

The Return of the Poor

The Creation of a New Underclass and how it Constitutes
Society

Jesper Svedgard

Abstract

This thesis puts forward the idea that the radical other that constitutes and threatens our society is not to be found outside its limits, but that it is something inherent to our society. It proposes that the threatening other, the constitutive outside of society, is the subject 'the poor', that in its failure to partake in the labour market, fails to conform to the rules of the market, and as such, fails to conform to the societal structures. The thesis introduces a new way of understanding the myth of society as being upheld by the ideology of the market. As such, any action that can be seen as putting the market mechanisms out of play is seen as a fundamental threat to the structural order. By using a post-structuralistic approach and a discourse analytical method I perform a deconstruction of the subject position 'the poor', which shows how the poor can be understood as a new underclass that is continuously excluded and re-excluded from society in a self-reinforcing process.

Key words: discourse theory, poverty, the subject, the market, ideology

Words: 19705

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1 Introduction

The thesis offers a new way of understanding society by deconstructing its opposite; the anti-society. The anti-society is what negates society and shows its limits, it is that which is not a part of society but as such gives it meaning. By deconstructing the subject position ‘the poor’¹ through the reading of public enquiries and reports, I will show how the poor can be understood as a new underclass that is outside of society. In other words, I will reveal the constitution of society by deconstructing its *constitutive outside*.

I will provide a critique of contemporary understandings of poverty and its consequences and show that there has been a shift in the focus on poverty in the political sphere and among researchers from the phenomenon of poverty towards the poor being seen as a distinct social group. This is part of a creation of the poor as a new underclass which is being segmented outside of society and given the role of an anti-society, as the constitutive outside of society. This makes it possible, through a deconstruction of the subject position ‘the poor’, to reveal the ideological necessity behind the myth that is society.

The critique I put forward against both poverty research and the political discursive understanding of poverty is its unilateral focus on the manifested and the acceptance of the division between the objective and the subjective, between an objective field, constituted outside of discourse, and a mental inside of pure expression of thought. Instead, we need to recognize that according to which parameters we label certain people as poor, will not only categorize them differently, but actually be part of the social and material construction of these people. In other words: the way in which researchers ask the question of what poverty is and who the poor are, is a part of the social construction of poverty and the poor, and this process is not separated from the material, but is a part of its transformation.

I will conclude by propose that what gives ‘the poor’ their ideological meaning is that they fail to be market actors. In contrast, what makes people included in society is their market activity and their ability to obtain the hegemonic societal identity which I will call ‘the entrepreneur’. In this sense the ideology of the market is the ideology behind the manifested society, or to put it plainly, the market *is* society.

¹ Throughout the thesis ‘the poor’ refers to the subject position and the poor refers to a group of people, living in what can be considered poverty.

1.1 Previous Research: Overview and Critique

The study of poverty has a long history, especially in Great Britain (Halleröd 1991) where it has been the focus of the gaze of theoreticians such as Adam Smith (1904 [1776]), Edmund Burke (1987 [1795]), Thomas R. Malthus (1989 [1798]), David Ricardo (1924 [1817]) and Friedrich Engels (1983 [1844]). Even the modern poverty research can be said to have originated in Britain when Seebohm Rowntree studied poverty in York during the first half of the twentieth century (Halleröd 1991) and made inquiries “into the social and economic conditions of the wage-earning classes” (Rowntree 1941: v). During the 1970s an international trend of seeing poverty as something beyond economic factors grew, instead it was comprehended as being comprised by a variety of social factors (Burchart et al. 1999; Misturelli & Heffernan 2008). In Sweden, systematic research of poverty and the conditions of the poor started in 1960s with research focusing on why some people were still poor in a system built on an idea of eradicating poverty (see Inge 1960; Korpi 1971). During the early 1990s the amount of poverty research grew fast and the focus of this first wave of research was still on answering the question of why poverty remained in society and poverty was still understood in mainly economic aspects, however it was increasingly seen as an impossibility to eradicate (Halleröd 1991, 1995a; 1995b). However, Swedish researchers increasingly adopted the international trend of seeing poverty as social rather than economic (see Halleröd & Larsson 2008; Bask 2010).

Most Swedish poverty research is based on an empiricist foundation, and focus on measuring poverty and to uncover the truth of who the poor really are. This research often builds on a naïve acceptance of the idea that statistical data can, in a way other forms of evidence cannot, provide hard evidence of a reality beyond discourse. The effect of this is that we end up in either a naïve realism, which presupposes an overlapping of thought and material being, or a scepticism where our understanding never can become fully submerged with the material world we want to understand (Žižek 2014: 15-6). This acceptance gives that poverty is comprehended as objectively given, as natural in the sense that it is formed only by material conditions outside our creation of meaning. This division between the objective and the subjective also gives that our understanding of poverty will not have an actual impact on poverty as a social phenomenon. But I would say that this is an incorrect assumption, and not only in the sense of a reversal of the logic, that our thoughts and ideas have material effects, but that the discursive is material in itself, and that a division between the two spheres is an illusion. If we shift our focus from the Swedish to the international research community, however, there are studies made that focus on the discursive construction of poverty (see Bradshaw 2004; Levitas 2005; Misturelli & Heffernan 2008) which can give important insights into society’s understanding of poverty.

One of the most influential of these studies is Ruth Levitas’ (2005) *The Inclusive Society?: Social Exclusion and New Labour*, which gives a good account of different views/discourses of poverty. She presents in her study three

competing discourses: MUD (Moral Underclass Discourse) in which the poor are suffering from a lack of morality, and a rise in poverty is explained through the dissolving of the social structures, which in turn are dependent on the demoralisation of society. According to MUD, the only way to fight and lower poverty is by re-moralising society and to strengthen the social structures of society (Levitas 2005: 90f). Within SID (Social Integration Discourse) the poor is seen as lacking in paid work and the solution lies within the economic sphere, through market solutions. RED (Redistribution Discourse) views the poor as lacking in money, and the solution for eradicating poverty as political, in this way poverty is seen as a structural problem originating in market structures. Society's view on poverty, in what way it constitutes a problem, how it is viewed and where the solution lies, is not just a specific comprehension of poverty and what society ought to do about it in the form of a correction of the system, it is also a part of the system (Esping-Andersen 1990: 23). Although, Levitas focus on the discursive construction of poverty, what is wrong in the understanding of the lack that constitutes the view of the poor in Levitas study is the comprehension of this lack only in the sense of what the poor are thought to be without, moral in MUD, work in SID, and money in RED. What this lack truly is, is the symbolic identification, the master-signifier; that which is just a lack, until it through identification becomes a positive attribute (Žižek 2012: 591).

Levitas and many other discourse analytics still cling to the idea of the division between our understanding and the objective world. What I want to propose instead is that these are inseparable, that contingency is not just an epistemological condition, but an ontological one, in that the object is nothing in itself and is always constructed through discourse. This is the condition for the possibility of “making people up”, because if the subject has no given essence outside of discourse, that which the empiricists are looking for is simply not there. To put it plainly, we all intuitively know who the poor are (even if we do not agree on the extent of poverty), and what researchers try to do is to find variables to define that group. This is an activity that is not only bound to fail, but it will also have the side effect of ideologically creating an essence of this group of people, because this essence is non-existing before the act of inquiry starts. What I want to show in this thesis is on what premises the subject position ‘the poor’ is ideologically constructed.

1.2 Research Questions

My point of departure for this thesis is that it is possible to discursively “make people up” and my purpose is to show how this is done in relation to the poor in Sweden. There have been research done to show the discursive change in our understanding of poverty and the contingent character of the subject ‘the poor’ (see Bradshaw 2004; Levitas 2005; Misturelli & Heffernan 2010), but there have not, to my knowledge, been any study undertaken to show the constructed essence, the necessity, behind the subject position ‘the poor’ and what role it is

given in the ideological totalization of society. I focus on what the poor might be rather than what they are, in the sense that I do not study and analyse the manifested, the observable, that which can be seen as reality. It is what is beyond this reality that interests me; the ideology behind the created subject 'the poor', and in what way 'the poor' has come to be society's constitutive outside, that which fills society with meaning. From the purpose of this thesis given above two questions can be formulated.

First, what is the necessary ideological kernel which 'the poor' are structured around?

Second, how can we understand society as a social order constituted by its negation, 'the poor'?

1.3 Method

The ontological point of departure for this thesis is the recognition that we cannot step out of discourse into a non-ideological position and view the world objectively, or, if you will, take off our ideological glasses that distort our view of reality. It is possible, however, to deconstruct the ideological construction of meaning, in order to uncover the contingency of the manifested, what points of reference are possible for subjects to obtain, how they relate to each other in the discursive structure and on what premise our society is based.

To give an account of the structural formation of the subject (i.e. 'the poor') and the ideological construct of society I will use a post-structural discourse theoretical approach. This is to be able to go beyond the observables and the idea of an essential identity of poverty.

1.3.1 What is Discourse

When referring to the concept of discourse I follow the post-structuralist tradition of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and the way they use the concept in their post-structuralist manifesto, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. According to their understanding of discourse everything is discourse and there is nothing beyond it obeying other logics (Laclau & Mouffe 2001 ch.3). However, this does not mean that everything is ideas and that the material world is just our imagination (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 108; Torfing 1999: 96). What it means is that there is not as Fairclough (1989), among others, claim; logics of the social that are not discursive, such as the economy. It means that

every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence [and] that any distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behavioural aspects of a social practice, is

either an incorrect distinction or ought to find its place as a differentiation within the social production of meaning, which is structured under the form of discursive totalities. (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 107)

That the material does exist, does not mean that the positive physical laws regulating it can be transferred and applied to our social world. Instead the social work through the logic of language and just as the constant variability of language, where terms incessantly are defined into concepts, social categories will to some extent be floating. But identities and meaning will be partially fixed through chains of equivalence. To construct a chain of equivalence is to bring together and connect a group of elements, without any meaning in themselves, to create structures of meaning which will fixate these elements as moments and give them meaning in the connections between them and their structuration around nodal points (I will in this thesis use the term nodal point to refer to all privileged moments, either they structure discourses, identity or spatiality), which are certain important signs that have the “capacity to unify a certain discourse by partially fixing the identity of its moments” (Torfing 1999: 99). But meaning can only be created through the logic of difference. Just in the same way as particular signs have no meaning in themselves, but need other signs to fill them with meaning, identities and other social phenomena have no pre-given, hidden or transcendental, eternal truth. Instead the social is formulated and reformulated continually through the construction of chains of equivalence abiding the logic of difference (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 127-34). As a result, reality as we perceive it becomes contingent, i.e.; things are in a certain way but could have been different. This does not mean that everything is floating with no fixed meaning, only that the existing order is not given by some natural externality that fixates its meaning. This discursive order of the social have consequences for the political, a consequence referred to as antagonism, which is the struggle between discourses.

Just as there can be no principle of unity for a discourse in a certain object or logic, “[t]he coherence of a discourse is given only in the shape of a regularity in dispersion” (Torfing 1999: 99). Social antagonism is what structures the discourse, but those antagonisms are within discourse. The limits of discourse is given by that which is not just one more difference but what poses a threat to the entire discourse and all differences within (Torfing 1999: 124). This limit is given by the creation of a radical otherness which has no place in the structure, but at the same time both constitutes the structure and poses a threat to it. This otherness acts as a, in the terms of Ernesto Laclau (1990: 17), *constitutive outside* to the discourse. In this case I will show that our society and all its antagonisms are constituted and threatened by the otherness of ‘the poor’.

1.3.2 Discourse Theory in Practice

The analytical aim of this thesis is to show the limits of the societal discourse and how its negated externality, ‘the poor’, constitute our society in the same way as the ‘orient’ constitute the ‘west’ and the ‘Jew’ constituted the German society for

the Nazis. In order to do this I have to understand how ‘the poor’ is constructed and differentiated from society. Different empirical material have been used to get a deep understanding of poverty and throughout the process a “communicative” relation between the material and the analysis have been established. The ontological understanding of the world presented below has created a foundation on which an analysis of the material has taken place. In the analysis quotations, all of which translated by me, are frequently used to increase transparency.

The analysis is divided into two parts. In the first part I have constructed a narrative to get a better historical understanding of poverty and how ‘the poor’ have related to society throughout history, this is done by investigating the structures of regimes of knowledge – the discursive structure of truth. Since knowledge and truth is constructed through power, the power structures are made visible by showing what truths of the poor have existed. And in this truth-creating discursive structure, the subject position ‘the poor’ is created as a decentred subject (Jørgensen & Philips 2002: 13-5) that is located outside of society forming an anti-society through negating the points of identification of an already negated subject (Dyrberg 1997: 146). What will be shown in the narrative in chapter three is how the discursively constructed truths of the poor have created different structural positions for ‘the poor’ in different historical eras.

The second part of the analysis is structured around the subject position ‘the poor’ and how it is constructed as the constitutive outside of society. I will deconstruct the subject position by showing which moments that structures the contemporary poverty discourse. But these moments have no fixed meaning in themselves, they get their meaning from the discursive structure. In this case I will show how the market can be seen as a nodal point that fills the moments with meaning and with their structuring effect creates and shape the subject position.

1.4 Material

The purpose of this thesis is partly to deconstruct the subject position ‘the poor’, and governmental publications that in one way or another deal with poverty or the poor have been deemed appropriate for this study. Sweden’s action plans against poverty, between 2003 and 2010, have been used as main sources since they take an all-embracing approach towards poverty instead of, like in most other sources, focus on particular areas connected with poverty, such as health care insurance, integration and education. The action plans builds on a European Union collaboration around questions of poverty and social exclusion and on what can, and should be done, as counter measures (Regeringskansliet 2008: 4) The collective goals that should be incorporated in national action plans have been developed during the years since 2000 but they more or less follow along the same lines. The main goal is to make the EU into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, capable of economic growth, more and better jobs and enhance social cohesiveness. The goals developed are as follows:

1. facilitate participation in employment and everyone's access to resources and services,
2. prevent social exclusion,
3. help those most exposed,
4. mobilise all actors (Regeringskansliet 2003: 3).

Besides the action plans a wide variety of other governmental publications have been used. To get a comprehensive picture of all materials used in the analysis see the list of governmental publications in the end of the list of references. I have limited the material to only encompass governmental publications published since the year 2000, because my aim was to construct a contemporary discourse. The reason for stretching back to the year of 2000 is to use material from different governments, compound by different parties, in an attempt to show that the discourse I construct is not bound to any particular party or government. The different publications fills different purposes, they act as communications and informative texts, they investigate and propose institutional changes, and they also act as means to convince the public of desirable policies.

The material used to construct the narrative of poverty is a different kind of material, which can be seen and treated both as primary sources and secondary sources and consists mainly of research and theories about poverty and the poor, from Adam Smith to contemporary researchers. This material is not just studies of poverty, but can also be studied as bearers of ideas and discursive understandings of the phenomenon and in this way they can be studied as primary sources. And if our understanding and comprehension of a phenomenon is an integrated part of that phenomenon, then the actual poverty can in this way be traced through time and be used to build a continuous narrative.

1.5 Disposition

Up to this point in the thesis I have given a very short research review and put forward my critique of existing research, and in what way my approach theoretically differs from the previously mentioned research and what the purpose of this thesis is. The methodological approach towards discourse theory and how I have practically used it in this study have been presented and what material I used for the two different analytical sections and how they are used have been discussed.

The rest of the thesis can be divided into three parts, the first part is the analytical section in which I present the narrative that I have constructed and which will act in a twofold way. Firstly it will give a historical background against which a better understanding of our contemporary conception of poverty and view of the poor can emerge and, secondly it shows in what way we can understand 'the poor' as being the constitutive outside of society and how this have changed through history, with a discovery of society that was defined by the segmentation of 'the poor' outside of society, how they were included during 'the

era of the welfare state'. An era which started to dissolve during the last decades of the twentieth century and the poor have made a return in the process. The second part is an analysis of the contemporary poverty discourse in Sweden in which I show the ideological construct of 'the poor' and in the third part and last part an understanding of society is created based on society's constitutive outside, 'the poor'.

2 Ontological Points of Departure

In this chapter the ontological understanding on which the thesis rests will be presented. In the first part of the chapter I will give an account of the theoretical basis on which creation of meaning is based, in short that all meaning are given from a structural relationship with the outside, and what I mean when I say that society is a myth. The second part is about the decentred subject and how it is nothing in itself – has no essence. I will also discuss the fact that even though the subject does not have a perfect structural identity, composed of a collection of subject positions, it has difficulties of breaking with the social order – the discourse.

2.1 The Constitutive Outside and the Myth of Society

To understand our social world we need to view the social system in its entirety, we cannot understand an object (or subject) by only giving it positive attributes. For example: the West does not get its meaning from within, from a certain essential Western-ism, but from its opposite, its outside, the East. In this regard post-structural discourse theory builds on Derrida's (1982) critique of Western thinking in which the world is fixed in binaries, hierarchically ordered with an essential inside and an excluded and inferior outside. He shows that the excluded outside poses a ruinous threat to the inside, but that the inside cannot be defined and will not exist without the outside. He points out that the inside is marked by a constitutive lack and is impossible as a totality and therefore needs the outside to fill this lack. The outside is in this way just as important as the inside, perhaps even more so since it is the outside that constitutes the inside. This is a reversal of the binary hierarchy, where it is not the sovereign King who constitutes his subjects, but the subjects who constitute the King, for his essence is just a symbolic being, a symbolic appearance that structures the social order, but in itself is nothing.

What this implies is that there is no Archimedean point outside of the social structure from where it is possible to objectively observe the object of inquiry. What is needed to comprehend our social world beyond the manifested is the abandonment of “every system of reference, to do away with every *pure given*, whether *a priori* or *a posteriori*” (Althusser 1997 [1947]: 62 emphasis in original). Now, this is not to say that everything is relative, it means that every transcendental point of reference with a self-determining essence (such as God, humanity or nature) that can fix all other meanings and identities in a totalizing structure, is non-existing and is just part of the symbolic order. There *is* a material

world beyond our social world, but there is no truth; “[t]ruth is not a feature of externally existing reality, but a feature of language” (Torfing 2005: 13). Truth, meaning and identities are created and formed by their relations to other meanings, and are therefore bound in time and space and cannot be understood by themselves, but need to be related to other objects/subjects. Hence, particular meanings and identities should always be interpreted in a specific discursive context to understand how they are constructed.

Meaning is constructed through the assertion of difference and articulations of chains of equivalence. There is no possibility of a discursive totalization which will fixate meaning as to create a discursive closure, instead, meaning can be said to be partially fixed through the construction of discourses around nodal points, which is privileged moments in a discursive structure which other moments is organized around. In other words: articulation is the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 113). This partially fixed meaning is what constitutes the possibility of knowledge and truth creation. The truth is not something external to our knowledge that is “out there”, waiting to be discovered: “The process of knowledge (that is, our comprehending the object) is not something external to the object but inherently determines its status” (Žižek 1994: 65).

This has implications for how we should comprehend the concepts of contingency and necessity. In traditional Western thinking the essential inside (the object itself) is necessary and the outside is accidental. This means that if the object is contingent, contingency is a purely epistemological condition. But if our knowledge determines the status of the object, contingency will not just be an expression of the incompleteness of our knowledge, but also of the incompleteness of the object itself. Behind this contingent appearance there is no hidden essence, no not-yet-known necessity, there is no “real” poor outside of discourse waiting to be discovered and classified. The necessity behind appearance is not a hidden necessity, a necessity there for us to discover, instead this necessity is an appearance of itself. To use an example from Slavoj Žižek (1989: 140-4): In the Nazi ideology of the 1930s, the idea of the Jewish conspiracy was the necessity behind the subject of the Jew as the threatening outside to the German society. It is this necessity behind the appearance of the poor that I will try to bring forward in an attempt to show the very contingency of poverty and the poor as a subject.

Discourse is always constructed in and through hegemonic struggles, and it is constantly created and re-created through political struggle. This is done through the articulation of meaning and identity. Articulation is a practice that establishes a relation among discursive elements that invokes a material modification of their identities. Hegemonic practices of articulation that unify a discursive space around a particular set of nodal points always involve an element of ideological totalization (Torfing 1999: 113; 2005). Since reality is always a discursive construction, ideology is not to be defined as a distorted representation of an objective social reality, it “is not simply a ‘false consciousness’, an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as ‘ideological’” (Žižek 1989: 15), instead ideology is our spontaneous

interaction with our social surrounding (i.e. the social structure). Ideology constructs reality as a part of a totalizing horizon of meaning that denies the contingent, precarious, and paradoxical character of social identity. The construction of naturalizing and universalizing myths and imaginaries is a central part of the hegemonic drive towards ideological totalization.

In so far as the social is impossible without some form of fixation of meaning, ideology is constitutive of the social. In this way, ideology is what makes a perceived closure of discourse possible and what constitutes the outside. In other words, we have no contact with our social world outside of ideology, since our social world is dependent on ideology. The ideological creation of the social is a vain attempt to institute the impossible object of society (Laclau 1990: 90-2).

The constant hegemonic struggle is due to the antagonistic nature of the social and this antagonism is impossible to do away with. A society is always created through antagonism and is the constructing of an included “we”, but since this “we” cannot have an essence in itself an excluded “them” is also needed. This exclusion of a threatening other(ness) both stabilize the discursive system and represents the impossibility of an ultimate closure. Antagonism in this way constitutes the limits of society and can only temporarily be hidden. The excluded elements are connected through a chain of equivalence and what connects those elements is nothing more than that they construct the threatening other, the external that pose a threat to the discursive system (Torfing 2005).

The myth of society is due to the impossibility of a discursive closure. However, this does not mean that we do not have a society effect, the ideological illusion of a society, “*a totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility*” (Žižek 1989: 50). This illusion is constructed in ideology, which creates both society and its outside. To unveil the illusion of society, the ideologically constructed “essence” of its constitutive outside, in this case ‘the poor’, needs to be deconstructed. This essence is in Lacanese the *objet petit a*, and is what we cannot see, the nothingness behind an identity, but at the same time that which makes it into what it is (Žižek 2012: 598-9). In other words, this essence of the poor is the essence which we can never find, that which is simply not there to be found, the illusion of our fantasy which comes into existence because of our desire to find it, meaning that there are no poor before we decide that there are and look for it.

2.2 The Subject

The main theoretical problem with our comprehension of the subject is that it is based on the constitutive role given to human individuals by both rationalism and empiricism. The critique of this understanding of the individual as the constitutive of the social is based on three conceptual targets: that the individual is an agent both rational and transparent to itself, that there is a homogeneity of the individual (that is an essence which constitutes the truth of the individual from within) and that the individual, in form of subject, is the origin of all social relations (Laclau

& Mouffe 2001: 115). Instead of the individual as a free agent with an essentialist identity created internally, discourse theory emphasizes the construction of social identity in and through hegemonic practices, which partially fixate the meaning of social identities in a differential discursive structure (Torring 1999: 41). As opposed to an essentialist conception of the subject that endorse an agency-based view of power, where power is external to the subject, discourse theory sees the subject as constructed by power. With an essentialist view of the subject there is first an internal relation, giving the subject its identity, then an external relation of power exist and in this way gives all social relations accidental status in relation to identity (Dyrberg 1997:21-2). Rather, identity should be seen as created in discursive structures as a consequence of power and cannot be studied in itself, but must be viewed as a part of a whole.

2.2.1 The Anti-essentialist Subject

As mentioned above I criticise the view of the “subject as a substantial, essential entity, given in advance, dominating the social process and not being produced by the contingency of the discursive process itself” (Žižek 1990: 250). Instead the subject is a social product of discursive, historically determined, social relations. This is to say, the subject has no natural essence, what we see as the essence, the inner being of an individual, that what lurks behind the idea of realising oneself, is this social construct. The identity of a subject is socially constructed in a specific historical context, it is not some naturally independent inner void, the idea that it is, is just “the pretence, and merely the aesthetic pretence, of small- and large-scale stories *à la Robinson Crusoe*” (Marx 1975 [1857]: 48). In this way, every attempt to find some point of reference (such as human nature) is a social construct based on historically determined social relations (Gramsci 1957: 140). The direct consequence of this is that human individuals as agents are,

not ‘free’ and ‘constitutive’ subjects in the philosophical sense of these terms. They work in and through the determinations of the *forms of historical existence* of the social relations of production and reproduction. [...] These agents can only be agents *if they are subjects*. [...] No human i.e. social individual can be the agent of a practice if he does not have the *form of a subject*. The ‘subject-form’ is actually the form of historical existence of every individual. (Althusser 2008: 134)

One example of the social construction of identities is the Marxist example of the construction of the consumer by the act of production, “production produces not only an object for the subject but also a subject for the object. Hence production produces consumption” (Marx 1975 [1857]: 61).

Above, ideology was given the meaning of that which is constitutive of our social world through its vain attempt of discursive totalization. But this ideological closure of a discourse is always dependent on subjects, since there is no ideology except ideology by the subject for the subject. In other words, all ideology is the creation of meaning by subjects, a creation of meaning that structures subjects and fill them with purpose. Through the subjects spontaneous

interaction with the social structure, ideology is recreated and the identity of the subjects are constructed (Althusser 2008: 42-4). Hence, the poor are nothing in itself, they become 'the poor' in their social relations through ideological articulation by subjects.

The subject is nothing more than the sum of its social relations, even though it has the possibility in the last instance to determine what relations will constitute it. However, if we separate the concrete individual, the non-subjectified empty container, and the concrete subject, the individual after subjectivation, we will come close to the subject of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* where the subject is just the sum of its structural positions. By giving the subject an identity dependent on social structures, post-structuralist discourse analysis has been criticized for neglecting the subject or rather treating it as an object within the discursive structure, as a "mere bearer of the structure" (Torfing 2005: 17). This might have been true for the comprehension of the subject put forward by Laclau & Mouffe (2001) in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* where the subject is seen as nothing more than a multitude of subject positions. But to say that the subject is created in and by its social relations is not to say that the subject have a perfect structural identity (Laclau 1990). Instead it should be understood in the way that the subject is not real without its social relations, it has to be socially constructed in order to be real.

2.2.2 The Subject as Lack

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past. (Marx 2000 [1852]: 329 §2)

The act of subjectivation (i.e. the act of identification) does not mean that the subject is determined only by structure. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe equates the subject with subject position (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 115), which is an idea that identity is given by relatively unified ensembles of subject positions, which gives the subject its meaning and position in the social structure by an enemy force that negates its identity. This overlooks the fact that "what is negated in social antagonism is always-already negated" (Torfing 1999: 52, italics in original). In this case, this means that 'the poor' is already a negation of society, not in the sense that the subject has achieved a full identity that is negated, but instead is negated as a split subject, who tries to achieve a complete identity by the act of identification (Žižek 1990: 249-54). From this follow that no clear distinction can be upheld between cause and effect; the construction of the other, that which is negated, is an effect of the negation of the other's identity, which in turn is an effect of the structured negated relation (Dyrberg 1997: 146-7).

Even if the discursive structure regulate the latitude of subjects, it is never fully determined by it, the subject always have a margin of freedom and ability to change the discursive structure. The poor can very well chose an identity and are

not forced to adopt the identity given to them, however this is not a free choice in the strict meaning of the word. Even if the subject is not fully determined by the social structure, it is nothing outside of its social relations. The subject is only what it is for the others, but at the same time the subject is the one who in the last instance determines which of these social relations will determine it. This means that the subject is determined by certain social relations only in so far as it determines itself and identifies with these relations (Žižek 1994: 45). The incompleteness of the subject's structural identity constitute the subject as a locus of a decision to establish itself as a concrete subject with a fully achieved identity (Laclau 1990: 30). In this way the subject is the lack in the structure, and the subjectivation of the subject through the identification with different subject positions is an attempt to fill this lack (Laclau 1990: 60; Žižek 1989: 175). In this way the subject is not included in the social order, instead it is the point where the social order breaks down (Žižek 1999: 129). Through subject positions, identity is shaped in the process of identification, but these identities is always open and make the subject never totally identical to itself. This triggers a constant process of identification, a becoming but not a being in which the subject 'finds itself' (Dyrberg 1997: 137). However, since that which is negated is already negated, 'the poor' as a point of identification is the second negation, the first negation is that the group of poor people are negated before subjectivisation, "this exercise of power cannot avoid having more or less far-reaching repercussions on the overall identity of the subject, due to the relational nature of the subject positions, and by extension, the structuring of identification" (Dyrberg 1997: 144). This makes it difficult for a subject to freely choose an identity, to put it in the words of Hannah Arendt (Zur Person 1964), "if one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew". This is due to the immense power of being discursively structured as the negation of the social order and in the case of Jews in Germany under the Nazi-regime, it becomes impossible to assert a position as a German or an undefined world citizen.

3 The Disappearance of Poverty and the Return of the Poor

Poverty and the poor are not the same thing, and the connection between the two is more complicated than the intuitive notion that poverty refers to the phenomenon and the poor to the individuals suffering from the phenomenon of poverty. Think of Michel Foucault's (1985) thesis about the difference of the act of sodomy and to be a homosexual: there have always been sexual acts between same-sex persons, but it has not always been possible to have a homosexual identity. Just as in the case presented by Foucault, we can here differentiate between the phenomenon, being in poverty, and the subject, the identity of being poor.

By presenting a historical narrative of the poverty discourse, I will give an account of how it came to be that poverty has disappeared, whilst the poor have made a comeback in the process, by showing the way in which the poor were incorporated into society by doing away with the old underclass and how poverty was comprehended as being reduced to a marginal problem with the growth of the welfare state. But while the welfare state has expanded, poverty has remained and has come to be perceived as a "new" poverty, a poverty that is different from the pre-welfare poverty. This "new" poverty is understood as not originating from society, but from the poor themselves. The focus on the poor as a distinct social group has returned and with it a new underclass has been created. I do not claim to give an all-embracing universal account of the development of the poverty discourse nor of poverty as a phenomenon. My focus is first and foremost on the poor as subjects and what role they have in the poverty discourse and in the shaping of society. In this chapter I will also show in what way 'the poor' are society's constitutive outside and how this has changed through time.

3.1 The Discovery of Society

Just like many other phenomena that are central to our contemporary times, the traces of the emergence of a modern comprehension of poverty should be sought in the transition period from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, a transition by some described as the 'discovery of society' (Polanyi 1989 [1944]: 143 ch.9; Dean 1991: 1). This transition period can be seen as the era where modernity came into being (Klages 2006) and our modern social imaginary was fully formed, meaning that the different societal spheres, civil society, state (politics) and economy, were theoretically separated (Taylor 2004). This transition period

between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, from an understanding of society as a hierarchically structured social system to a segmented totalized structure with clear boundaries and made up of different spheres can be described as a move from contractual theoreticians towards a Hegelian understanding of society. A society made up of a private sphere, Hegel refers to it as family, of economy, a pre-political collective but particularistic civil society and a universalized political state (Hegel 2008 [1820]).

If we quickly move back to the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes uses the term *commonwealth* to denominate what we today would refer to as either the state or civil society as well as economic relations under a common jurisdiction (Hobbes 1996 [1651]: 111-8, ch. 17). And in the middle of the eighteenth century, Rousseau, equates civil society with the state², meaning the state of civil society as opposed to the state of nature (Rousseau 1973 [1755]: 143-4). This tendency to view the collective social sphere as one was prevalent throughout most of the eighteenth century, a notion which also included political economy (Dean 1991: 125), seen as the state equivalent to “the wise and legitimate government of the house for the common good of the whole family” (Rousseau 1973 [1755]: 128).

Even in the theories of Adam Smith, who is often referred to as the originator of modern political economy, the economy was not fully separated as an autonomous sphere. Rather, for Smith, the wage-contract was the way for participating in the social community and gaining civil status (Dean 1991: 133). For Smith the economy is not fully separated from the rest of society because it obeys the same moral rules as other social conducts; the self-interest of individuals are not derived from amoral economic rules (Himmelfarb 1984: 50). In this way a morally fair distribution of wealth is desired and those making up the far greater part of society should receive a fair part of the production of their labour so they do not need to be poor and miserable (Smith 1904 [1776]: 80, ch. 8). This differs from later modern economists, followers of Smith, such as David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus and Joseph Townsend, who did not see poverty as regulated by moral or societal laws, but by economic laws. Poverty in this light was seen as a natural state which should not be artificially counteracted.

Adam Smith’s optimistic view of the development of the economy and especially the prospect of an eradication of poverty, through an increase in the demand for labour due to an increase in the funds for the payment of wages, was the main point of critique directed against him from those in the nineteenth century who followed in his footsteps. Instead, new strictly economic laws were developed, that explained why there were poor people and why they must be poor (Malthus 1989 [1803]: 77). The reason for poverty was sought in the very numbers of the people, the number of the poor was what naturally made them poor, and the only reason for the riches of the small number of people who were rich was because they were few (Burke 1987 [1795]: 269-70).

² Rousseau in contrast to Hobbes uses the terms civil society and state, but he equates the two terms. He refers to the state as the state of civil society as opposed to the state of nature.

The poor were conceived as a natural part of a society but although, they were the masses, there were different levels of poverty. To help and to harness the poor meant to put them to work, to transform them from idle poor to industrious poor and to prevent the industrious poor from being corrupted into idleness (Dean 1991: 26-7). Through most of the eighteenth century the idea of creating jobs for the poor was not questioned and the failure of preventing poverty was placed on the misadministration of poverty (Dean 1991: 51). Putting the poor to work did not mean putting them in useful labour, it meant building up the morale of the poor through labour, no matter if it was useful in an economic sense (Dean 1991: 37).

For Adam Smith the laws that regulated the economy was moral laws with political implications. The base for a good economy was the happiness of the members of the nation, a happiness that was dependent on liberty and justice also for the labouring poor, those who made up the majority of the people. In contrast to this, the classic political economy is not dependent on moral laws, but instead on laws of production and distribution that are indifferent to liberty and justice. And it is this perception of the economy as an autonomous realm that creates it as a separate object of knowledge. In this amoral logic of the economy, poverty is something politics cannot do anything about, it is a product of natural economic laws. In this way, poor relief is an interference with the workings of the economy, and poverty was inscribed in the workings of this new reality of economic laws (Dean 1991: 152).

Compared with Smith, Malthus represents a total reversal of the expectations of the economic development: instead of an invisible hand that created social harmony, “Malthus envisaged a struggle for existence that resembled nothing so much as Hobbes’s state of nature,” (Himmelfarb 1984: 129) with the poor condemned to a life that was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes 1996 [1651]: 84, Ch. 13 §9). Malthus derived at this conclusion based on the discovery that “the funds for the maintenance of labour do not necessarily increase with the increase of wealth” (Malthus 1989 [1803]: 77). From this he concluded that economic laws was not moral laws and that the economy has to, as an object of study, clearly be separated from other social and moral laws. This shift made the economic laws into natural laws that society both should not and could not do anything about, instead it became each personas responsibility to tackle the problem the best way possible (Malthus 1989 [1803]: 104). It was through this dramatic shift in the view of the economy, into the form given to it by Malthus and later modified by Ricardo that the economy was clearly separated from the rest of society and freed from its “ties to moral philosophy and emerged in the guise of a natural science” (Himmelfarb 1984: 100-1). With Malthus the continuum of the “labouring poor” was also broken. For a long time the poor had been equated with the labouring masses, those who owned no land or estate and had nothing but their labour. Instead they were divided into what we could call the poor, those who are not rich, and the truly poor, those who are indigent (Himmelfarb 1984: 77).

This also indicates a shift where labour ceased to be unified as a property of human beings, and instead was split into two. On one hand it was seen as the

amount of labour that went into a commodity and determined that commodity's value relative to other commodities. On the other hand, labour was itself becoming a commodity (Foucault 1970: 253). This becomes clear in Ricardo's (Ricardo 1924 [1817] ch. 5) theory of wages, where a definite economic conception of poverty is presented, and a difference between the 'natural price of labour', the level of wages needed to sustain a workforce, and the actual or 'market price of labour' was formed. Ricardo never strayed far from the Malthusian maxims but took a gradualist stance, where the level of poverty could be lowered if the poor were taught not to put their trust in systemic relief or structural changes, but instead to look to themselves for the possibility of getting away from poverty (Ricardo 1924 [1817]: 82-6, ch. 5 §41). Political economy thus retains a moralising dimension concerning poverty, but unlike for Smith, for whom the moral derived from moral philosophy in which the responsibility of securing liberty and equity for the citizens was put on society, the moralising dimension was restricted to the conducts and life of the poor. To put it bluntly, the "poor must simply obey the laws under which they, more than most people, are condemned to exist for their earthly life" (Dean 1991: 153). This distinction between the morals of a mercantilist work-policy and a liberal economic is that the latter emphasises personal responsibility and self-regulation (Dean 1991: 154). The free labour is defined as 'formally free labour' consisting of workers who sell their labour "in the formal sense voluntarily, but actually under the compulsion of the whip of hunger" (Weber 1927: 277).

This moralising aspect created a new division between a larger group of people, the masses of society, who to a large degree can be said to have lived in more or less poor circumstances, and a group of indigents. No longer were the labouring masses the poor, instead it was those who became confined to a new underclass, whose poverty was not just economical, but made them excluded from the newly "discovered" society. This division was primarily a moral distinction between those who were just poor and those who were referred to as the indigents or paupers. They were not distinguished from each other in terms of income or standard of living, but instead they were differentiated in terms of the "dependency and degradation that was presumed to accompany dependency" (Himmelfarb 1984: 399).

Polanyi places the problem of poverty with the emergence of pauperism and political economy, which led to the discovery of society itself (Polanyi 1989 [1944]: 152 Ch. 10). When the market was extended to labour, the conception of society as a totality governed by its own laws emerged, and these laws were founded on the naturalistic interpretations of political economy (Polanyi 1989 [1944]: 105-6, ch. 6). In other words, the extension of the market to incorporate labour was the necessity for the modern society based on an imaginary totalized structure. The direct implication this has for the poor is that it pushes the poor out from society; instead of being on the bottom of a hierarchically structured society, they end up being segmented outside of society when society is seen as a totality "For centuries the poor – all the poor – had been referred to, for obvious reasons, as 'the ragged.' By the early nineteenth century that label was being applied more selectively to the very poor" (Himmelfarb 1984: 371).

3.2 The Disappearance of Poverty...

When we have moved into the nineteenth century the reason for poverty was sought in the essential characteristics of the poor, who was thought to lack the same high morals, ambitions or honour as did the rich. Instead they had “only hunger which can spur and goad them on to labour” (Joseph Townsend quoted in Dean 1991: 70). The early economists used this way of thinking combined with a kind of Social Darwinism where competition among humans was seen as the progressive force of social life, a social life obeying the law of “the survival of the fittest”. So when the number of poor increased while the economy at the same time grew it was seen as a natural consequence of the growing riches (Polanyi 1989 [1944]: 166, ch. 10). Even if poverty in this way was seen as a structural phenomenon, the poor were comprehended as being different from the rest of society. They were thought to have their own culture (Bowpitt 2000), an amoral culture closely connected with drunkenness and crime (Himmelfarb 1984: 385). Since poverty was comprehended as natural it stopped being the target of poor relief, and instead the focus was put on policing the poor to preserve poverty by preventing its moral collapse into indigence (Dean 1991: 197). This view of the poor before the emerging of the welfare state was in other words that of an underclass, distinct from society, where the fault of poverty lay with the poor themselves and not in societal structures. What was needed for the poor to become non-poor was to learn or be forced to partake in what was seen as society, to bring them into society not change it (Gillin 1921; Phelps 1938; Zweig 1948). In other words “[t]he solution ... was seen to depend on reforming the character of the *poor*” (Bowpitt 2000:27, italics in original). What this means is that the poor was by definition outside of society, they were a negation of society itself and could not be a part of society insofar as they were poor.

Already during the nineteenth century there were those who questioned the view of poverty as a problem originating from the poor themselves. For example, Robert Owen strongly opposed the exclusion of the poor and criticized Christianity for being individualizing and for putting the blame on the poor themselves for their poverty and in this way denying the realities of society. He saw society as a real entity that all citizens are a part of and realized that the individual had to subject him-/herself to society and could then not be seen as the bearer of the problem (Gjöres 1932). He was perhaps more right than he knew, since the individual do not only subjects him-/herself to society in that he/she surrenders to its structures, but the subject position possible to obtain for the individual is also given by societal structures. Even so, Owen argued with the Malthusian logic of the day, but meant that it should be possible to create a situation where the personal interest of the poor corresponded with that of society (Dean 1991: 194). A more radical approach to the problem of poverty was held by Karl Marx, who saw poverty originating from the exploitation of the working class (Marx 1997 [1867] ch.7), but did not want only to incorporate the poor, the working masses, into society, but wanted to create a new universality, a universality of the proletariat, instead of an universality of the bourgeoisie. In

other words he did not want to make room for the poor in the existing society, but instead create a new society (Marx & Engels 2000 [1848]).

Despite the critique of the way poverty and the poor were perceived, the moralistic character of the poverty discourse remained and the poor were seen as “guilty of self-indulgence and complacency, the very antithesis of those conditions of self-sacrificing necessary to self-realisation. The problem was therefore one of individual moral failure” (Bowpitt 2000:25-6). A more thorough shift in the poverty discourse came in early 20th century. The moralizing approach towards the poor might have remained to some degree, but the shift towards seeing the poor as victims of a system and their poverty as tied to the structures of society became more prominent and structural poverty was no longer seen as being natural but instead as social and as such, contingent (Rowntree 1941; Bowpitt 2000). Seebohm Rowntree was one of the first prominent researchers of poverty who studied the problem systematically. He undertook his first study of poverty in York in response to the moralistic character of the prevailing poverty discourse. He showed that many people actually lived under conditions below a liveable standard and that they had very little influence over their own social situation (Halleröd 1991:41). This new way of comprehending poverty were accepted amongst both social democrats, left liberals and also among Marxists, who were only surprised that anyone still needed to be convinced of the social problem of poverty (Bowpitt 2000).

The shift that started to occur did not only mean that the problem of poverty was societal instead of morally tied to the individual, but it also meant that the poor no longer were the problem and that poverty now was something that could be abolished, and it was possible to claim that society had a role in doing so. These two changes in the poverty discourse, the shift away from a moral perspective on the poor and the idea that society should take an active part in the abolishment of poverty, might be the most obvious changes in the poverty discourse. However the most fundamental change was the incorporation of the poor into society. They were no longer the external outside, the amoral threat to the organic society. Instead they became a part of the societal structure. Politically the idea of *folkhemmet* (the people’s home) that originated in Germany in the nineteenth century and had a central role especially during the first half of the twentieth century in Sweden can be viewed as a way to ensure the inclusion of the poor and is perhaps the clearest political evidence of the incorporation of the poor into society. Another indicator of this paradigmatic shift was that during the 1920s, unemployment, which until then had played a modest roll in the discussion of poverty, rather than culture became central for understanding poverty (Rowntree 1941; Inghe 1960; Bowpitt 2000).

As an experiment to incorporate the poor into their new position in society, the welfare state implemented rights and obligations for both the poor and the state. The poor had an obligation to work and the state to provide work (Dean 1991: 114). In this way the welfare state was “an attempt to bring the distribution of welfare in the population under the control of deliberate political action” (Ringén 1987: 1). To break the dependence the individual had on the market, which was seen as the root to unequal distribution and poverty, politics were used to de-

commodify the individual (Esping-Andersen 1990:22). As a result, economic benefits at levels that did not force poor people out into the labour market were not seen as a problem: this is the whole point of making the individual de-commodified and non-dependent on the market. At this point the state had been transformed into what Rousseau thought was one of its most important functions, “to prevent extreme inequality of fortune [...] not by building hospitals for the poor, but securing the citizens from becoming poor” (Rousseau 1973 [1755]: 147).

When poverty had been framed as a societal problem and the poor had been incorporated into society, it became a task for the state to solve the problem and reduce the number of persons suffering from poverty. With this aim the welfare state grew with the economy and the number of persons in poverty decreased until after the Second World War, when poverty was thought to be more or less eradicated. If there was any poverty still visible in society it was seen as residual from history, a left over soon to disappear (Inghe 1960; Tengvald 1976:8, 51-53). The view on poverty in Europe was still, during the middle of the 20th century, focused on starvation and dangerously low living standards. Using the same way of measuring poverty as fifty years earlier, Rowntree and Lavers (1951) concluded that with the economic growth and the expansion of the welfare state, poverty had become a marginal problem in British society by the middle of the century. This view was a commonly held view in the western democratic welfare states in the 1950s (Townsend 1962), but a view that would be the target of growing criticism.

One among many critics of the way poverty was measured and that it was thought to be a vanishing phenomenon was Peter Townsend (1962) who argued that it was irrelevant to study poverty in the 1960s from a perspective based on living conditions during the early twentieth century. He meant that what was needed was to base the study of poverty on living standards in contemporary Britain and that poverty should be seen as a forced deviation from the common lifestyle:

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average family or individual that they are in effect excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities (Townsend quoted in Bradshaw 2004:170).

Instead of connecting poverty to physical hardship it became more closely linked with the concept of inequality, and the reason for poverty was placed in class-society and the unequal distribution of wealth (Tengvald 1976). This meant that poverty was related to the riches of society, inseparable as two sides of the same coin.

Viewing poverty as related to inequality and deriving from class society meant a move away from an absolute definition of poverty towards a relative one and that economic growth no longer was able to solve the problem of poverty.

However, economic growth could be used to increase the amount of resources dedicated for welfare and in this way poverty could be abolished and the poor could in the future be a remanence of the past (Inghe 1960). This optimism was dented during the 1960s and 70s when, despite increasing welfare costs and ambitions there was no downward trend in the number of persons receiving social assistance in Sweden (Korpi 1971). Even if inequality was seen as the main reason for the existence of poverty, focus changed towards the study of precipitating factors at the individual level and why some groups needed economic aid from the state to a larger degree than other groups (Korpi 1971; Isaksson & Svedberg 1989).

During this period poverty again became a concept focusing on more than just economic factors. Poverty was connected with feelings of deprivation, poor living conditions such as overcrowding and poor sanitation, monotonous and irregular work, inadequate educational and recreational opportunities and ill health (Inghe 1960). The broader concept of poverty and the move towards revealing which groups are more prone to poverty can at first glance appear to be a shift in the poverty discourse towards a cultural understanding of poverty and a focus on the poor as a social group, but what makes it different from both a pre-welfare and a more contemporary view on poverty is that it focus on the distribution of wealth. Even if it talks about other social aspects of poverty as well, these were seen as descriptions of what it is like to be poor and what welfare effects poverty would have, and the central point was that poverty at its core remains a notion of lack of material resources. In theoretical terms, the poor were seen as being in society, not outside it. One could say that instead of focusing on a distinct social group, the poor, the focus was on which social groups, such as immigrants or single mothers, have a higher risk of falling into poverty and how it can be possible to eradicate poverty, seen as a residual from a less developed past (see Inghe 1960; Korpi 1971). Poverty was seen as a residual problem due to the equalizing of incomes and the expanding welfare state until the second half of the 1960s (Tengvald 1976: 51-2).

3.3 ...and the Return of the Poor

During the 1960s there was a rediscovery of poverty in England and the United States and the previous studies, notably those of Rowntree, which had shown that poverty was a diminishing problem came under critique and new studies showed that poverty had remained on a high and relatively stable level (Ringen 1987: 141-2). During the second half of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s there was a shift in the poverty discourse towards a larger focus on social factors relating to poverty and a growing focus on inequality. This produced a causal chain where inequality lead to poverty, which in turn caused welfare problems and had negative social effects. Although poverty never did disappear, poverty in the absolute sense was not seen as the main problem, instead the focus among researchers was on overall inequality (Halleröd 1995a: 174). The main aim for

researchers was to increase the understanding of poverty to gain knowledge about what the state should do and what direction welfare programs should take to decrease poverty rates (Inghe 1960; Korpi 1971). Even though society was still an unequal and stratified society, the hope was that it would be possible to work towards a more equal society.

But when the success of the welfare state came into question, with critique against the state for intervening in the lives of individuals, the focus on poverty became a focus on the poor. The social and cultural consequences of poverty became the social and cultural characteristics of the poor. The poor became a specific group and what came to be of interest was what this group was like and how it interacted with the rest of society. Thus the poor once again started to emerge as a distinct social group who were seen as marginalized and oppressed (Misturelli & Heffernan 2008: 675). This means that being poor no longer meant just suffering from poverty, it meant that poor was an identity. An individual was not just poor, he/she was 'the poor'. If earlier studies tried to reveal the existence of poverty as a social and collective problem, from the 1960s onwards more and more focus was put on the poor, who they were and why they were poor (Tengvald 1976: 8), and by so doing created them as a distinct group.

Even though there had been studies on topics of poverty in Sweden for decades, research grew in the early 1990s. At this point the main focus in Sweden was on the question: how can people in Sweden, a country with very low levels of unemployment (at least up until the economic crisis in the early 1990s) and the most de-commodifying welfare state in the world (Esping-Andersen 1990:52), be poor? But the Swedish research quickly adopted the international trend of seeing poverty as beyond economic definitions and increasingly non-economic variables were used to measure poverty, and today the conceptualization of poverty is a full series of explicit characteristics that comprise virtually all elements of the human condition (see Burchart 1999; Misturelli & Heffernan 2008; Halleröd & Larsson 2008). What made this broadening of the concept of poverty different from earlier incorporations of non-economic variables was that it came with a shift in focus from the phenomenon of poverty towards the poor themselves, meaning that instead of seeing social aspects of poverty as consequences of poverty, they instead became a mapping of the social characteristics of the poor.

Even if this is a focus on the poor as a collective, it is still individualizing in the way that it ignores society, or places the poor outside of society. This is the same individualizing view on poverty that was criticized by Robert Owen over a century earlier. With this move towards a cultural understanding of poverty and an individualization in the poverty discourse, two new and competing concepts, 'poverty individualization' and 'social exclusion', emerged, challenging the way in which poverty was understood as being connected with social class and the distribution of wealth (Bak & Larsen 2015).

The concept of poverty individualization focuses on specific events in a person's life that might lead to poverty and that this poverty often is transient. For example, having children or getting divorced could lead to poverty. This concept of poverty fits well with the view of poverty as being something that will disappear, or already has disappeared from society, because this type of poverty is

not a societal problem, but rather a temporary state that can befall us all. Perhaps society's only responsibility is to provide economic assistance during a transition period.

Social exclusion is a concept which has had a much larger impact in both politics as well as in the research community. It is also individualizing in the way that it puts focus not on societal structures, but on the characteristics, living conditions and culture of the poor themselves. With the concept of social exclusion just as with the concept of poverty individualisation, society is removed, but here in a much more radical way. If in the concept of poverty individualisation, poverty is not a societal problem but an individual one, social exclusion instead pushes the poor out of society into a non-society. Society becomes the included, the non-excluded, or in other words the non-poor.

Social exclusion is often used as a concept that is interrelated with poverty but at the same time describes a phenomenon other than poverty, where poverty contains economic factors and social exclusion contains social, cultural and political factors. These two concepts do not compete but are seen as interlocked in a dynamic interrelated process where the notion of poverty is primarily focused on issues of distribution and social exclusion is focused primarily on relational issues (Room 1995; Bask 2010: 302-3; Devicienti & Poggi 2011). The problem with this division between the two concepts is that they focus on and describe the same group in society and even if the operationalised measurements of the two concepts do not correlate perfectly with each other (Devicienti & Poggi 2011), there is always the poverty factor in social exclusion since if an individual freely chooses to be excluded from society because of non-economic reasons, he/she is not suffering from social exclusion (Boon & Farnsworth 2011). If poverty is having insufficient funds to ensure a certain standard of living, and social exclusion is being excluded from participation and not being able to live one's life according to the demands of society, then poverty and social exclusion are the same thing. Both poverty and social exclusion are, in other words, suffering from welfare problems due to a lack in purchasing power. Instead the concept of social exclusion should probably be seen as an extension of poverty. It is the new concept for poverty within the welfare state that was invented when poverty research came to focus on the poor themselves. It is this new problem representation, where the problem of poverty is in the community of the poor, that is the reason for the concept of social exclusion.

Today most of the early criticism against the concept of social exclusion, that it focuses on the poor themselves, has almost disappeared and the concept has to a large degree replaced poverty (Bradshaw 2004). The concept of social exclusion is said to capture all aspects of being pushed to the edges of society, a phenomenon that the more "classical" perception of poverty could not capture. What this means is that social exclusion can explain the re-emergence of poverty, but a re-emergence of poverty seen as different from the "old" poverty. This "new" poverty is the poverty that emerged *in spite of the welfare state* (Lagrée & Fai 1985: 234; Martin 1996: 384). When in this way other resources than income are used in an attempt to single out a more homogeneous group of persons who live in what is described as social exclusion, the group turns out to be smaller than

the original low-income group (Ringen 1987: 164) and shifts the focus towards non-economic factors of life. This “new” poverty is more than a lack of funds, it is being segmented at the edges of society or outside society. It is not just suffering from welfare problems, which society could solve, it is instead the whole of social life and a culture of poverty. It is single mothers, unwillingness to work, crime, etc. This poverty within the welfare state differs from the poverty that the welfare state was meant to eradicate in that the relativity of this “new” poverty is not just relative in economic terms, but also as culture (Bask 2010: 302). Those making up the community of the poor in today’s Sweden are thus socially and culturally distinct from the rest of society, a society which they are socially, culturally and economically excluded from. This way of viewing the poor as making up a socially excluded group of people that are culturally distinguishable from the rest of society, will give them a *constitutive role of a non-society*.

In this way we have arrived back at a pre-welfare state discourse where the poor are excluded and are individually, or as a group, responsible for “bringing those conditions upon themselves, or as lacking the qualities or skills to deserve anything different” (Townsend 1993: 6). To quote the Swedish poverty researcher Miia Bask (2010: 315): “To be able to estimate a person’s absolute risk of exclusion, we have to specify the full set of characteristics of this person”.

It is important to clarify that the dividing of people in different social groups and moralizing over the social and cultural aspects of the oppressed group does not necessarily mean that there is an intension to oppress. Christian missionaries in Africa during the nineteenth century wanting to help the less developed and helpless Africans to become more civilized can very well have been done with the best intensions, but it is non the less an act of imperialism. It can for example be seen as “important to identify the poor”, to be able “to take action against poverty [because] poor people suffer from malnutrition, lack of shelter, ill health, exclusion from ordinary lifestyle in society etc.” (Halleröd & Larsson 2008: 15). But this focus on the lives of the poor instead of on society will even with the best intensions be a part of the creation of an underclass. The idea that a poor person, either with help or by him-/herself, should “pick up on life style and [gain] access to the customary standard and style of life” of a certain society (Copeland & Daly 2012: 280), is very close to the pre-welfare poverty discourse.

Jock Young (1999) sees this transition as a movement from an inclusive to an exclusive society, where large groups of people are structurally excluded. He is probably right in his description of the exclusion in a post-welfare state, but he is too quick in his conclusion that the era of the welfare state was an era of inclusion. Véronique Mottier (2005) has for example showed how eugenic expert discourse has shaped the Swiss welfare state in its exclusion “of categories of citizens deemed ‘unfit’” and how this shaped a national identity on which society was formed. We should instead see all societies as exclusive, the main question is, according to what logic do the exclusion take place. Thomas Piketty (2014: 471) points out that “it was the wars of the twentieth century that, to a large extent, wiped away the past and transformed the structures of inequality”, this indicates a shift in the constitutive outside from a dangerous underclass towards a dangerous

threat from the outside. This is a shift that perhaps can be said to have been reversed today and the constitutive outside is once again something that can be found geographically within society.

With this continuous trend of constructing the poor as a distinct group of people with their own culture, we see a move away from poverty towards 'the poor': a group of people suffering from poverty due to some essence in their own person. In this way we have gone full circle and have brought back the underclass. This underclass is made possible by creating segmented categories of people instead of seeing society as a stratification of people.

4 The Construction of ‘the Poor’

When talking about poverty and poor people, it is taken for granted not only that poverty exists and that there are poor people, but that we can distinguish these people in different ways. A post-structuralist critique of this point of view is mainly aimed at its anthropocentric basis for claiming that subjects get their identity from within. Instead, the subject should be seen as the lack in the social structure, which through the act of identification, sees itself through the social order. This means that we cannot search for the “true” poor, because the truth is created in our social action of defining who the poor are (Torfing 2005: 13). That which is possible, however, is to show the ideological construct of the subject, the point of identification, which moments the identity is formed around and what it is that defines these moments. The material mainly used in the analysis is four governmental action-plans against poverty published between 2003 and 2008, this is because these documents are the only who have an explicit focus on poverty. Besides the action plans I have used other governmental publications, such as inquires and reports to be able to capture a wider comprehension of poverty and ‘the poor’.

4.1 Poverty and Social Exclusion

Going through the material, there is no trace of an idea of the type of welfare state that came into being during the first half of the twentieth century, the type of welfare state that Rousseau (1973 [1755]: 147) referred to when he said that the state should secure “the citizens from becoming poor”. The only preventive measures mentioned in Sweden’s action-plans against poverty are measures to tackle symptoms of poverty, such as crime prevention, measures to actually prevent poverty as a phenomenon are not mentioned (Regeringskansliet 2003; 2005; 2007; 2008). Furthermore, when reading the material, one can see a clear move away from a focus on poverty, towards a focus on the social effects of poverty. The first apparent shift in focus can be seen in the action-plan from 2003, where the focus is stated as giving primary attention to the social integration process, on the expense of a focus on politics and the welfare state (Regeringskansliet 2003: 45). From 2007 onwards, the term poverty is dropped from the titles of the action-plans, and poverty is referred to more as the problem of social exclusion/inclusion and societal participation, rather than a lack of economical means (Regeringskansliet 2007; 2008). Social exclusion is given the meaning of:

People or groups excluded from, or prevented access to, the various parts of society. Social exclusion occurs partly because people do not gain access to key parts of public life such as the labour market and partly through a process in which people gradually becomes excluded by one social problem leading to several subsequent problems. Social exclusion can thus be seen as a consequence of an accumulation of social problems in different areas, but is also an expression of structural problems in a society where individuals or groups do not have access to certain areas of society. Social exclusion refers to non-participation in important social areas such as employment, education, politics and democratic processes, culture, recreational activities, social relations and housing. (Regeringskansliet 2007: 15-6)

The unwillingness to talk about poverty is not just an absence of a discussion about the causes and effects of poverty, it is also a sign that poverty is comprehended as something that is virtually non-existing and therefore not important. The rise of inequality and the growing risk of poverty for a growing part of society is downplayed, and instead poverty is measured in absolute terms to show a positive trend of poverty-reduction since the 1990s (Regeringskansliet 2008: 7-8). This is in line with the tendency of seeing poverty as something foreign to our society, as a residual of an earlier society. It is the notion that if poverty still exists in our modern welfare state, or to the extent it does, it must be a new kind of poverty, a poverty based not in a lack of economical means but in other social problems located in the individual. When economic factors are discussed in the action-plans it is always done in the sense that economic growth is needed to sustain the welfare state. It is also clear that “labour market policy is part of economic policy” (SOU 2007:2, p. 73). In this way, labour market policies are secondary to the aims of the economic policies and becomes a sort of means to achieve the primary target of economic growth.

Here on follows a description of the division, based on a logic of moral, between the deserving and the undeserving poor. And following that will be an analysis and deconstruction of the discursive foundation on which the subject position ‘the poor’ is based. The chapter will end by revealing that which is the decentred, structural necessity of ‘the poor’.

4.2 The Deserving and the Undeserving Poor

The focus of many government publications is what could be referred to as a search for the poor; who they are, what makes them into a group that is distinctly different from other groups in society, and also to find ways to contain the poor, to make sure that they do not fall into indigence. In the attempts to capture the whole of the concept of poverty and to successfully define the poor, the scope of the concept has become so extensive that it has virtually lost all focus, and all that binds these groups together is that they are perceived as not belonging to the inside, as being a part of society. The different suggestions of containing the poor

is dispersed between law enforcement, to strike down on criminals, rights for handicapped people, access to museums etc. (Regeringskansliet 2003; 2005; 2007; 2008). In these action-plans, poverty is something hovering in the background, while the focus is pointing in all other directions and the proposed policies, following a logic of moral, are about curing the various symptoms of poverty rather than poverty as a phenomenon. Putting the focus on specific unmoral acts and essential characteristics is a way for society to allow its problems

to be blamed upon 'others' usually perceived as being on the 'edge' of society. Here the customary inversion of causal reality occurs: instead of acknowledging that we have problems in society because of basic core contradictions in the social order, it is claimed that all the problems of society would be, *ipso facto*, problem free! Thus, instead of suggesting, for example, that much high risk, deleterious drug use is caused by problems of inequality and exclusion, it is suggested that if we get rid of such drug use ('just say no', lock up the dealers) we will no longer have any problem. (Young 1999: 110-1)

One example of this way of not being able to go beyond the ideologically structured discourse that is coming through in the material is when the rise in violence against women is discussed. This often affects "women with welfare related problems, such as unemployment" (Regeringskansliet 2003: 14), and it is the violence as such that is seen as the problem, instead of that which most likely is the cause of the violence. The same is the case with the view on prostitution, where even if women in economically exposed situations are at higher risk of falling into prostitution, it is the prostitution itself that is understood as a problem (Regeringskansliet 2003: 14). What is clear here is that poverty is not the main problem, it is the life that poverty can lead to. To a large degree, this resembles the pre-welfare structure where poverty was in actuality reinforced by the efforts of keeping the poor from falling into indigence rather than trying to eradicate poverty (Dean 1991: 197). Just as during the eighteenth century, this way of not conceiving poverty as the main problem, creates a division between people who live in poverty and those who are the poor, a division made only on moral grounds (Himmelfarb 1984: 399), and is what enables the structural position of 'the poor' to be located outside of society.

The moralising and cultural aspect of poverty becomes clear in the view of the culture of immigrants and the problems it is said to have on their children, where, for example, a higher frequency of the use of medicine, as well as psychological problems among children with parents not born in Sweden are seen as derived from "the stress of having dual systems of norms and, as a consequence, weaker adult support" (Regeringskansliet 2003: 13).

This moral logic of difference creates a division between what is perceived as the deserving and the undeserving poor, where the deserving are those who, even if they are poor, are perceived to be so due to no fault of their own. While the undeserving poor are to blame for their own poverty because of their non-conformity to society.

As a rule, economic transfers or other de-commodifying measures should be kept down as not to “disturb” the labour market, however, this does not apply to those who are “deserving”. In fact, economic assistance to these people should not be put into question: “Universal welfare obviously also provides assistance to the most vulnerable groups in society. Such additional support must continue to be strong” (Regeringskansliet 2008: 8). Nevertheless, there is always a suspicion that those who are deserving might fake their “deservingness”, and because of this, the funds for investigating people that are receiving financial aid are growing (SOU 2007:2; SOU 2015:44).

In this way, there is constantly an element of blame put on the poor for their situation, simultaneously as their roles as victims of societal power structures entitles them to our pity. Thus, the poor are transformed into recipients of our good will and protection, both from other poor persons, for example by law enforcement, or to protect children in poverty against “domestic abuse, unduly exploitation, or deficiencies in the care of the child or any other condition in the home that poses a clear danger to the child’s health or development” (Regeringskansliet 2003: 20). What unites this two positions of blame and pity, is its point of view. It is always the inside looking out, seeing people who are not a part of the structure and who should either be helped or disciplined in a constant discursive act of inclusion and exclusion. In this way it involves, to borrow conceptions developed by Claude Levi-Strauss (2000 [1955]) in his *Tristes Tropiques*, both an anthropophagic and an anthropoemic logic (Zygmunt Bauman 1995). Anthropophagic meaning that society swallows the other into inclusion, and anthropoemic, meaning vomiting out the other, keeping them outside of society.

This dialectical movement of inclusion-exclusion is always discursively manifested in society and those who are thought to be the deserving poor, such as disabled persons, should be allowed to be de-commodified, while the undeserving poor should be given enough economic incentives to join the labour market, as it is insufficient economic incentives which is believed to keep the (undeserving) poor from joining the labour market (2015:44, p. 15; Ds 2012:26, p. 44). They are in this way seen as lacking in moral and not wanting to partake in society, and just as the poor during the nineteenth century needed hunger to feel obliged to labour (Dean 1991: 70), the contemporary poor need economic incentives to make the choice of participation.

The distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor and the way the market has a central role are clear in the discussion of financial transfers to young adults. Those who have at least partly a capacity to work should be given increased incentives to work, however, those that are deemed unfit for work, in the sense that they most likely never will be able to have an employment, should be able to get more financial aid in order to be kept out of poverty (SOU 2008:102). Although this can be seen as reasonable, it implies that those who have a work capacity should not be hindered from falling into poverty. This is yet another example on how poverty itself is not seen as a problem for the welfare state, but as a natural effect of the life-choices of certain individuals. Another differentiation made between different groups of poor people is the suggestion

that young people with disabilities should be helped onto the labour market by public employer's (SOU 2008:102, p. 137). This being something that is never discussed regarding any other group, since it would mean a political creation of jobs that are thought to never occur "naturally" on the labour market.

The difference between the deserving and the undeserving poor can also be seen in the preference of transfers, where for example an "increase in the child allowance [...] leads to fewer families becoming dependent on welfare" (SOU 2001:24, p. 19). This means that if a family can be hindered from receiving subsidies by increasing other social transfers, such as child allowance, it is seen as something positive because it is a part of the general welfare system and is as such seen as morally legitimate. This is due to the importance of division in the act of exclusion, a division central to the understanding of the moral character of the discourse, maintaining the demarcation between those thought to be on the inside, as a part of society, and those who are thought to be on the outside, and as such, not a part of society.

4.3 The Market and 'the Poor'

Above, a description is given of the main problem-representation of poverty policies and the logic of dividing the poor into groups of deserving and undeserving. In the following part, I will show how 'the poor' is structured around discursive moments, which together with the subject position, are given meaning through the market as a nodal point giving meaning to the discursive structure.

4.3.1 The Market

The policies and measures targeted at combating poverty, and helping those exposed to it, are mainly directed towards those who are thought to be the deserving poor. Other measures are mainly focused on economic growth and the creation of jobs. In other words, the main objective in government policies against poverty is to enhance the market forces and to make citizens act on the market – commodifying them. To force them to become subjected to the market and to become a part of the economic system. A healthy economy is prioritized over reducing poverty and it is thought to be the main focus of politics to make sure that we do not come into a recession so "the risk of future labour shortages [must be] minimized, for example by better matching and increased mobility in the labour market" (Regeringskansliet 2007: 6).

In *Sweden's Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005* the main aspect of anti-poverty policies is to tie people to the (labour)market and this is believed to be done through three main points: employability, entrepreneurship and adaptability (Regeringskansliet 2003: 27). What this means is that it is not the state who has a responsibility for combating poverty, only for creating a system in which individuals are given the possibility to emancipate themselves through the

market. In this way, poverty becomes the responsibility of the individual, and a failure to succeed is articulated in moralistic terms as a failure to comply to societal structures, while a failure on society's and/or the state's part to counteract poverty is understood structurally through “economic cycles” and structural “changes in employment” (Regeringskansliet 2003: 16). To borrow Levita's (2005) concepts, the individuals failure are described in terms of MUD (a moralistic discursive understanding), while the state's failure is strictly based in market structures and can be understood in terms of SID (a market economic understanding of poverty).

The government's labour policies are based on efforts for “a more flexible labour market through employability for those without a job and security for those in transition from one job to another” (Regeringskansliet 2003: 24; 2008: 9):

Work and education is the foundation of social participation in society. The basis for the Government's labour policy is measures to promote employment and competence, and to get a more flexible labour market by enhancing employability of those who are without work (Regeringskansliet 2007: 10).

The objective of the state to prepare and help the individual to adapt to the market (Regeringskansliet 2003: 24-7) is clear in the shift that the unemployment fund has gone through to “stimulate an increase of job applications. To be entitled to compensation from the unemployment fund, the unemployed must be available for work, actively look and apply for jobs” (Regeringskansliet 2003: 26). This is a huge shift from the idea of the welfare state described by Esping-Andersen (1990: 26-32), where the objective is to protect the individual from market forces, to de-commodify the individual. Today, the main goals for welfare policies, expressed in the governmental publications that I have studied, is to get “more people into work and to get more people to work longer, creating more flexible jobs and reducing sick leave” (Regeringskansliet 2007: 9), and “[s]ocial security measures must be designed so that they contribute to economic growth and employment, while measures for growth and employment in turn must support social objectives” (Regeringskansliet 2007: 9-10). Since economic growth and employment (actively partake on the labour market) are the social objectives there are no other considerations needed to take.

This is a clear example how the market is dictating the terms and it is the role of politics to follow the market without any unnecessary interventions. This means that it is not up to politics to ensure an income or certain standard of living for the citizens when they are unemployed or have a lower wage than is needed for a certain standard of living. The problem of poverty is structural, but is founded on a political failure to follow the market. The insecurity of the market is not met with securing the citizens from negative consequences of market dependence but with adapting through employability. To quote Tony Blair: “Our aim is not [...] to regulate for job security, but to make people more employable in the labour market, thus enhancing their skills, talents and mobility” (quoted in Levitas 2005: 120).

Poverty reduction is then about adapting individuals and the whole of society to the market and the role of the state is to promote competition and forcing the

citizens to act as *homo economicus*. The economic sphere is seen as the arena for inclusion, an arena where individuals can enter into contracts voluntarily to create mutual benefits (Taylor 2004: 71):

This agrees well with the modern welfare philosophical discussion about personal responsibility, choices and circumstances. Our responsibility and our choices are created at the intersection of external circumstances and our own personality. Everything we bear no responsibility for, but a part. Our responsibility grows when welfare society offers opportunities, also in terms of trying to support oneself. (SOU 2009:89, p. 16)

This new era resembles the nineteenth century in many respects: the separation in the deserving and the undeserving poor; the acceptance of poverty as natural and unavoidable; the revival of the idea of competition (Ferge & Miller 1985: 309-10). However, the key difference is that between the nineteenth century's work ethic that Max Weber (1976 [1905]) calls "the protestant ethic" and a contemporary ethic of the market.

To secure that the market is functioning "a uniform minimum [should] be secured to everybody by all means; but [...] all claims for a privileged security [...] must lapse" (Hayek 1976: 210). It is not just interventions in the market in the shape of increase in wages, job security and economic support to those out of work that leads to a non-functioning market and as a consequence to poverty. Even if paid work is central to exit from poverty it is important to point out that full employment cannot be seen as desirable goal, since also this political intervention is putting market mechanisms out of play (Hayek 1976: 206).

4.3.2 Employment

The economy is the driving force for inclusion and against poverty and the "main task of the government is to implement measures that lead to higher employment and lower unemployment and reduce labour market exclusion" (Regeringskansliet 2007: 21). "The goal should be to raise the employment rate for all of working age. With such a goal, it is natural that the efforts are aimed at reducing the growing social exclusion" (SOU 2007:2, p. 28). This is done by enhancing the market through "creating better incentives to work" (Regeringskansliet 2008: 6), i.e. to make it economically harder not to obtain a job, and by making it "easier and less costly to hire" and "easier and more profitable to start and run businesses" (Regeringskansliet 2008: 6). Efforts to reduce social exclusion is mainly targeted at the unemployed, the aim is to make them attractive on the labour market (Regeringskansliet 2008: 14), because "work and the workplace are seen as key factors when exclusion and social marginalization should be fought" (Regeringskansliet 2007: 21). "A long period of unemployment leads to social exclusion and lack of participation in society" and this should be met with "a more flexible labour market by enhancing the employability of those who are without work" (Regeringskansliet 2008: 9). But efforts to reduce poverty also functions as a way to ensure that the unemployed do not avoid the labour market

willingly by “higher demands on activity [for the jobseeker and] strengthen the financial incentives to work” (Regeringskansliet 2005: 26; SOU 2007:2, p. 65). Although, the statistical relationship between the economic incentives to work and the labour supply is not clear (SOU 2007:2, p. 302) policies for employment, and against poverty, is based more or less solely on the idea that economic incentives that resembles market mechanisms is the best means to increase employment. This produces a forced identification with the market onto ‘the poor’, since, the inability to partake on the labour market is meet with requirements of more market identification through commodifying logics.

It is of key importance to notice the difference between having a job and to partake on the labour market. The main focus of the action-plans is how to make people partake in the labour market, not to actually get people into employment. Since the value of a job lies first and foremost in that it is created through the supply and demands of the (labour)market (Regeringskansliet 2012), it is getting people to participate in the labour market that is the priority. This is apparent when viewing job creation policies, which is focused on introducing corporate tax credits (SOU 2007:2, p. 35) rather than, for example, creating jobs in the public sector. This logic not only forces the poor to identify with the market, but also, due to labour market participation without employment, to do so as a failed market actor.

Labour force participation is seen as the main goal because “[i]f the labour force participation remains at a low level for a longer period of time it increases the risk of people being permanently excluded from the labour market” (SOU 2015:21, p. 155). The inclusion in the labour market achieved by working provides a value that work has “in itself through the social participation that work gives” (Ds 2012:26, p. 46). “Work has always had a central place in the moral imagination, and has also been seen not only as an economic necessity but as vital to the people's morals and upbringing” (SOU 2009:89, p. 69). It is this division of inclusion and exclusion that creates the other(ness) that is constitutive of the social order, and that which at the same time poses a threat to it (Torfing 2005). In this case, the perceived immoral essence of the poor is that which threatens society as it poses a threat to the workings of the market, by the possibility of a spread of this immoral behaviour that will hinder economic growth. The importance given to the labour market makes it apparent that the labour market has been given a wider symbolic meaning, as the abstract universal market, encompassing all markets. In this way, active participation, or inclusion, in the labour market is the participation in all markets, and the way to truly be a part of the included society. This extends the meaning of ‘the poor’ as failed labour market actors to, what could be called, thoroughly failed market actors.

4.3.3 Education

The connection between labour and education is important because of their foundational character of being the “basis for social inclusion” (Regeringskansliet 2007: 16). They are both seen as “the foundation for the personal and social

development of individuals and constitutes a foundation for participation in society” (Regeringskansliet 2008: 11). Even if the “individual’s needs, wishes and conditions should guide [his/ her educational choices] the labour market’s demand for labour [must be] taken into account” (Regeringskansliet 2003: 33). In this way, employment and education is intertwined in the sense that they are both opportunities for societal inclusion, but not in the sense that they are perfect substitutes for each other. Instead, labour market participation is market participation per se, while education is a way towards inclusion through the labour market by employment (Regeringskansliet 2003: 33-4). The idea that people “overconsume education” (Regeringskansliet 2008: 38) is an example of this because if education was to be the way to inclusion, overconsumption of the same would not be considered a problem, but instead, education is only valuable in so far as it leads to employment:

Lifelong learning is supported through the efforts of several different policies at different levels, and is crucial to achieve the objectives of full employment, improving quality and productivity at work and social cohesion. The education system's flexibility provide opportunities for supplementing qualifications on the basis of societal and individual needs. Extensive measures are taken to reduce early school leaving and to improve educational opportunities for persons with low levels of education and inactivity on the labour market. (Regeringskansliet 2005: 14-5)

The function of education in the discursive structure is to enable market participation, it gives the subject an opportunity to adapt to the requirements of the labour market. Through a lack of education, ‘the poor’ bears not only the meaning ascribed to it in the previous section, of a failed market actor, but also as a failed commodity, a commodity that lack the attributes attractive on the market.

4.3.4 Welfare

As mentioned above, the view of the main task of the welfare state that is put forward in the governmental-action plans is not to take counter measures against poverty but rather to “[p]romote social cohesion and equal opportunities for all through adequate, accessible, financially sustainable, adaptable and efficient social protection systems and policies for social cohesion” (Regeringskansliet 2007: 8). In this way the social protection system’s main objective is to promote social cohesion, not to financially help people in need of economic aid, through changing the behaviour of the poor.

If employment is the way to social inclusion and education the way to employability, then the social security system functions as a system of corrective measurements to ensure a correct behaviour for becoming included through the labour market:

*Arbetslinjen*³ is an essential principle of the general welfare policy. Work is the foundation of prosperity and it is also the basis for people's personal and social development. [...] Work or training is always preferable to funding. A long period of unemployment leads to social exclusion and lack of participation in society. (Regeringskansliet 2007: 8)

The public health insurance system for example has social inclusion as the main goal and if sickness, or ill health, is a reason for social exclusion, then the measures to counteract it is not treatment to become free from that condition, instead it is through the participation on the labour market social exclusion is avoided (Regeringskansliet 2008: 11). This means that it is not sickness that excludes an individual, but the inability to sell one's labour that is the main problem. To become sound and healthy is instead the task of the health care and not of the health insurance system, which instead should force a desirable behaviour through enhancements of the incentives to work (Regeringskansliet 2007: 7, 23; 2008: 25; S 2012/4640/SF, p. 13):

[W]hile the problem remains that too many who are sick, it will remain for a long time, and often end up in permanent social exclusion. It is therefore important to achieve a more active sick leave process with early efforts to the individual's ability to work to a greater extent will be utilized. (Regeringskansliet 2008: 24)

The “[u]niversal welfare system also provides assistance to the most vulnerable groups in society. Such additional support must continue to be strong” (Regeringskansliet 2007: 8):

The general welfare policy creates the foundation for the prevention of poverty and social exclusion and therefore the basis for the Swedish action plan for social inclusion. The general welfare helps to reduce inequalities between different groups in society, but it must be complemented by targeted assistance to the most vulnerable groups in society to achieve social inclusion that includes everyone. (Regeringskansliet 2007: 13)

However this only applies to specific groups who are considered deserving, those who for some reason are seen as not obliged to partake in the labour market, and is not a general statement encompassing all those in need of economic aid. Among those referred to as the undeserving the objective is to get them “into work and reducing social exclusion” (Ds 2012:26, p. 43), which is done through increasing incentives to work. This is done in two ways, firstly it is seen as important to enhance incentives for persons receiving financial aid to return to work by lowering the substitution effect (Regeringskansliet 2008b:11) to make it “more

³ The main principle in Swedish labour market policy (since the 1930 crisis settlement), which means that job seekers should primarily be offered work or labour market policies. First when such measures are not enough, direct financial aid will be provided. Since the election in 2006, the concept has primarily been focusing on commodifying policies.

profitable for recipients of financial aid to take temporary jobs and increase their working hours (Ds 2012:26, p. 43). In other words, to make it more economically beneficial to take a job. Secondly, to make it less economically beneficial to not have a job and to put demands on those who receive payments, either from the unemployment fund or financial aid, to actively seek jobs and this is monitored to make sure that the person actively tries to get back into employment (Regeringskansliet 2005: 16). We can in a sense talk about push and pull effects.

The pull effects are the lowering of taxes and making it possible to keep parts of the financial aid when moving into an employment, the push effects are the limits of financial aid, the demands made on those who receive any kind of economical transfers from the state and control mechanisms, or to put it in other terms “Narrower port and broader ways back” (SOU 2009:89, p. 90). The push and pull effect are based on the presumption that that which primarily keep people away from labour, is the de-commodification effect of the social security system (Ds 2012:26, p. 44).

The push and pull effects works according to a moral logic, in the same way as natural Malthusian and Ricardian economic laws masked the moralising aspect of putting the moral blame on the poor themselves. For example is the incentives used against families with children with the argument that

“[n]ot having the same economic conditions as other children can mean that the child must abstain from such things as comrades take for granted. Economic vulnerability may also affect other things that are important for children's development opportunities and control over their lives, as well as the family's ability for example to get an accommodation.” (SOU 2015:44, p. 23)

What this means is that in order to help the child economically demands should be put on the parents as if their economic situation is due to a lack of incentives. In this way the social security system functions in a moralising way.

Economic aid in times of unemployment and lack of other types of income should preferably be through insurance rather than grants (SOU 2006:86), but at the same time requirements for the payments are put on the individual in the form of demands on a certain level of “activity”. We can here see a discrepancy between the idea that direct grants should not be handed out, but at the same time that we should not organize society after de-commodifying logics. There is an acceptance that the Swedish/Nordic welfare systems have been more successful (SOU 2006:86, p. 34-5), but at the same time we see a move away from that system. The connection to what can be seen as the new era is here important. We were successful but our policies are no longer valid.

5 ‘The Poor’ and Society

In the previous chapter I have deconstructed the subject position ‘the poor’ to reveal the ideology behind its manifested appearance. In this final chapter I will answer the research questions posed in the introduction of this thesis by summing up the results of the deconstruction made in the previous chapter and show what conclusions can be drawn.

5.1 ‘The Poor’ as the Constitutive Outside

The purpose of this thesis can be divided into two parts, the first one being to show the constructed essence behind the subject position ‘the poor’, and that the poor is the constitutive outside of society. I will in the following paragraphs answer the research question: what is the necessary ideological kernel which ‘the poor’ is structured around?

In the deconstruction made in the previous chapter I have shown how the subject position ‘the poor’ is constructed and given meaning in the discursive structure. It is made obvious how ‘the poor’ is given its meaning through the identification with the symbolic order structured around the market as the nodal point, which organizes the entire poverty discourse. The moments employment, education and welfare can all be seen as identification points for ‘the poor’, and they all discursively relate to the market. The moment education is structured around the market in that it is seen as the way to employability and hence, to market and societal inclusion. The welfare system as a moment in the societal discourse is also structured around the market in that it is seen as an institution of corrective measures, meant to impose desirable behaviours on the citizens, to compel them, by push and pull effects, to become market-actors, to become homo-economicus.

It is thus the ideology of the market which is the necessary ideological kernel of the subject position ‘the poor’, and that which utterly defines ‘the poor’ is that it is the non-market actor, the identity of not being able to partake on the labour market, which is internalizing the role of all markets, representing *the market* as an abstract phenomenon. Participation in the market is equated with inclusion in society, and this gives that it is the failure of the poor to participate in the market which is what pushes them outside of society.

Even if a subject misrecognizes the discursive order, there is no identification beyond this order and the subject must submit to it (Laclau & Zac 1994: 31-2). As mentioned in section 2.2.2. *The Subject as Lack*, if a subject or a group of people is pushed into becoming the radical other, that which is not a part of the structure

but defines it, the difficulty to escape that position is immense. This is due to that the excluded position is always already excluded, that is, it is negated, perceived as something inherently different, before it is filled with structural meaning, and this meaning is then subsequently also negated. This is to say, what is negated is always already negated.

Consequently, I have shown how ‘the poor’ is given its meaning by finding moments of identification in the symbolic order that is structured around the market as the ideological kernel of the poverty discourse. However, the observant reader will have noticed that all points of identification mentioned (except *welfare*, which can be said to act as a forced identification with the corrective system which pushes ‘the poor’ out of society) are negative points of identification. They are, in fact, anti-identifications. Employment as a point of identification is negative because it is in the lacking of employment that the identification occurs, and the same is true for education. Even the market, the nodal point that structures the entire discourse and the identity of the subject position, is an anti-identification, because it is the identification through not being a market actor. Now, this is the truly radical position of the excluded other: no truly positive points of identification is accessible to it, the structural meaning ascribed to it is just that of the other, the anti-society. It is the opposite, constructed only as an external threat to the discursive system (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 127). In this way, ‘the poor’ can be seen as the empty container in which all threatening otherness can be placed. This lack of positive structural points of identification, meaning that it has no part in the discursive structure and can only be defined in its negative relationship to it, is the final evidence, showing how ‘the poor’ truly is society’s *constitutive outside*.

5.2 ‘The Entrepreneur’ and the Victory of Hayek

So, ‘the poor’ is the constitutive outside of society due to the fact that it is not participating in the market, and it is thus the ideological kernel of the market which structures the anti-identity of ‘the poor’ as the non-market actor. Knowing this, we can move on to the second research question posed in chapter one: how can we understand society as a social order constituted by its negation, ‘the poor’?

As stated in chapter four, non-participation in the (labour)market is equated with non-participation in society. This leads us to conclude the rather radical notion that the market *is* society. Or rather, it is the ideology of the market that is upholding the myth of society, it is that which is providing the society effect, the idea of a discursive totalization. Since society have no essence in itself, it is empty until filled with structural meaning and the contingency of the social allows this meaning to alter through the passing of time. It is clear that the social has become a new kind of social through the meaning creation of the ideology of the market. This can be illustrated in the Weberian example of the “protestant work ethic” (1976 [1905]) given in the narrative in chapter three; the ideology of the market

creates its own ethics and moral, replacing the work ethic, i.e. filling the social with new structural meaning.

If the market is society, or the ideology that upholds the myth of society, the points of anti-identification for 'the poor' are in fact societal points of identification, which 'the poor' negates. The subject which identifies with them successfully, which identifies with the social order, obtains the position that I shall call 'the entrepreneur'. 'The entrepreneur' is the one who partakes on the market, who has the ability to produce him-/herself, to invent an identity of their own, or to adopt particular life-styles, selling his/her labour and consuming the "right" products and services that make his/her own *self-company* successful. In this way the market gives us a clear point of identification, transforming us from citizens to market actors (Bauman 1999: 95).

We have thus arrived to a society that can be characterized as the ideal society put forward by Friedrich Hayek (1972 [1944]: 36) where the market is the basis for the societal order. Following in the footsteps of Hayek, it is apparent that in the Swedish political discourse, the promotion of economic growth is seen as the overall priority of the state, and it is considered to be the individual's submission to the market forces that enables this growth in material welfare (Hayek 1972 [1944]: 204). In the view of Hayek, the role of the state is to promote competition, enforcing the citizens to act as "homo economicus", in other words, to force the citizens to adapt to the market. This is not done through natural market forces, but through societal structures forcing a "submission to the impersonal forces of the market" (Hayek 1972 [1944]: 204), and the role of the state is to create "a suitable framework for the beneficial working of competition" (Hayek 1972 [1944]: 39).). As shown in chapter four this is the objective of the Swedish welfare system, which is shown to be an institution exercising corrective measures on the citizens in order to compel them to perform as market-actors.

To conclude, this means that by looking at the subject position 'the poor', I have been able to uncover a discursive shift in society where the aim of the welfare state no longer is to make the citizens independent of the market, to de-commodify them, as was the original intent of the welfare state. Instead, they are in every way pushed and pulled towards dependency of the market, and being a commodity is rewarded with the inclusion in society. However, since the market is the point which structures the entire discourse, that which creates the anti-identity 'the poor', it is also that which is the excluding force, and to try to adapt to the market will only reinforce this exclusion and reproduce the social order – the market as society.

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