? Do others have to decide what is good for you? (…) This is the view of human nature on which the current welfare system is based. And this view indeed asks for the present paternalistic, distrusting policy. This is a view we do not share. We believe that every human being is a full citizen that should be granted the freedom to develop itself. We believe in individual responsibility, emancipation and participation (Groenlinks, 2015a).

However, besides opening up an alternative viewpoint towards where the current welfare system should develop, this alternative image, that aims to displace the conception of a welfare recipient as inherently lazy, also puts forward its own view on human nature, and therewith also produces a notion of the desirable citizen. In other words, not only do these advocates critique the current welfare system as unnecessarily repressive and freedom-constraining, but, by choosing these precise lines of critique, they implicitly evoke a counter-image of the preferable subject.

Two things remain unchanged in the hypothetical situation of unconditional social welfare, namely the idea of 'citizen as a worker' and the idea that it is now 'up to you' whether you'll achieve to lift yourself up out of the situation of social security. In other words, being a welfare recipient is framed as an individual problem and the first and foremost solution for this problem is to get yourself into a paid job. The green party for instance, notes that "a loosening of rules will lead to a more active stance of welfare recipients and this will enhance their chances to get out of social welfare" (Groenlinks, 2015b). Framed in this way, the problem still lays with the welfare recipient him/herself, and the responsibility he/she assumes with the granted freedom.

Thus what we see here, is that notions such as 'laziness, dependency and fraud' are defined in contrast with 'responsibility, participation and trust'. The crux of the issue is that, to paraphrase Cruikshank's (1996: 234) words, social problems are defined in contrast to the achievements of the desirable citizen. Not only are these advocates proposing a reform of the current welfare system (less rules), they are also constructing a future scenario in which the responsible, trustworthy and enterprising citizen plays a central role. Central in the sense that this citizen is the condition for this reform to come through, since a system with less rules and more freedom is only likely to succeed when it is predicated upon citizens who take their responsibility, and emancipate themselves through participation and engagement.

Unconditional social welfare aims to replace the lazy, fraudulent and dependent citizen with its confident, trustworthy and entrepreneurial counterpart. What is asked in return from the welfare recipients is a responsible way of handling the new given freedom, whereby responsibility is solely understood in terms of the activation of your own inherent potential, that is, of finding a paid job. Active citizenship becomes privatized, meaning that it "allocates responsibility for people's daily and private acts" (Newman & Tonkens, 2011: 196). The alignment of participation and responsibility in this, obscures other potential meanings of participation, such as politicized forms of active citizenship. What if people don't want to be or cannot be free in the way that others have decided for them, and what is the fate of the irresponsible citizen?

To conclude, this image of welfare recipients as paralyzed in their condition must be understood against the background of the search and longing for active and participating citizens. This view on citizenship is not new, but rather the norm (Verhoeven et al., 2013; WRR, 2006; SCP, 2014). What these political parties are advocating thus, is only a change of means to produce the desired citizen, whereas this notion of citizenship itself remains uncontested.

4.3 The experience of the welfare system

However, this does not necessarily has to be a problem, and certainly not when welfare recipients conceive of themselves as active and venturous citizens who just need to be liberated from the restricting rules, so they can lift themselves up out of social security. And indeed the majority will immediately consent on the fact that the rules they are subject to, and the reintegration projects that they are obliged to take part in, are 'senseless', 'forced labor'

and are only 'creating more distance between [them] and the labour market'[18]. A venture into the lifeworld of welfare recipients leads us into stories of people who are unable to pursue their conception of the good, and who are under a constant supervision of controlling institutions that heavily constrain and discipline them in daily life. The oppressive force these rules and conditions are effecting upon welfare recipients is considered one of the most pressing problems for these people, and nearly all would opt immediately for a loosening of the rules, so that they don't 'feel the continuous presence of the disciplinary government', but 'are left alone and are given some freedom'[19].

A woman, around the age of thirty, came in with a letter from the reintegration office that stated that she had to take part in a 'work experience program' again, regardless of the fact that this was already her sixth year in social security. Because of personal circumstances, she was not able to finish her master's degree at that time, so in the end she applied for welfare. She was ready to take up her studies again after a year or so, and since she only had to do an internship as part of her graduation, it was very likely (she would obtain a degree in which there was plenty of work) that after six months of internship she would be out of welfare. However, since welfare is not supposed to be used for obtaining a degree and the reintegration office has as its principle 'the shortest way to work' (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015, p. 1) and in theory a reintegration trajectory can get you a job faster that the six months of an internship, every time she asked permission to graduate, it was denied. In other words, this is a situation where someone is purposively held in a position of welfare for over six years, from which literally nobody is profiting. After all, municipalities are paying both for her reintegration projects and for her welfare, while at the same they are missing out on the tax money that could have been collected.

This is an example of the form of bureaucratic rigidity with which welfare recipients have to deal on a daily basis. The result is an overall feeling of alienation, especially since this rigidity is in most cases counter-productive, yet determining for how their situation and life will take its course. A homeless man in his mid-forties summarized his feelings as follows:

Listen, I have to fill in this and this and that, to even be entitled to social security. I'm not able to sleep more than three nights under the same roof; otherwise they will give me a shortage. I'm not even able to sleep on a different bench than the one I have indicated on the form; otherwise they

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[18] Field notes Bijstandsbond, 03-12-2015
[19] Interview R1

will cut me too. (…) Yeah, the fact that they treat like as if I'm a baby that needs to be corrected and educated, that's the worst[20].

This story was underscored by one of the volunteers, when he told me that more than once they have to work cases that involve homeless people who have not slept next to the indicated bush or bench and therefore were not eligible for social security. This so called 'bush police', instead of conducting a normal house visit to see whether a welfare recipient really lives on the address he has given, here performs, what is ironically called, 'bush visits'[21]. He recalled a situation a while back:

> At one morning they didn't find him there, and normally they can leave a letter in the mailbox, but obviously that is not possible here, and so the second time he was not there, they decided to not give him the welfare money. Luckily we could fix this with our lawyer, but what if he did not knew us? He would have received no money at all[22].

If we take in consideration the experience of welfare recipients with the current system, they underscore the points made by the political parties who are proposing a reform. When it comes to freedom, there is an overall consensus on the fact that citizens should be to a large extent free from governmental pressures, since it is experienced as paternalistic and counter-productive. However, things took an interesting change when the welfare recipients were asked what the government could do for them, and what they thought that the appropriate solution was for getting people out of welfare.

4.4 Unemployment as an individual problem?

All the answers that were given were in some way related to work[23], and more specifically to measures that could enhance the availability of work and thus reduce the persistent

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[20] Field notes Bijstandsbond 08-12-2015
[21] In Dutch, however, the word play is more obvious: 'struikbezoek' instead of 'huisbezoek'
[22] Interview R4
[23] I'm aware of the fact that the group of welfare recipients is very heterogeneous, and as such, ascribing to all of them the view that they want work obscures the complexity of social reality. Although I indeed also encountered welfare recipients who considered themselves as 'standing outside of society', 'not willing to work another single minute of their life', most of the people I encountered still had as their main objective to find a paid job.

unemployment. This respondent for instance, who, after being part of lots of different reintegration projects, commented:

Well, [after lots of different useless trajectories for over more than two and a half years] in the end they eventually have sent me one last time to an obligatory job application training, again. An intensive job application training. Two days a week. Thirteen weeks. Compulsory attendance. But after the sixth week I said 'if you have found someone above the age of 56, who you have actually *helped to find work*, give me that name, give me that person. If you can prove this, I'll stay, but otherwise I think this is completely useless and you're just bullying me[24].

On first sight this story just repeats the dominant narrative that is also prevalent in the proposals to loosen the rules connected to welfare; but what is of interest here, is this notion of 'helped to find work'. Apparently what reintegration trajectories should do, first and foremost, is help the welfare recipient in getting a paid job. They should actively stimulate their participation in the labour market, since it is presumed that they themselves cannot do this. Still, we could read this as an affirmation of the fact that instead of stimulating people into work, we should be giving them the freedom to stimulate themselves. But, when the respondent was asked what he would rather like to do instead of these projects, he answered "payed work", and then, "but yeah, payed work, for that there's obviously [sarcastic] not enough money"[25].

The feeling of not being in control when it comes to the search of successfully finding a paid job is one of the most frustrating aspects with which welfare recipients are confronted in their lives. One woman who got another frustrating letter of the reintegration office that she had to participate in yet another program explained:

Off course, I really, really want to work. Forty or fifty hours, I don't care. But it has to be something that I really *can* do. I apply for jobs day after day, but nobody seems to want me[26].

The fact this condition is connected with factors that lie outside of the influence of the welfare recipients themselves, is illustrated by the conversations with people in their mid-forties/fifties, who found it very difficult, maybe nearly impossible, to get out of welfare on their own strength again. And this was not because they didn't search of a job, but rather

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[24] Interview R2; my emphasis
[25] Interview R2
[26] Field notes Bijstandsbond 17-12-2015

because there were no jobs for this specific group of people. One man commented: "They saw me coming there, and immediately asked 'how old are you'? Forty years?! Ha-ha, I am sorry sir, but you better stay at home!"[27]

In other words, what we could deduce from these experiences, is that besides the longing to be free from bureaucratic control, there is a longing to participate in paid work. But whereas in the policy documents the problem was mainly framed as 'rules that inhibit own initiative', the problem that the group of welfare recipients themselves experience is not solely these rules, but also the persistent unemployment. And the fact that the respondents refer to factors that lie outside of their influence as the main cause, and the fact that they note sarcastically that there is not enough money to compensate for this, suggests that in their experience the persistent unemployment is not only the result of the uncontrollable free market, but also dependent on certain political choices. Thus, whereas the political parties aligned the passiveness of welfare recipients with the conditionality of the system, the welfare recipients themselves rather connect their position with the current condition of unemployment. Both agree on the uselessness of the system, but they differ on what an eradication of the system would achieve.

Some were convinced that even a basic income would not make a radical change for the position of welfare recipients, although this is a rule-free system of social welfare in optima forma:

Hm, a basic income? I'm not very enthusiastic about this idea. Why not? Because it does nothing concretely to tackle the problems of unemployment. Only the relatively higher educated could profit from this service, but is does nothing for the group that is already marginalized[28].

This view was widely shared, also by someone who was not in social welfare himself, but who provided juridical assistance to welfare recipients who experienced problems with payments, such as cuts:

There are a lot of people who really, really want to work. And yes, there are also people who are just lazy. For this last group a basic income or unconditional social welfare may be an outcome, but what about the first group? How is a basic income going to provide them with a job?[29]

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[27] Field notes Bijstandsbond, 10-12-2015
[28] R3
[29] Field notes Bijstandsbond, 03-12-2015

There is thus a genuine fear that when the reform is not accompanied by measures that take into account unemployment, this reform will only lead to a further marginalization of this already vulnerable part of society. Unconditional social welfare is regarded is a "ransom"[30], to speak with one of the respondents words, and will only foster a further disconnectedness between the 'have's and the have-nots'.

4.5 The freedom of the future

Summarizing and concluding this section, we could say that two things come explicitly to the fore. Firstly there is overlapping consensus between the policymaking reformers and the welfare recipients concerning the uselessness and counter productivity of reintegration trajectories, and both agree on the fact that there is a serious need to cut back on bureaucratic control and disciplinary mechanisms that are the defining part of the current system. People should be free. But at this point the two different narratives start to diverge. After all, we should ask the question 'free from what'?

On the one hand there is this narrative of the reforming policymakers who assert that citizens should be free as much as possible from governmental authority in order to be able to 'invest in themselves' and make us of their 'own initiative'. If we keep in mind then that the key tenet of neoliberalism is its corollary, self-regulating form of citizenship (Rose, 1999) which is predicated upon a more private, individually oriented form of civic participation (Putnam, 2000), we could read this proposal as yet another form of neoliberal subjection, although through a different means.

On the other hand then, the narrative of the welfare recipients themselves also denounce the system as unnecessarily oppressive and controlling but first and foremost because it is 'degrading' and 'paternalistic', and not because it is their own initiative that needs to be restored. They rather point out that it is the unyielding unemployment, which is (partly) the result of certain political choices, that needs serious addressing. Freedom here, does not solely mean independency from government, but is rather viewed as estimating the extent that I, and not someone else, am in control. The government should effectively create certain conditions, such as work, because these conditions (among others) enable people to be free.

In other words, what is happening in a more abstract sense here, is the collision of two concepts of freedom, that is, freedom as non-interference versus freedom as control. Whereas

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[30] R3

in the first case freedom signifies the mere absence of something, in the second case it seems to require the presence of something (Carter, 2012). This is indeed highly reminiscent of Isiah Berlin's (1969) notions of positive and negative liberty. According to Berlin, when using the negative concept of liberty we attempt to answer the question "What is the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?", whereas the positive concept attempts to answer the question "What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?" (Berlin, 1969, pp. 121-122). It are exactly these two concepts that are deployed within the two different narratives concerning unconditional social welfare and which are also inevitably predisposed to constitute two different kinds of social realities. In the conclusion I will reflect on the possible implications this can have for welfare recipients and their relation to society.

VII. Conclusion

It is clear that the current system of welfare with its rules and constriction is experienced as a heavy burden on the daily lives of welfare recipients. The constant supervisions, the degrading trajectories and the senseless job application training programs are not helping welfare recipients to find a job, or to live their live in a way that is meaningful to them. This means that there was an overall consensus on the fact that there is a strong need to as soon as possible alleviate the conditions that are connected to welfare. However, this 'overall consensus' deserves some critical reflection, especially because of the fact that all of the fieldwork was conducted in an organization that helps welfare recipients with problems they experience. The fact that they were there, already signified that they experienced problems, and as such, they could be viewed as influenced on their perception of the current welfare system. Theoretically spoken, it could indeed be the case that outside of this organization, welfare recipients were very well pleased with the current system of reintegration projects, the 'shortest way to work' courses, and job application training programs. The description of the lifeworld of welfare recipients and the theoretical considerations I developed out of this data then runs the risk of merely reproducing one partial view on social security that is not applicable to people outside of the organization. However, the fact that these problems are widely signified, not only in my interviews and data, but also in newspapers, political parties and parliamentary debates, strengthens my conviction that the image I sketch of the experiences of welfare recipients are not constricted to the specific situation of de

'Bijstandsbond', but are largely felt throughout this group of people, and as such provide an illustration of the general feeling that prevails.

The fact that this problem is picked up by several political parties in different municipalities also signified that this problem was experienced outside of the 'Bijstandsbond'. The discursive analysis of the different policy documents showed that the political parties recognized the struggles the welfare recipients experience in daily life, and therefore also recognized the need for an alleviation of the rules and conditions. However, the alleged freedom enhancing character of this measure, which is deemed preferable by both welfare recipients and political parties, becomes embedded in a social context that remains unchanged, that of an 'activating welfare state' (WRR, 2006) with its specific form of citizenship. In other words, while opting for an alleviation of the rules, the political parties also produce a preferable subject with an already filled in understanding of citizenship. We have to keep mind then, that it was exactly this notion of the 'active' and 'venturous' citizen that was underlying the earlier adoption of the rules and conditions attached to welfare. What we thus see, is only a change in means to achieve the construction of the good citizen, leaving this conception of citizenship itself unchanged.

This becomes a problem when we take into account the future that welfare recipients construct for themselves. Alleviation of conditions would certainly be welcome for now, but how is that going to provide them with a job? As we've seen, for the welfare recipients the biggest problem was not necessarily that their initiative that needed to be restored, but rather the experience of a persistent unemployment that left them unable to participate in society. The fact that this unemployment is experienced as (partly) the result of political choices, attest to the fact that both parties have a different understanding of how one can be a good citizen. And as it turned out, it is especially the inclusion of the imaginations that welfare recipients foster about the future that highlights this paradox, which underlies unconditional social welfare: everyone agrees on the need of freedom, but they disagree on what freedom is.

Whereas welfare recipients thus have a positive understanding of freedom, meaning that to be free requires the *presence* of something, the policy advocates justify their ideas mainly on a negative understanding of freedom, meaning that it is solely the *absence* of something that makes people free. Now, it is not about whether that or this form of freedom deserves preference, Berlin (1969) wrote a great deal about it, but rather that the supposed negative character of freedom upon which unconditional social welfare is based, is a phantasm. Because, besides positing that citizens should be free from constraints and thus putting to the fore a negative concept of freedom, this ideal principle also becomes embedded

in an activating welfare regime, and as such, negative freedom adopts the dominant premises of this regime. In other words, negative freedom is phantasmal in the sense that it is accompanied by a moralizing discourse of what it means to be a good citizen. Drawing on a negative concept of freedom while also sustaining this moralizing discourse, runs the risk of creating an ever deeper split between the 'deserving and undeserving poor'.

Giving welfare recipients the freedom to develop themselves is thus not based on some affective morality, but is rather a rational calculative means that aims to constitute desired subjects, thereby also inevitably constructing the unwanted citizen, 'the other', the unwilling person that refuses to or can't draw itself 'back in society'. After all, since lesser rules have led to an unrestrictive situation, wherein every person can develop itself and take limitless initiative, the ones who are left behind, who are not able to lift themselves up, are there solely and alone because of their own guilt. In this way, building the policy proposal upon a specific notion of citizenship that centers on participation, responsibility and trust, being unemployed could be considered as a strictly individual problem, where it is the individual's own choice not to answer to the expectations of society. To refer the guilt of unemployment to the citizen itself, obscures the power relations and structural inequalities that are part of social reality. At the same time it depoliticizes the condition of unemployment and the meaning of active citizenship. As such, this plan runs the risk of creating an ever more marginalized group that is disconnected and left alone at the fringes of society.

What would it mean if we fit the imagination of people into a broader framework? What could this possible discrepancy between policymakers and welfare recipients mean on a more abstract level? Answers on hypothetical questions have an important implication concerning the kind of knowledge they produce. The first possibility is that they reproduce a dominant social discourse and thus predict present societal circumstances onto to future. The second possibility however, is that these answers signify a self that is (partly) outside a social context, and being there, is able to construct a future that is progressive and emancipatory. Progressive, because it can possibly be less constrained by structural domination (such as symbolic violence), and emancipatory, because a progressive future has the potential of transforming the present if one would act in line with this future. This means that the ability to make free choices is also dependent on the extent to which future narratives implicitly critique elements of the present. Should we take future imaginaries serious and view them as constituting a new kind of ontology that escapes the binary of structure-agency?

There can be no conclusive answer on this, but this research at least showed that through a discourse analysis of future narratives one could come to alternative results. After

all, the inclusion of a focus on the future resulted in the 'discovery' of different concepts of freedom. If we would have focused only on the present we would have found that freedom from constraining welfare rules is preferable. As such, the inclusion of future narratives opens up a space, from where one is able to better grasp the complexity and multi-sidedness of society, and from where eventually alternative discourses can possibly start to emerge.

Dominant discourses that are prevalent throughout society have the capacity and tendency to silence alternative discourses and therewith reproduce power, there, where it is already present. Including future narratives into one's framework therefore aims to shed light on the contestations and subversions of the marginalized that have been silenced so far. It is about creating, for those are not seen as having a privileged position as a speaker, that circumstantial condition, wherein they can decide what can be said and what should be regarded as legitimate to say. We have to ask ourselves whose future we are defining and which freedom we are advocating. Because, if we don't do that, if we are not willing, to refer to the painting on the front, to share that brush with those for whom we are so eagerly trying to paint a path, "our institutional legacy will be frail and evanescent, (…) impoverishing language, that most characteristic of human institutions, that structure of meaning and continuity that is never still and ever open to the improvisations of all its speakers" (Scott, 1999, p. 357).

VIII. Evaluation

The reason why I initially started with this research was because I was interested in the idea of a basic income. What I found especially intriguing, was the way how this plan was framed in a 'solution for everything' way, and how it mainly justified itself in the media with reference to middle class ideals, such as developing your creative potential, and doing an extra university degree. In other words, I was interested in how this plan would work out for people who supposedly needed it the most, but were most of the time absent within policy circles and law-making institutions.

Next to that, since a basic income is a plan that does not exist yet, I had to find a way to make it researchable and the initial plan was, to conduct hypothetical life histories with respondents to see how they would form their life and what implications this would have for the succession of the system of a basic income. It was this initial idea of hypothetical life-histories that made me think about the implications that hypothetical answers have for the

kind of knowledge they produce and thus eventually steered me in the direction of this futurist perspective that makes up an important part of my research.

The biggest struggle I encountered was to find respondents. It proved very difficult to find welfare recipients in my own environment, which nevertheless also strengthened my conviction that there is growing gap between the different strata in society, where people from different backgrounds do not encounter each other anymore. The fact that I eventually could perform my research as a participant observer within the 'Bijstandsbond'', luckily solved the problem of finding respondents and was a very instructive period for me. It reassured my conviction that it is worth hearing the stories of people who are usually not deemed as necessary to hear. It did broaden my perspective in a way that no scientific book could have done.

I think this is how we arrive at another point that I experienced as difficult during the research process and that was the operationalization. I do have a strong interest for social theory, but sometimes it was difficult to fully connect the empirical with the theoretical. Giving a clear account of how my theoretical considerations are exactly related to the empirical findings, and to give a clear operationalization of this interaction, was one of the hardest aspects for me during this research. Especially the last phase of this thesis, when I had to make it a coherent whole and had to work away inconsistencies and provide the reader with a logical structure, was a part that I found very difficult, yet also provocative, and it is here that there is a lot to learn.

Last, but not least, although this research did improve a lot compared to earlier versions in terms of literary clarity, I am well aware of the fact that the writing style I sometimes use is far from vivid, and maybe sometimes even unintelligible. It might be bright to have complicated thoughts, but I regard it as even more bright, when one can translate those thoughts into a lucid and understandable text, especially when one is addressing issues that have their importance also outside of academia. Trying to be nuanced and express the knowledge that you have, while also at the same time keeping an understandable writing style is an art in itself, and this is where I hope to gain considerable improvement in the foreseeable future.

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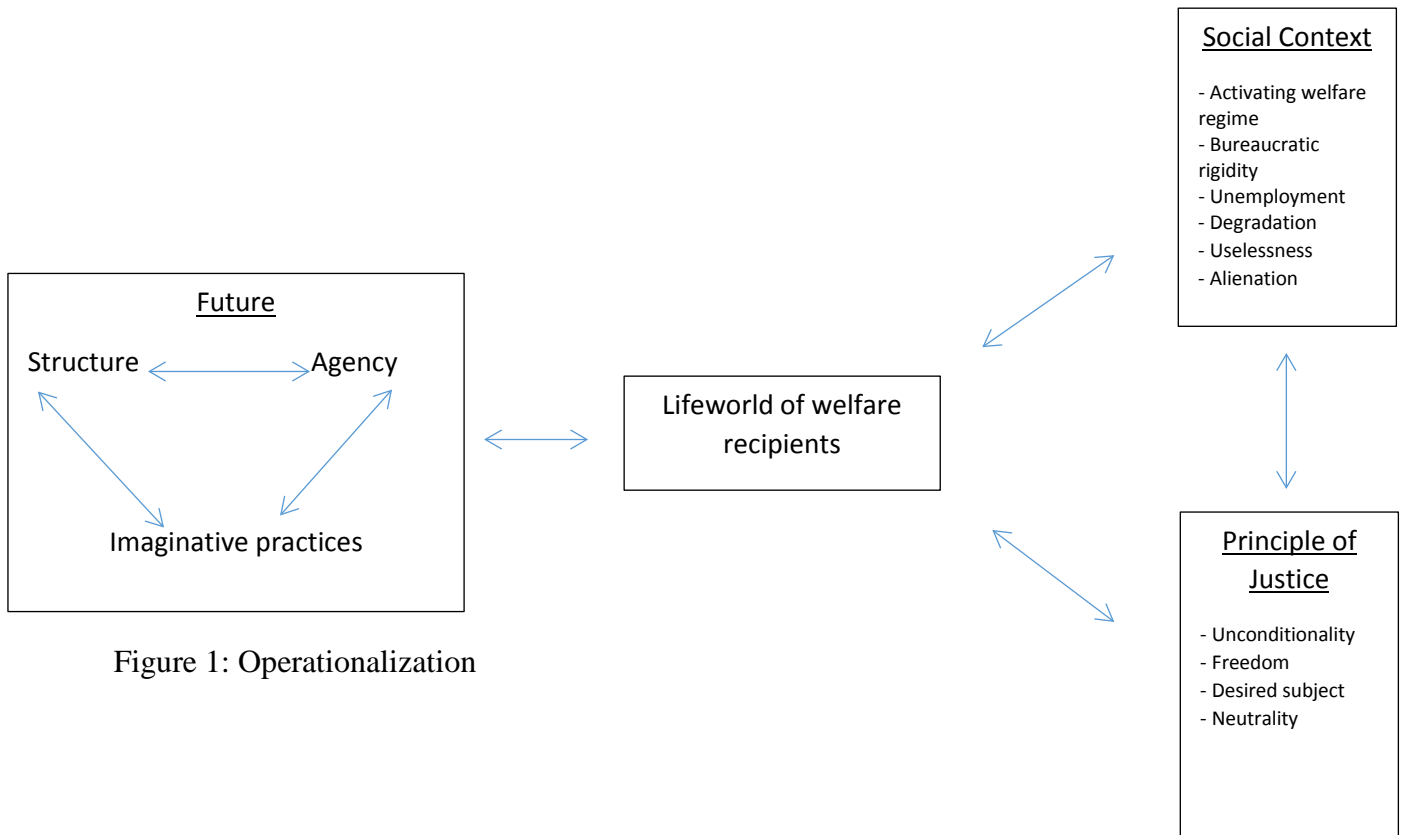## X.   Appendices

10.1 Appendix I: Operationalization scheme

Figure 1: Operationalization

10.2 Appendix II: Interview guide

Since I choose to conduct unstructured interviews, my guide is very small, as to leave as much space as possible for improvisations and unforeseen directions. However I need retain a basic topic list:

1) Experience with welfare; current situation
   - How do you experience the rules concerning welfare
   - Reintegration trajectories
   - Obligatory job application
2) What should change according to you?
   - What could the government do to help you?
   - How do you think certain conditions can be improved best?
3) Hypothetical scenarios
   - Imagine you will receive an UBI
   - What will you do?
   - What would change?

10.3 Appendix III: Field notes from the participant observation at the 'Bijstandsbond'

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10.4 Appendix IV: Interview transcripts

[Removed from published version]