Discourses of Unemployment in Denmark

Cultural-Encounters

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Abstract

This project investigates questions of discursive hegemony and counter-hegemony in a series of articles from the Danish public media debate, and from articulations of official party politics found on party websites and press statements. The theory and method of the project has been derived from the work of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Birgitta Frello. The project’s primary theoretical concepts are: articulation, subject-position, hegemony, and counter-hegemony. After conducting our analysis, we were able to state the presence of two pervasive hegemonies: ‘unemployment as a problem’ and ‘work constructs and influences identity. Through a discussion we clarified how the various discourses interact and how the positioning of the unemployed subject is used in legitimizing solutions for the ‘problem of unemployment’.
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Problem area

There is at present, a general political focus on the status and future of the Danish welfare state in its relation to a globalized neoliberal economy. An extensive public debate concerning unemployment and social security has emerged from this context. Pre-election political campaigns, particularly those of the party Venstre, have indicated that unemployment and social welfare restructuring will be central in both parliamentary politics and in public debates. Venstre’s campaign has presented a number of texts that attempt to ‘expose’ generalized social welfare clients as receiving exuberant sums - sums which according to Venstre de-incentivize employment.¹ Ventre's campaign has been heavily critiqued by other political parties, such as Enhedslisten, which has countered by launching campaigns ‘exposing’ the high wages and privileged pension plans of members of parliament.² Moreover, Venstre’s campaign has been heavily criticized and satirized in public and social media - spurring many opinion and debate articles, which generally fall under quite traditional ‘red’ vs. ‘blue’, left vs. right, or ‘structure’ vs. ‘agency’ divisions. However, the role of the center-left, the Social Democrats and Radikale Venstre in particular, has indicated that the range of divergence between the traditional ‘left vs. right’, has become remarkably narrow - in other words, the center position seems to be particularly popular within parliament.

Our attention and curiosity regarding the normativities surrounding unemployment were initially prompted by an extracurricular reading of Rune Engelbreth Larsen’s Ledighed og Ledighad (2013), which according to Engelbreth, provided a critical analysis of the ‘political norms-shifts’ in relation to unemployment.³ Engelbrecht’s prime thesis is that the Danish political center-left has in recent times accommodated liberal ideology - conceptualizing unemployment, in regard to able persons, as consequence of individual (free) choices - in stark contrast to the understanding of unemployment being the determinant consequence of macroeconomic factors, such as supply,

¹ https://www.venstre.dk/politik/maerkesager/for-fremtiden-skal-det-betale-sig-at-arbejde
² https://www.facebook.com/enhedslisten/photos/a.430075946022.226747.223040066022/10153045040391023/?type=1
³ Engelbreth, 2013: p. 9
demand, and most importantly - mode of production. In summary, through his analysis he outlines two historically distinct and oppositional political ideologies, and claims that they have substantially merged.

We find his analysis both productive and interesting, but suspect that it is also too reductive. In this paper, we wish to add nuance to the ‘political norm-shift’ thesis by viewing the general public debate and politics of unemployment through a discursive lens - as a discursive struggle for *hegemony*.

**Research question**

Which hegemonic discourses and counter-hegemonic interventions can be identified in the current debate concerning unemployment in Denmark?

**Strategy of analysis**

*Introduction*

As this paper shall be dealing with discourses of unemployment as a problem, both a theory of discourse and an analytical method, or strategy, will be required. We have chosen to derive our method from our reading of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), and *Critique as Counter-Hegemonic Intervention* (2008) while mitigating our reading with some perspectives and insights from Birgitta Frello’s *Kollektiv Identitet* (2012).

We have chosen the work of Laclau & Mouffe, as they productively explore how power relations, social hierarchies, and collective identities are constituted through discourse, through *articulations*, which produce, or construct, subject positions - such positions are seen, not as ‘topographical’, stable and privileged categorical positions, such as ‘the working class’ or ‘the people’, but rather as expressions of hegemony within a given discourse - the partial stabilization of definition, narrative, association, equivalence, and contingency.

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4 Engelbreth, 2013: pp. 22-23
*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is also a political theory that explains how political interests might formulate effective strategies and succeed in their goals by accurately identifying and exploiting ‘structures’ of discourse.⁵

We view the present debate surrounding the *unemployed* and *unemployment* as a discursive struggle for hegemony, one which is also the site of competing political strategies. We therefore believe that Laclau and Mouffe’s theory provides us with the most relevant and useful optics for conducting our analysis. Also, unlike many radical leftist social theories, hegemonic theory and strategy operates on the basis of interaction with, and mitigation of, existing dispersed power structures: this correlates to our field of research as debates regarding the *unemployed* and *unemployment* have to do with reform proposals - both of state policy and of the descriptive and evaluative language used in speaking about unemployment.

The scope and complexity of Laclau and Mouffe’s work in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is far too great and detailed to thoroughly explain within the parameters of this project. We will therefore outline what we consider to be of primary concern for our purposes. We have singled out four analytical tools for treating our empirical data: articulation, subject position, hegemony and counter-hegemony. In the following, we explain the portion of theoretical framework of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* in which the aforementioned analytical tools appear. Lastly we describe some considerations for selecting our data, and what possibilities and limitations this data, in conjunction with our analytical tools, affords us.

*‘Everything is Discourse’*
Laclau and Mouffe propose a theoretical structure that explains the operations at work within an all-encompassing discursive field, while being clearly anti-essentialist - in doing so, they are treading ground, which could be precarious in terms of potential misunderstandings and conflations with other theoretical debates. The most pronounced of these, we believe, is their general understanding of discursive space - that ‘everything is discourse’. This must be understood as being in complete non-relation to debates concerning realism/idealism:

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⁵ Laclau/Mouffe, 1985
“The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. (...) What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but rather the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence.”

Therefore it should be understood that Laclau and Mouffe understand everything as being an object to discourse, as both the physical as well as the social world are constituted through discourse in order to gain meaning. This is, again, not a position that denies the existence of the world external to thought an sich, or that an entirely unproblematic meaning can approximate a ‘sutured’ stability, but rather that nothing is so ‘objective’ and pre-given as to be able to claim a status of meaning outside of discursivity.

Articulations

We shall begin with the concept articulation as it appears to be a basic aspect of Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory. In this theory, and indeed within related theories, the relationship between a term and the concept(s) it denotes is understood as unstable, ‘unsutured’, and relational - the relationship between the signified and signifier is reflexive, which is to say that meanings change dependent on the context of their usage in exchanges - that all identities are relational and relationships of difference determine meaning. An articulation is a linguistic gesture that assigns a relation of difference between ‘elements’, so that in consequence the meaning, or identity, of these elements is modified. The result of such an articulatory practice is the contribution to a ‘structured totality’, which is what Laclau and Mouffe name as ‘discourse’. Articulation is thus a practice in which various elements are combined and differentiated in order to create a total representation of a given theme or issue.

We utilize articulation as an analytical tool for localizing practices in which different elements of meaning are assembled in order to create a total representation of a given theme or issue. For the purpose of our analysis we will not only focus on how different elements are combined, but

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6 Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: p. 108
7 Frello, 2012: p. 201
8 Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: p.105
9 Frello, 2012: pp.196-198
especially on the distinction between inside and outside, as it is this demarcation that constitutes
the articulation and in turn, the discourse. In regard to unemployment as a problem we will
analyze what is included in and what is excluded from descriptions of unemployment, how this
differentiation affects the structuring of the given discourse.

**Subject Position**

A subject is understood in Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory as being yet another discursive
identity, or an unstable position in the greater discursive field. Thus, the classic ontology of
subject, and its centered role as an origin of social relations, as a unified agent, homogeneous and
‘transparent to itself’ - is abandoned in favour of the subject position. The subject-position is
altered in dependence on the interplay of discourses. Furthermore, the subject position is
overdetermined, and thus constituted performatively in many ways at the same time and across
time.

The concept of subject position, de-centers and destabilizes the subject, thus denying it as the
origin of the social. However, the subject position does not radically deny the subject by
differing all subjectivity to complete social dispersal. Again, like most aspects of Laclau and
Mouffe’s discourse theory, the subject position is an anti-essentialist notion, which views
personhood as something existing, but only as ‘moment’ in the context of the social, which is
always relational and never closed, or ‘sutured’. This allows Laclau and Mouffe to reject the
classic dichotomy of individual-social and name it false. The individual-social dichotomy is such
a pervasive notion, that it functions as a major premise in much political thinking, and is an
assumption that enables many articulations regarding social normativity. Thus, the concept of
subject position provides us with an optic for localizing discourses employing the individual-
social binary.

The understanding of subject as subject position will allow us to analyze the various articulations
of personal identity, which appear frequently in our data. It will allow us to trace, as an example,
hierarchies seen in sequential order, of overdetermined positions. The concept of subject position

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10 Frello, 2012: p. 200
11 Laclau/Mouffe, 1985. p. 115
12 Laclau/Mouffe, 1985. p. 115
will also provide us with grounds for asserting the presence or absence of hegemony, as for example, when a certain position, such as employment status, is highlighted as central, essential, primary or foundational for identity.

**Hegemony**

In Chapter two, Laclau and Mouffe arrive at the concept of hegemony, which was introduced into the Marxist dialectic by the Italian Marxist scholar, Antonio Gramsci. Laclau and Mouffe identify, via Gramsci, that collective political identities cannot be exhaustively determined or explained by economic factors and conditions. Rather, such political identities are, in Gramsci’s vocabulary, ultimately relational, being ‘cemented’ together by ‘ideological elements’ into complex ‘collective wills’, and without having any permanent or necessary attachment to a particular group of people.\(^\text{13}\)

Laclau and Mouffe are positioned within the poststructuralist field, and thus perceive the social as a fluid and open space without intrinsic meaning, - meaning is continuously contested through articulations and therefore never stabilized.\(^\text{14}\) This understanding of the social is the presupposition in which the hegemonic practice operates. In light of this ultimate non-fixity of permanent meaning, articulations do take place, which attempt to fix, or ‘suture’ meanings, associations, equivalencies, etc. When this process takes place with a high degree of success, hegemonic discourses are established.\(^\text{15}\) However, any given semantic situation, or ‘articulatory moment’ enjoying consensus is not necessarily hegemonic. When hegemony is present, one specific discourse has the power to position subjects, as the other discourses are dominated.\(^\text{16}\) The struggle for hegemony is a fight for stabilizing a specific discourse and thereby a specific meaning of a given concept or issue, unemployment in this particular case. In our analysis we will focus on discerning the most hegemonic discourses, the ones which have the power to position the unemployed subject in a specific way, to determine what unemployment entails, and what it is not defined as. A dissection of these discourses, in terms of elements articulated in specific ways, will be made in order to show how they function.

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\(^{13}\) Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: p. 68  
\(^{14}\) Frello, 2012: p. 196  
\(^{15}\) Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: p. 134  
\(^{16}\) Frello, 2012: p. 203
In her short article, *Critique as Counter-Hegemonic Intervention* (2008), Chantal Mouffe examines the concept of critique and how it is applicable to hegemonic strategy. Her article is formulated as a response to the later ‘trends’ within the grouping of thinkers she refers to as ‘Post-Operaist’. These thinkers include Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, and Paolo Virno. These thinkers advocate a type of ‘social critique’, which operates through the gestures of desertion, exodus, or as ‘critique as withdrawal from’. Mouffe’s concept of critique is formulated as ‘critique as engagement with’. This difference may be understood in similar terms to the difference between the classic and orthodox Marxist strategy of preparing for the (inevitable) revolution, whereupon a wholly new society may emerge, predicated on rational organization and without exploitive relations of power - and the hegemonic strategy, which would operate through organizing articulations so as to link dispersed struggles into a common identity - by identifying adversaries, and through the localized stabilization of ‘nodal points’ on key issues, achieve hegemony - not to overthrow and dismantle the state, but rather become the state; this hegemonic strategy does not envision the possibility of a post-revolutionary society without power relations - this is not deemed possible because of the fundamental instability of the social, or as Mouffe herself describes: “Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices which attempt to disarticulate it in order to install another form of hegemony.”

Thus, counter-hegemonic interventions perform an action towards hegemonies in a similar way to how articulations engage with elements: by ‘hacking’ into aspects of the hegemony and rearticulating them into a preferred structuring. The scope of adversaries should be limited to accessible ‘nodal points’, meaning here intelligible and workable localized hegemonic sites, not overly extensive sites such as ‘capitalism’ or ‘the people’. These sites, such as discourses of labor rights, gender issues, post-colonial relations, climate and social justice etc. should then be linked together through ‘chains of equivalence’ into alliances, or new hegemonies.

We use the concept of counter-hegemonic interventions to identify articulations which directly engage with perceived hegemonies in order to disarticulate and subsequently restructure their

\[http://eipcp.net/transversal/0808/mouffe/en\]
elements into new hegemonies - thus providing us an understanding of how certain articulations may be seen as ‘engaging resistance’ to dominant forms of political thought.

**Empirical material**

We have selected a range of debate and opinion articles that directly and primarily engage with the topic of unemployment. We omitted all editorials and other such articles the could be seen as representing the newspaper as an organization. We chose articles from prominent Danish newspapers and journals, these being: Dagbladet Information, Politiken, Berlingske Tidende and Kristelig Dagblad. We did not include articles from Ekstra Bladet, BT, Weekendavisen, Børsen, Jyllands Posten, free and local newspapers, magazines, blogs or Facebook groups. Our search process was both based on internet (Google and DuckDuckGo) searches. We primarily used the search terms, ‘arbejdsløshed’, ‘ledighed’, ‘debat’, ‘opinion’, ‘kontanthjælp’, ‘kontanthjælpsmodtager’, ‘langtidsledige’, ‘ledig’ in various combinations with each other. Our reasons for selecting certain articles and omitting others were partially influenced by the priority of the search results. We also prioritized diversity of opinion in choosing articles: for this purpose, we endeavored to not select overly similar articles. We also identified Information and Politiken as being commonly associated to the political left, or ‘red bloc’, likewise we identified Berlingske Tidende and Kristelig Dagblad as commonly associated to the political right, or ‘blue bloc’: based on this categorization, we included, what we hope is an adequately balanced representation of the range of positions.

The amounts of available empirical data is extensive - relevant articles are continuously published, and the resources and scope of this project are strictly limited. For that reason we will not be able to state any general representative conclusion, only that certain discourses can be found in the debate.

We will then proceed the second level focusing on political parties - key issues, campaign posters, statements and speeches of politicians regarding unemployment, which are found on official party website or in articles published by various daily newspapers. We chose to represent the political parties, which are represented in Parliament as well as one newly formed party, these being: Socialdemokraterne, Radikale Venstre, Socialistisk Folkeparti, Enhedslisten,
Alternativet, Venstre, Dansk Folkeparti, Konservative Folkeparti, Liberale Alliance. We searched for material in the homepages of the parties, looking within political agendas such as ‘beskæftigelse’, ‘arbejdsløshed’, ‘kontanthjælp’, ‘velfærd’, and ‘arbejdsmarked’. We also searched the Internet for other sources, such as newspapers, where politicians directly represented party politics. The search terms were approximately the same as those used for public media scene, and in conjunction with the party name.

*Structure of the analysis*

In this section we will describe the procedure of the upcoming analysis. Through our reading of the work of Laclau and Mouffe and the empirical material, we found that it was adequate to divide the empirical material into two levels of analysis. This is done in order to give a cross sectional snapshot of the discourses of ‘unemployment’ and ‘unemployed’ that appear in the ongoing debate.

The first level consists of individuals participating in the public debate, stating their opinion on the topic unemployment. This level will be called the *public media debate*, and we will leave out any statements from politicians or parties. These are a part of the second level, named the *political scene*, and this level is an analysis of the parties as well as politicians opinions and policies regarding unemployment. The tools described in our strategy of analysis will fully come into play in analyzing the first two levels. On both levels we conduct an analysis of how elements are combined in articulations of discourses - what is included in and what is excluded from definitions of *unemployment* and the *unemployed* - as it is the unsaid, the absent and the contradictory that participates in defining notions of unemployment and the unemployed. We will use the concept of hegemony and subject position in order to distinguish the hegemonic discourses. Hegemony as a tool is also used to distinguish the most wide-spread discourses of unemployment in general. The concept of counter-hegemony is used on both levels in order to show how the hegemonic discourses are contested in their struggle for stabilizing the meaning of unemployment and the unemployed subject.
Analysis

The first level - Public media debate

Introduction
In the following, we analyze a range of articulations, and seek to show how they modify the given discourse. From the range of articulations we also identify, what appear to be the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses of unemployment and the unemployed. Based on the range of articulations from persons of different backgrounds, we want to show how discourses of unemployment appear in the public media debate. We also want to show how these get challenged. Our analysis of the public media scene provides some insight regarding the presence of common and dominant discourses, but cannot claim any generalized or exhaustive representation. We do not intend to convey that these highlighted discourses are necessarily the most central or most important, others could have been identified analyzing other types or samples of data.

The voice of the unemployed
The first article ”Kære Inger Støjberg, jeg råber til dig hernede fra bunden”\(^{18}\) can be placed in the first level and is published in Information. It written by a person on social welfare (kontanthjælp), Sarah Elizabeth Daley, writing a letter addressed to Inger Støjberg, the political spokeswoman for the party Venstre. In short, Daley writes in opposition to Støjbergs statements regarding the unemployed, proposals for cutbacks in social security, and Venstre’s campaign politics.

At first she describes herself as a 33-year-old person receiving social security and then she lists a number of other characteristics individual and personal to her:

\(^{18}\) http://www.information.dk/527135
“Men det er ikke det eneste, jeg er. Jeg er kvinde, mor, akademiker, der mangler at skrive mit speciale, feminist, arbejdsløs, homoseksuel, venlig, empatisk, dygtig, passioneret, følsom, ked af det, vred, glad og sjov. Med andre ord et menneske med mange nuancer og facetter.”¹⁹

The word ‘but’ indicates that the author has an awareness of the logic of contradiction, which is present in discourses ascribing a primary identity to employment status - a logic which is contested by listing other elements as being both simultaneously and equally constitutive. It implicates that one cannot simultaneously be a person receiving social security and a be multi faceted human being (which she argues that the policy of the party is reducing her to). Through the articulation process a distinction between what belongs to the definition of ‘kontanthjælpsmodtager’ (a multi faceted human being) and what does not (a one dimensional human being) is created. In trying to open the meaning of what an unemployed person is by positioning herself as more than a mere receiver of social security - she challenges a discourse producing an one-dimensional perception of the unemployed subject. The substance of this articulation conveys that, even as employment status heavily influences identity, there are other factors that need to be recognized and valued, otherwise persons might be viewed by politicians as economic statistics.

Daley describes sensitive scenes from her life, for an example she got (yet another) refusal from a job she applied for.²⁰ We interpret this as a way of blaming circumstance and the societal condition. Even though she is trying her very best, applying for jobs ‘nonstop’, she stands powerless against the system and the societal condition.

Daley also criticizes the hierarchy between the ‘top’ of the society consisting of the most powerful people, amongst these Inger Støjberg, and the ‘bottom’ where the weakest people of the society, including herself can be found.²¹ But in doing this she is also reproducing and thereby reinforcing the very same hierarchy, which is another way of putting herself and other unemployed in a subordinate position.

¹⁹ http://www.information.dk/527135
²⁰ http://www.information.dk/527135
²¹ IBID
Daley writes: “Jeres ord er med til at skabe og definere virkeligheden. De er med til at læse os fast.”

Previous to this she writes about social mobility, which she argues she does not have, and which Inger Støjberg has plenty of due to her position in the hierarchy. In this she is also blaming Inger Stoijberg and the party Venstre for launching campaigns that inhibit the unemployed from becoming a part of the labour market. At the same time she is giving them the power to do so, in saying that their words ‘define reality’, again reproducing the hierarchy.

In summary, Daley articulates the unemployed subject, and herself as a victim exposed to the forces of the societal condition, the system, and its representatives exemplified in Inger Støjberg. In that way she is trying to dis-articulate and challenge articulations of social welfare recipients as ‘lazy’, ‘unmotivated’, and ‘living in luxury’ by positioning the unemployed subject in a condition of involuntary unemployment despite trying hard to find a job. Furthermore, she also challenges the discourse by positioning herself as a multi faceted human being and in doing so she seeks to re-humanize herself.

The re-humanization of the unemployed
If Daley was trying to re-humanize herself, primarily, then Lars Werge is trying to re-humanize the entire group of unemployed. In an article from Kristeligt Dagblad, *Er ledige vor tids syndebukke?* we find the point of view of vice chairman of the Danish Confederation of Journalists (Journalistforbund), Lars Werge, who states that it is not the community but rather the individual who gets blamed for not finding employment. We interpret this statement as correlating to Engelbrecht’s aforementioned ‘norm shift’: That there has been a shift in understanding, especially amongst the political center-left, in accommodating the traditional liberal conception of unemployment as being a matter of personal responsibility and choice - the political left thus breaking with the traditional Marxist conception of unemployment being caused by determinant structural processes.

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22 [http://www.information.dk/527135](http://www.information.dk/527135)
23 [http://www.etik.dk/etik.dk/er-ledige-vor-tids-syndebukke](http://www.etik.dk/etik.dk/er-ledige-vor-tids-syndebukke)
24 IBID
25 Engelbreth, 2013: pp. 22-23
In his articulation of unemployment, Werger links another element ‘coincidence’ (tilfældig) to the sequence, as he stresses that it is beyond a person’s control, whether they are fired or laid off:

“Men ofte er det helt tilfældigt, hvem der mister sit job. Slagteriarbejdere kan ikke gardere sig mod, at slagteriet lukker (...).”

Again, as with Daley’s articulation, the word ‘but’ appears and constructs a contradiction. By pointing to socio-economic conditions as causing unemployment, Werger contests one of the dominant, or hegemonic, views of unemployment described above. Werger is challenging this relative hegemony with the arguments of the historical left.

Werge tells of a former journalist colleague, who in his 50’s had lost his job and had much difficulty finding another:

“Han havde tårer i øjnene over sin situation, fordi han ikke havde fundet et nyt arbejde(...) Han følte sig ugleset. Desværre kan vi fortælle rigtig mange af den slags historier. Ledighed går alligevel dybt ind på din identitet, og hvis det så er en kontekst om, at det i øvrigt er din egen skyld, så gør det for alvor ondt.”

Werge relates his colleagues experience in order to establish an account of how an actual unemployed person, complete with an identifiable and charged emotional reaction, can experience their situation - a situation that, as Werger informs us, is unfortunately common. This can be seen as an articulation that seeks to undermine the, according to Werger, over-generalized and politicized notion that unemployment is experienced by unmotivated persons as leisurely and preferable to work.

Another important component of Werges articulation of unemployment is his linking of elements ‘unemployment’ and ‘identity’, in saying that unemployment have a great impact on your identity. It seems like a matter of course that unemployment influence the identity, and this adds to his understanding of unemployment. Again, as it was the case with Daley, what one might call the discourse of ‘work constructs or influence identity’ is reproduced.

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26 [http://www.etik.dk/etik.dk/er-ledige-vor-tids-syndebukke](http://www.etik.dk/etik.dk/er-ledige-vor-tids-syndebukke)

27 [IBID](#)

28 [IBID](#)

29 [IBID](#)
In utilizing such a pathos laden example, and linking of the elements ‘identity’ and ‘unemployment’, we interpret this as a re-humanization of the unemployed - contesting the idea that the unemployed only have human and societal value as potential employees, an idea that is, according to Werge, conveyed through various political campaigns. All in all he is trying to position the unemployed subjects as real humans, who generally have arrived in their present situation involuntarily as a result of socio-economic forces. One could also interpret Werges articulation as trying to position the unemployed as lacking any significant agency, as victims of circumstance, and in a sense he is playing on a well-established discourse in Danish public debates and politics, where one should not openly appear to attack the ‘weakest members’ of ‘society’ (“de svageste i samfundet”).

Different positionings of unemployed
In the same article as Werge appears we find the parish priest and PhD Kathrine Lilleør, who is advocating the opposite. She is articulating a discourse where she links the elements ‘recipient of social security’ (kontanthjælpsmodtager) and self-inflicted/self-imposed (‘kan godt gøre for det’) and thereby she is stating the opposite of what Werge does, that the unemployment is a self-imposed condition for which the unemployed have responsibility for.31

In her articulation process she distinguishes between three categories of unemployed: 1) A small minority - the involuntarily unemployed, 2) a larger group, who capitalize on the system and whose condition of unemployment is self-imposed and 3) the unskilled unemployed.32 The first group is accepted as being entitled to social security and is thus protected from her critique but this group is not further specified. The second category is portrayed as the ‘bad’ ones, who are ruining the system for the ones who are involuntarily unemployed:

“Mange af dem, som er på kontanthjælp, kan gøre for det, hvilket går ud over de få, som ikke kan gøre for det. Og de, der godt kan gøre for det, bliver ødelæggere af det meget smukke system, vi har.”33

30 http://www.etik.dk/etik.dk/er-ledige-vor-tids-syndebukke
31 http://www.etik.dk/etik.dk/er-ledige-vor-tids-syndebukke
32 IBID
33 IBID
Even though she depicts the social security system as ‘beautiful’, she also articulates into a discourse about social security, where the elements ‘benefits for the poor’ (fattigdomsydelse), ‘disgraceful to take from the common sum of money’ (uværdigt at tage fra den fælles kasse), ‘a disgraceful way of earning money’ (uværdig måde at tjene penge på) are tied together so that social security appears unattractive and an undignified affair; while linking this to the ‘recipient of social welfare’ (kontanthjælpsmodtager), which then becomes this figure who, without justification, is taking from the common pool of resources reserved for those in serious need, the disabled, sick, and involuntarily unemployed. Even though her view of unemployment is primary that of a self-imposed one, she blames the trade union 3F (fagforeningsforbund) for the enforcement of ‘high’ wages, so that organisations and firms cannot afford to employ people, but instead hire from a cheaper, foreign work force. Thereby the unemployed subject again is positioned as a victim, who she feels sorry for. It is especially the third group, the unskilled unemployed she pities and victimizes, and whom, according to her, remain rather invisible in the debate. Furthermore, this can be seen as an example of drawing simultaneously on ‘contradictory’ discourses’ - mixing the discourse of blaming structure/circumstance with that of agency/responsibility - for the purpose of constructing a social reality surrounding the unemployed and unemployment. On the one hand, she is shaming and blaming the ‘self-imposed’ unemployed and the trade union that restrains the unemployed from getting a job. On the other hand, she is victimizing the involuntary

34 http://www.etik.dk/etik.dk/er-ledige-vor-tids-syndebukke
35 IBID
36 IBID
37 IBID
unemployed and the unskilled ones. From this we can conclude that different positionings of unemployed come into play in her articulation. The unemployed subject is positioned in different ways depending on which discourse she draws on and thus re-articulates. In tune with her saying, that it has become acceptable to criticize the unemployed, she is trying to articulate discourses which positions categories of unemployed, either in a position for shaming and blaming (the self-imposed group), or a position where the unemployed become victim. This is not at all the standpoint of the following and third person appearing in the article, Christopher Arzrouni.

The individual’s own fault
A third person appearing in the article is the editor and member of The Danish Council of Ethics (Etisk Råd), Christopher Arzrouni states that Ventre’s campaigns do not attack the moral character of the unemployed, and that he cannot identify that the unemployed are used as ‘scapegoats’. Instead he asserts that the campaigns only point out that unemployed have a relative high standard of living compared to what they do. He is trying to convert the messages of the campaigns into statements of fact, sheer observations, making the statements of the campaign appear innocuous. Unlike Lilleør he does not express pity for any subgroup of unemployed.

In explaining the ‘issue’ about 170,000 people receiving social security, Arzrouni articulates a discourse where the element ‘picky/choosy’ (kræsne) is combined with social welfare recipient. He states, that it is not because there are not enough jobs, the issue lies in the fact that people are choosy. Thereby he positions the unemployed subject as a choosy and spoiled individual, thus reproducing a discourse that points to the individual or individual choices as explanations of unemployment.

One of Arzrouni’s overall points is, that people do not necessarily deserve, or have the right to claim social security, unless they make a contribution in return. Another point he presents is that the individual has a responsibility for finding a job. The latter point adds to the discourse of unemployment as a self-inflicted and self-imposed condition, but for stating both points, he

38 http://www.etik.dk/etik.dk/er-ledige-vor-tids-syndebukke
39 IBID
40 IBID
relates that he has been criticised for being selfish. We interpret this critique of him as an indication of the discourse of blaming of the system is employed in opposing him. Unlike Arzrouni, the succeeding person, Henrik Day Poulsen, argues that the problem lies in the culture and not in relation to the individual.

The culture as an explanation of unemployment
In the article “Kontanthjælp som livsstil” from the daily newspaper Berlingske Tidende, Henrik Day Poulsen, PhD and psychiatrist, expresses distaste for the ‘culture’ of viewing social security as an unproblematic entitlement. Thus he is not stating that social security is a problem nor unemployment itself, but rather that common attitude towards receiving the benefit is.

At first, Poulsen briefly articulates a discourse where the unemployed is constructed as shameful by combining following elements: ‘very sorry’, ‘missing a job’ and ‘embarrassed of their situation’. We have already been documenting this specific way of positioning the unemployed subject, and one example Daley, who positions herself this way, and we can thus confirm, that this discourse is being reproduced and reinforced, so that it has become a common, and unquestionable thing to state - a hegemonic discourse, which has the power to position the unemployed subject in this way.

In discussing the ‘problem’ of the ‘entitled attitude’, Poulsen is providing examples that illustrate the, according to him, problem of people leading this kind of ‘lifestyle’. He discerns between two main types of groups, the first one he calls the ‘Danes’, where elements such as ‘have always been receiving social welfare’, ‘their parents have also been recipients of long-term benefits’ and ‘finding it completely natural to receive money’ are linked together in creating an articulation that tries to position the unemployed subject as a person who views social security as almost inherited. He states: “(...) man er altså opvokset i en kultur, hvor borgerløn er en realitet.”

41 [http://www.etik.dk/etik.dk/er-ledige-vor-tids-syndebukke](http://www.etik.dk/etik.dk/er-ledige-vor-tids-syndebukke)
43 IBID
44 IBID
The second group, which at first is designated as ‘immigrants’ and later is narrowed down to ‘female immigrants’ (indvandrerkvinder), of whom ‘60 % do not work’.\textsuperscript{45} The following elements ‘find it completely natural to stay at home’, ’their culture dictates that women do not work’ and ‘some immigrants do not at all know from where their social welfare comes’ are linked together in creating an articulation that tries to position the unemployed subject as both a victim of a certain culture but also a person for whom social security is a natural and unquestionable part of life.\textsuperscript{46} The two articulations seek to position the unemployed subject as uncritical, taking social security for granted.

The interesting in Poulsen’s articulation process is that he traces these attitudes back to different cultures, thus making ‘culture’ the source of the ‘problem’. But he goes further, linking a various number of elements like ‘our welfare system has failed’, ‘we do not dare make demands anymore’, ‘at the same time we naively believe that everybody could and should be equal’, ‘defensive, political correctness’ and ‘the benefits are so high, that it is not worth one’s while to get a job’.\textsuperscript{47} In this way he articulates a discourse where a hodgepodge of different reasons are boiled down and attributed to ‘the system’ and ‘culture’, which have failed, and thus the individual is not blamed for his or her condition of unemployment. This is again positioning the unemployed subject as uncritical, unthinking and passive yet content with the situation. Thomas Steen Parum in our next article might be an example of the ‘content unemployed’, yet he is hardly uncritical and unthinking.

An example of a Counter Hegemonic articulation
A debate article was printed in Information on the 21st of March, 2015, written by Thomas Steen Parum, and titled: Kontanthjælpsmodtager: Jeg nægter at skamme mig. Parum begins by summarizing the tone and content of a number of political campaigns, scandals, and a series of articles, all of which express frustration and indignation towards the politics of shaming and blaming the unemployed.\textsuperscript{48}
Parum references, indirectly, the statement made by Lars Løkke Rasmussen in the Danish parliament, that an extra 2000,- DKK per month (the difference in income between a social welfare income and a full-time minimum wage job, according to Ventre’s calculations) couldn’t be considered an adequate incentive for motivating the unemployed to seek work - the value of this amount, as described by Løkke Rasmussen equates to a pair of shoes.\(^49\) Parum writes that such a statement, coming from a privileged person, “(...) smager lidt af Marie Antoinettes kage.”\(^50\)

Addressing Lars Løkke Rasmussen and Inger Støjberg directly, and indicating that other readers may skip the point, Parum asserts that 2000,- DKK can, and indeed does, feed a low income family for a month.

The gesture of articulating a perspective on a statement coming from a privileged subject position, a statement that ‘tastes’ similar to Marie Antoinette’s infamous epigram regarding cake, could be understood as a relatively restrained, yet nonetheless obvious association to revolutionary France and the ‘Jacobin imagination’. Parum also suggests, by indicating parenthetically that ‘everyone else may skip this point’, that with the exception of the elite, there exists a partial, or perhaps emergent, hegemony: This hegemony, as understood and presented by Parum, is based on the common and quotidian perception that non-elites have of the value of 2000,- Dkk - the immediate association, not with shoes, but rather an entire monthly food budget. Thus Parum’s articulation, which links the elements “food consumption for a month” with “2000,- Dkk” also transmits an counter-hegemonic articulation - one that challenges the hegemonic discourse. It can be seen as an attempt to constitute a formation of subject positions into a collective formation, or identity, that constitutes itself by excluding an Other-ness: the Other-ness being the subject positions which attempt to define, via articulation, 2000,- Dkk as a minor sum, one lacking substance as a monetary incentive.

Parum writes that his primary motivation for writing is to contest the repeated articulations of shame, which he understands as being pervasive amongst the unemployed. He mentioned two articles from the 10\(^{th}\) and 14\(^{th}\) of March, 2015, respectively by Katrine Arnfred and Sarah Daley, where statements such as, “Skammen er handlingslammende”\(^51\), “(...) vi fremstår som

\(^{49}\) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dKv2e00KxA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dKv2e00KxA)

\(^{50}\) [http://www.information.dk/527987](http://www.information.dk/527987)

\(^{51}\) [www.information.dk/527135](www.information.dk/527135)
“usynlige”\textsuperscript{52}, and “Arbejdet er den primære identitetsmarkør.”\textsuperscript{53} provide him with grounds for identifying the debate as being more about perceptions of social status and identity rather than economy. Parum writes that he cannot fathom why the aforementioned columnists internalize the values of the ‘societal structure’ in such ways that they suffer psychologically and experience exclusion from the ‘community’. He views the exclusion felt by Sarah Daley as being a construct based on her acceptance of an employment-based identity hierarchy, where her position is on the lowest tier:

“For måske opfatter Daley virkelig, at samfundet er indrettet i denne hierarkiske model, og måske ønsker hun inderligt at kravle op på et af niveauerne over sit eget. Måske har hun en reel drøm om at blive en del af det store samfundsmæssige fællesskab, som hun føler sig udenfor.” \textsuperscript{54}

This point regarding shame, and the proposed rejection of it, indeed appears to be the core of Parum’s agenda. He understands that the columnists, Arnfred and Daley, while writing in opposition to the discourses that marginalize, shame and blame the unemployed, nonetheless accept and participate in re-articulating certain hegemonic discourses, namely those which assign value to persons on the basis of their their employment status, and by extension their (economic) ‘contribution’ to ‘the community’. We interpret this articulation as a counter hegemonic discourse, one that questions and contrasts itself in relation to the legitimacy, necessity and actual existence of an employment-based social hierarchy. He seems to identify both this hierarchic structure and the ‘community’ in which it is organized as a hegemonic discourse, yet one that is ultimately contingent: “Når alt kommer til alt, så er den model jo blot én version af mange mulige. Blot en skabelon til at afhjælpe al for megen forvirring”\textsuperscript{55}

He also seems to explain how he sees Arnfred and Daley as internalizing and reproducing regimes of discipline, in which they render themselves paralyzed. This can be read out of statements such as “Skammen er handlingslammende”\textsuperscript{56}: the shame of ‘not contributing’, ‘not supporting oneself’ and essentially lacking the ‘primary indicator of identity’, only operates,

\textsuperscript{52} www.information.dk/527135
\textsuperscript{53} www.information.dk/526793
\textsuperscript{54} www.information.dk/527987
\textsuperscript{55} IBID
\textsuperscript{56} http://www.information.dk/527135
Parum insists, if the values that predicate such feelings are accepted, internalized and reproduced - values which Parum deems ‘wrong’ or ‘incorrect’: ‘(...) det sker alene, hvis selvværdet ikke har været sundt og stærkt nok i forvejen, eller hvis det har været fundet på nogle forkerte værdier.’

Parum also suggests rejecting the notion of a national-economic community as in fact existing – the community of employment-based personal value, which Arnfred and Daley, in Parum’s understanding, experience being excluded from. He writes that he has never experienced such a community as actually existing, whereas other communities are in fact real:

“Man kan sagtens opleve fællesskab på en fodboldtribune; på skaterbanen i Nørrebroparken; fra folk, der ejer gamle folkevogne og vinker i forbifar; blandt religiøse, som så igen inddeles i mange flere fællesskaber. Men jeg har aldrig følt samhørighed med andre, fordi vi modtager en løncheck eller betaler skat.”

This view appears reminiscent of, and perhaps is derived from, or influenced by *Imagined Communities* (1983). The process, or act, of imagining community, in Anderson’s sense, could be re-articulated in the terms of Laclau and Mouffe as an attempt to stabilize a formation of collective identities, or formations of subject positions - made meaningful through articulations. In this sense, the ‘community’ of wage earning taxpayers is not a meaningful entity *a priori* - the ‘community’, if *made* meaningful as such, requires repetitive re-articulations of its presence - in hegemonic proportions - or it simply ceases signify any ‘community’ as such. The meaning attached to this ‘community’, by Arnfred, Daley and others, is one that Parum seeks to suspend, disarticulate, and undermine. Through his articulation, he contests, not only the actuality of this ‘community’, but the feelings of obligation, interdependence and generosity, which while being inherent in the affectual economy of smaller and well acquainted social bodies, are inappropriately transposed to the national-economic scale and then are reproduced in ways that undermine experiences of self-worth and human value.

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57 [www.information.dk/527987](http://www.information.dk/527987)
58 IBID
Thus, when Parum’s understands that Arnfred and Daley’s motivation for wanting to re-attain social status, to release this shame, or to restore pride, he means that these desires are understandable and valid, but that they should attain these changes by subverting the hegemonic discourses – by articulating alternatives. Thus the shame experienced when answering questions regarding occupation, such as ‘so what do you do?’ – creating situations of ‘awkward silence and avoidance of eye-contact’, could be, according to Parum, circumvented and ‘hacked’ by articulating a counter-hegemonic discourse - one which might prioritize the value of a person’s social relations, activities, and perhaps even non-commodified productivity - in constituting contrast to the domain of the national or global economy. But this alternative perspective, or counter-hegemony, is staunchly opposed by Thomas Funch who insists on the importance of the national-economic community and quid pro quo.

The reproduction of the discourse of the national-economic community
In response to Thomas Parum’s article, Thomas Bruun Funch writes in his article in Information the 28th of March 2015, titled: “Hygger man sig på understøttelse, håner man fællesskabet”59 Funch addresses Parum directly, insisting that the latter should indeed be ashamed of himself, not because of his status as a recipient of social welfare (kontanthjælp), but rather because of he is not taking responsibility seriously. Funch writes:

“Jeg investerer mine skattekroner i dig, så du en dag kommer frisk ud på arbejdsmarkedet og deltager i at gøre vores samfund bedre for alle, inklusiv dem, der havner i samme situation, som du nu befinder dig i. (...) Men hvad får samfundet ud af sin investering i dig, når du bruger den til at gå ekstra lange ture med hunden?”60

Funch describes the relationship between himself and Parum as being both based on personal and community investment – Funch invests his tax money in Parum, so that the latter can at some point become reintegrated into ‘society’ and assume a similar responsibility – it is also ‘society’, which invests resources in Parum – an investment, which according to Funch has little promise of return, when time is used for ‘taking extra long walks with the dog.’61

59 [www.information.dk/528694](http://www.information.dk/528694)
60 IBID
61 [http://www.information.dk/528694](http://www.information.dk/528694)
The language used by Funch is saturated with discursive elements implying an understanding of a *de facto* social contract - one existing within an individual-society dichotomy. This appears clearly in the articulation of social-welfare as a matter of *investment*.

Funch articulates this investment as existing on a twofold level - firstly Funch’s personal and direct investment in Parum - secondly, and simultaneously being society’s investment. Funch thus represents himself as society, and society as himself. In addition to his use of the word ‘society’, he is also applying the word ‘fellow citizen’. As a recipient of social security, one is not only indebted to the society/community, but also to your fellow citizens, concrete people, who in paying their taxes are helping you. This articulation prompts the unemployed to feel ashamed, it positions the unemployed subject in the doghouse. This appears to be the very affect Funch intended in addressing Parum: ““Jeg nægter at skamme mig.” erklærede kontanthjælpsmodtager Thomas Steen Parum (...) Men Thomas, du bør i den grad skamme dig.”

The social relation between the dual entity of ‘Funch-Society’ and of Parum is, again, characterized as *investment*. The concept of investment denotes a value being placed in suspension so as to reap a surplus value at a later time. If this surplus value cannot be created and collected by the investor/s, the matter is understood as a breach of (social) contract, which implies both negligence and theft. Funch’s use of the word ‘wage’ instead of ‘social welfare’ or ‘benefit’ (ydelse), indicates the aspect of deserving; you have to earn the social welfare in order to receive it, and this is in line with the terminology of investment, which reinforces the notion. Later on he describes the ideal society: “Køber man sig ind i et system, accepterer man også de vilkår, der følger med.”. The word ‘buy’ also figures in the terminology of investment.

There is also a visible notion of conditions for inclusion or exclusion present in Funch’s articulations: In that ‘Funch-Society’ invests value in Parum (and similar others) with the primary purpose of *reintegration*, the latter is thus seen as being partially outside of the validated social body - or, to borrow from Agamben, in a state of *excluded inclusion*. Funch is thus a

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62 http://www.information.dk/528694
63 http://www.information.dk/528694
validated member of society because he is employed, pays taxes and *invests* his taxes in Parum; and Parum is an invalidated member of society because of his un-actualized potential, to become employed, pay taxes etc.

Funch writes that he has, in his past, had the need of social welfare assistance, and for that reason is glad to pay his taxes, so long as the money is used well. Yet he considers the debate, when it is centered on characters such as *Fattig Carina* and *Dovne Robert*, to be misleading and a cause of suspicion towards ‘the system’ - a suspicion that leads Funch to imagine reforms: He believes that efforts should be made towards adjusting political and economic matters so as to avoid situations in which people end up of needing the support of social welfare, which is to say people be be supporting themselves through employment or entrepreneurship. If, however, persons do become unemployed, they are obligated within the structure of the present system, according to Funch, again by an *social contract*: “En kontrakt, hvor modtageren af understøttelsen lover at gøre alt, hvad der er muligt for at finde et arbejde.”64 Funch believes that breaches of this ‘contract’, inevitably leads to a breach in trust that in turn is corrosive to ‘society’.

Funch apparently already believes that this breach of trust has occurred and is corroding society; he therefore argues that indeed of focusing on instituting a social welfare ‘ceiling’ (kontanthjælpsloft), or upper limit, as the party Venstre has suggested, he suggests heightened regimes of ‘control’, which would ensure that social welfare recipients use their time in finding work – that it would better for ‘society’ if Parum were to deliver newspapers or work as a cashier at a supermarket:

“*Vi skal kontrollere, at du sidder med computeren og skriver ansøgninger, i stedet for at spille Ludo med børnene (...) Vi skal kontrollere, at du sidder og læser hvert eneste job-opslag på nettet, i stedet for faglitteratur. Gør du ikke det, må din kontanthjælp ryge. Ganske simpelt.*”65

Funch believes that it should ‘pay to work’. He maintains that the ‘solid foundation’ of a society should be that of everyone working and supporting themselves – where everyone takes responsibility for themselves and the ‘community’. Funch then ultimately proposes eliminating

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64 [http://www.information.dk/528694](http://www.information.dk/528694)
65 [http://www.information.dk/528694](http://www.information.dk/528694)
social welfare (kontanthjælpen) and reforming union-based unemployment insurance (A-Kasse). The money saved in doing away with social welfare, Funch suggests, should be used towards improving the conditions for those on unemployment insurance – that this ‘reform’ would solve the problem of people not insuring themselves and solve the issues regarding unemployment insurance running. Funch also proposes ‘allowing’ those who ‘refuse’ to work, the ‘right’ to opt out of employment insurance:

"Gennemfører vi disse tiltag, så vil vi få et sikkerhedsnet, der redder dem, der gerne vil reddes, men lader dem, der ikke vil, leve deres liv, som de nu ønsker. (...) Der vil nemlig ikke være et samfund, der forventer noget af dig, fordi det ikke har investeret i dig."66

Funch concludes by stating that his proposals, if implemented, would solve the problem of social welfare recipients feeling the burden of shame. He believes these proposals could lead to the construction of a ‘community without hierarchy’ – in such a community, Funch asserts, there would be respect for ‘unlucky’ persons, who despite their ‘hard work’ could not find employment – that they would be part of the ‘community’, in a literal contractual sense, because only those who would ‘choose’ the ‘community’ would be a part of it.67

The debate between Funch and Parum can be seen as the struggle to define what the ‘community’ is, should be, and how the unemployed figure into it. Firstly, Funch is positioning Parum as a part of a group who ‘does not take society seriously’, ‘cheats’ (snyde) ‘breaks the contract’ ‘is closest to himself, the family and the dog’.68 It is an articulation where Parum, and others receiving social welfare are positioned as unprincipled people who have dropped out of the society, not contributing to it and even cheating the system and society. While defining the ‘bad’ unemployed he also defines the ‘good’ unemployed: "Det danske sikkerhedsnet er kun sikkert, hvis de, der bliver grebet af det, tager det seriøst, kommer ud af den knibe, de er i, og hjælper til at gøre nettet stærkere."69 ‘They’ refer to the unemployed as those who do not profit from cheating the system and their fellow citizens, but rather those who promptly resume

66 [http://www.information.dk/528694](http://www.information.dk/528694)
67 (IBID)
68 (IBID)
69 (IBID)
contributing. As an example of this model, he uses his own experience: “Jeg har selv haft brug for samfundets hjælp, og jeg betaler derfor min skat med glæde.”

Summary of the first level
On the first level of the analysis we have shown various perspectives in the debate of unemployment. It is evident that a number articulations play into discourses that blame the unemployed for the condition of unemployment. This includes Arzrouni and Funch, who articulate, respectively, discourses of ‘choosy/picky’ and ‘investment’. It is also clear that many of the articles feature discourses blaming authorities and structure, consisting of the political system or even the culture for the individual’s unemployment. These include Werge and Daley, who position themselves as speaking on behalf of the unemployed, articulating the ‘rehumanization of the unemployed’, and Poulsen who implicates ‘culture’ as being the cause of unemployment. Lilleør is articulating both the discourse of ‘blaming the unemployed’ and ‘blaming the authorities and societal structures’ as she states that it the individual’s own fault, but at the same time she blames the trade union 3F for preventing a specific group of unemployed from getting jobs. The discourse ‘work constructs and influences identity’ has been consistent through the analysis, thus we consider it to be a hegemonic discourse.

Parum stands out and appears to be the only voice articulating a distinctly counter-hegemonic discourse. This may be seen in his rejection of the idea of the national-economic ‘community’ - the employment-based identities and hierarchies they constitute, and as the units of life-value measurement. He thus contests the discourse ‘work constructs and influences identity’, while simultaneously affirming its prevalence and importance for others. Funch is highly opposed to the articulations of Parum - this may be seen as attempt to rearticulate and and reenforce both the discourse of ‘work constructs and influence identity’, and of national-economic ‘community’

70 http://www.information.dk/528694
The second level - the political scene

As explained in our section regarding selection of empirical material, and in our strategy of analysis, the second level - the political scene - is an important site of discursive struggle for hegemony. Political parties claim to represent the view and priorities of their constituent voters, supporters, members, as well as functioning in alliances with other parties and organisations sharing political goals, ideologies and identities. In a sense, when party politics are formulated, maintained and engaged, there is a certain underlying assumption of cellular consensus, or hegemonic discourse. These discourses are manifest in articulations directed both internally, reproducing and reiterating the party’s collective identity, and externally - towards other parties and their constituencies - as discursive engagements aimed at subverting, winning-over, modifying, encouraging defection etc.

Our analysis of the political scene examines, what we deem as being representative articulations of official party politics. We have identified a series of discourses, which we consider to be important. We do, however, not claim that these discourses are necessarily the most central or most important - there are certainly a multitude of others that could be considered.

‘Working community’
‘Working community’ appears to be a recurring discourse that is articulated in a wide, but related series of contexts. The party Venstre links following elements ‘almost 800.000 Danes are on social security’, ‘economic burden’ and ‘major human costs when placed outside of the working community’.71 Thereby articulating a discourse where the unemployed subject is positioned as an economic burden, suffering from not being in the ‘community’ of the labour market. The subject is victimized, but not in this context blamed for being on social security.

As a matter of course Løkke states, that there is personal pleasure to obtain upon being able to provide for oneself.72 This statement conveys a certain view of ‘human nature’, where the subject

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71 https://www.venstre.dk/politik/maerkesager/for-fremitiden-skal-det-betale-sig-at-arbejde/per-moeller-soerensen
72 https://www.venstre.dk/nyheder/der-er-brug-for-en-jobreform
is positioned as being in their ‘proper place’ when working in the labour market - in a working ‘community’ - naturally feeling delight when providing for themselves. In this way work becomes a natural state of life, a premise we as human beings share. Further Lars Løkke writes that, when moving more unemployed persons from public relief, they are doing them a favor by removing them from a situation in which they become miserable - into the ‘natural’ place of human beings. The following quote of Venstre member, Per Møller Sørensen represents a prime example of an articulation that reproduces the element ‘work is socially valuable: “Arbejdslivet er godt for det sociale (...)”

In a video Lars Løkke links the elements “(...) en grænse for hvor meget man må modtage i passiv overførsel (...)” and “(...) blive en del af et aktivt arbejdsfællesskab (...)”, thus adding to the discourse of positioning subjects as either active or passive human beings - in correspondence to their status as either employed or unemployed, respectively.

Likewise the party Liberal Alliance is reproducing the dichotomy of inside versus outside of the labour market, for an example “(...) havnet uden for arbejdsmarkedet.”, “(...) henvisse hundrede tusinder af danskere til en tilværelse uden for fællesskabet (...).” Again, this positions the unemployed subject as being excluded from the ‘community’ of the labour market.

Eigil Andersen, the labor market spokesperson from Socialistisk Folkeparti, also articulates the discourse of the ‘working community’, stating that ‘99 %’ of the population would prefer to work and perform a ‘function in society’ rather than receive unemployment benefits. He ties this to the conception of ‘workplace community’ as being a valuable aspect of social life.

Dansk Folkeparti also articulates the notion of ‘working community’ and ties it into the ethnic Danish ‘national community’. They do this by stating a series of common political demands and condemnations, that ‘anyone who can contribute to the community, should place themselves at

73 https://www.venstre.dk/nyheder/der-er-brug-for-en-jobreform
74 https://youtu.be/fvdIYDhkM8
75 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVOYu_XwUT8
76 https://min.liberalalliance.dk/lcn/socialdl/download/POL_117086151405820
77 (IBID)
78 http://eigilandersen.dk/venstres-kampagne-mod-kontanthjælp-er-svineri/
the service of the labor market’ and ‘it is unacceptable that there is a larger group of unemployed persons that are not actually available for the labor market’ - they then proceed to tie these articulations to the specifying of ‘an overrepresented group’ within the aforementioned ‘larger group’, namely ‘immigrants from third world countries’, whose status necessitates “(...). at der skal importeres udenlandsk arbejdskraft for at forsørge indvandrere, der ikke ønsker at bidrage til fællesskabet.”79 Furthermore these articulations are tied to the deficits in welfare: in that a substantial pension benefit, efterlønnen, ‘costs half’ the amount of that spent on social welfare for migrant residents, it is articulated as ‘a great loss of welfare that the Danish state suffers, by importing people who cannot, or do not wish to, contribute to the community.’80 This articulation positions the ‘unemployed immigrant’ as a lazy and passively receiving social security overall a unsympathetic subject.

Incentives:

We have presented a handful of articulations that position the unemployed subject as an economic burden to ‘the community’, as suffering socially from not being included in this ‘community’, but who also cannot be expected to find motivation without political intervention. This brings us to the discourse of economic incentives.

The Konservative Folkeparti proposes such an incentivisation, which is more or less analogous to Venstre’s. “Hæv jobfradraget med 1000 kroner om måneden, så det bedre kan betale sig at arbejde.”81 This proposal indicates an understanding that, unless there is a significant margin of difference between social welfare incomes and wage incomes, it would be unfeasible that people should wish to become, or perhaps even remain, employed. This discourse, that ‘it should pay to work’, conveys through exclusively economic terms, what also could be formulated in non-economic terms as ‘it should benefit to work’, or ‘it should be worth one’s effort to work’. The discourse of economic incentivisation proposes a social reality, where motivation to perform functions must correlate to a monetary payment - a social reality where other motivational

79 [http://www.danskfolkeparti.dk/Et_dynamisk_arbejdsmarked](http://www.danskfolkeparti.dk/Et_dynamisk_arbejdsmarked)
80 (IBID)
81 [http://www.konservative.dk/Politik/Beskaeftigelsespolitik/Beskaeftigelse](http://www.konservative.dk/Politik/Beskaeftigelsespolitik/Beskaeftigelse)
factors are subordinate or perhaps disbelieved. The margin of difference proposed by Konservative is a minimum of 3000,- per month.\footnote{http://www.konservative.dk/Politik/Beskaeftigelsespolitik/Beskaeftigelse}

The Venstre party chairman, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, speaks about the solution to the problems described above in the so-called JobReform, in which a specific group of unemployed people is mentioned: the unemployed married couple (kontanthjælpsægtepar). Løkke states that the number of these kind of couples have increased since the SR-government (Social Demokraterne and Radikale Venstre) repealed the limit of social security (kontanthjælpsloft) enforced by the VK-government (Venstre and Konservative). The repealing of this limit ‘made it more attractive’ for these couples to receive social security rather than work.\footnote{https://www.venstre.dk/nyheder/der-er-brug-for-en-jobreform} Lars Løkke is articulating a discourse in which he constructs a cause-effect explanation between the repealing of the limit and the increase of receivers of social security, thus positioning the unemployed subject as one who would rather receive social security than work - if ‘it does not pay’ - as subjects who are only economically motivated.

The general idea of Venstre’s proposed ‘incentives’ is to reduce social welfare so as to increase the margin between wages and social welfare benefits. Venstre’s “454.215,00 Kr” campaign poster claims that a married couple with three children ‘can’ receive the aforementioned amount in social welfare income – this claim is supported by almost conspicuously centrally placed reference to the Ministry of Employment as a source. This poster shows, what appears to be, a ‘working class’ man, with handy-person overalls, crossed arms, a stern, perhaps incredulous facial expression – all of which seem to convey moral indignation towards the ‘fact’ that the exemplified married couple with three children enjoy 454.215,00 per year, an income, which when formulated in terms of an hourly wage, amounts to ‘only’ 6, - Dkk per hour less than a full time wage earner.\footnote{https://www.venstre.dk/politik/maerkesager/for-fremtiden-skal-det-betale-sig-at-arbejde}

\textit{Critique of ‘incentives’ as counter-hegemony}

In response to the Venstre’s 2015 pre-election campaign, “Det skal kunne betale sig at arbejde”, Enhedslisten published a selection of counter-campaigns in poster format entitled Faktatjek. The
posters satirize Venstre’s campaign posters, using identical font, blue background, and reappropriations of graphs and economic figures. As the title implies, the ‘fact check’ posters communicate an understanding that Venstre’s posters present misinformation regarding the status and discrepancies regarding social welfare and employment-based incomes.

In relation to Venstre’s campaign, aimed at reducing social welfare for the stated purpose of creating a greater margin between social welfare and employment incomes - so that ‘it shall pay to work’ - Schmidt-Nielsen articulates this as being both antisocial and unrealistic:


JSN describes the logic of Venstre, which emphasises lowering social welfare income in order to incentive work, as being ‘hokus pokus’. She insists that cutting social welfare will not factor in creating a multitude of new jobs, nor will it improve the health and work abilities of ‘sick’ people, causing them ‘stand up out of their wheelchairs’ - this ‘magical logic’ does not make any sense, she exclaims. Some sense could be derived from this logic, if one considers a different aspect, namely wages. As JNS did open her 1st of May speech with a condemnation of Ryanair’s recent refusal to pay union wages if the company were granted access to Kastrup airport. She describes the company's employment and wage policies as being untenable and unacceptable for the Danish work market and workers. Thus she is well aware of the lucrative business models that function on the basis of paying low wages and offering only precarious job-security to employees - in articulating the logic of Venstre as ‘hokus pokus’, she failed to articulate a connection between the reduction of social welfare/employment security and the lowering of wages - an outcome that Danish Employers Union (Dansk Arbejdsgiverforeningen) has recently called for.

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85 https://enhedslisten.dk/artikel/laes-hele-johanne-schmidt-nielsens-1-maj-tale-her-74662
‘Unemployment is a problem’
In her 1st of May speech, the chairwoman of Socialdemokraterne, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, articulated unemployment as a social problem, stating that unemployment is not the individual’s problem, but a shared problem. Thus, she articulates a discourse where the elements ‘not a problem of the individual’ and ‘shared problem’ are linked together, defining unemployment as a ‘problem’ that should concern us all as a community.87 This statement builds on the premise that unemployment is a nuisance to society that should be solved.

As with Venstre, Thorning is also reproducing the premise that work is a good thing in proclaiming the success of government policies, that: “Mennesker kommer i arbejde”.88 In describing the progress her party has made, she announces that people are getting jobs, implicitly saying that it is a positive thing. Conversely, it is a bad thing to not have a job. Thorning links ‘rammes af’ and ‘arbejdsløshed’, thus articulating a discourse of unemployment as something you get ‘struck by’, like a disease or a bus.89 Another discourse she reproduces in her speech is that of the ‘passive unemployed’, stating that young people should not be ‘passively’ provided for.90

In the proposal regarding social security ‘Alle hænder skal bruges’ formulated by the party Liberal Alliance (LA), the discourse of social security is articulated by the linking of following elements: ‘helpful’, ‘strong social safety net’, ‘problem’, ‘barrier’, ‘socio-economic consequences’, ‘human consequences’ ‘system, that restrains people’, ‘solution’ and ‘temporary’.91 But the relation between the elements is dependent on the distinction that is made in the process of defining the term: what is social security presently, and what should it be - implying that the present system is problematic and in need of ‘reform’. By linking ‘help’, ‘strong social safety net’, ‘the problem’, ‘barrier’, ‘socio-economic consequences’, ‘human consequences’ and ‘system, that restrains people’, the present social security is articulated as a powerful and problematic system that prevents the unemployed from being a part of the labour market and restrains them in a miserable condition of unemployment. This positions the

89 http://www.socialdemokraterne.dk/da/politik/dagpenge/
91 https://min.liberalalliance.dk/lcn/socialdl/download/POL_117086151405820
unemployed subject as a victim of the system, excluded from the labour market with little control over his or her life, and adding the word ‘passive relief’ one could argue that this positioning is reinforced. The dichotomy of ‘passive versus active’ is hereby reproduced.92

Linking ‘strong social safety net’, ‘helpful’, ‘solution’ and ‘temporary’ articulates the preferred version of social security, namely as a temporary safety net that helps the unemployed out of their unhappy condition, but the unemployed subject is still positioned as a victim, but a victim that is helped back into a self-supporting, independent and honorable life in the labour market.93

Both discourses are in relation to the discourse that unemployment is a problem for both persons and ‘society’. The preferred system is articulated as a solution to unemployment, and the current system implicated as being a part, if not cause, of the problem. Liberal Alliance is also articulating unemployment as a problem, not unlike burglary or a house fire, by the linking of ‘insuring oneself against’ and ‘unemployment’.94

Weakest in Society
Thorning’s 1st of May speech also articulated a traditionally hegemonic discourse, one that prohibits the legitimacy of attacking ‘the weakest person in society. She does this, while implicating Venstre’s recent campaign as having breached this discourse, stating: “Vi skal ikke have et Danmark, hvor man driver klapjagt på de mest udsatte i vores samfund.”95 By linking the elements ‘most vulnerable people’ and ‘to hound’ (drive klapjagt) she articulates a critique of Venstre’s treatment and view of the unemployed, whereupon she dissociates herself from these. By using an including ‘we’ she does not only dissociates herself but ‘all of us’ from the way Venstre treats unemployed, according to Thorning, as scapegoats. Linking ‘most vulnerable people’ and ‘families on social welfare’, she articulates a discourse where the unemployed are positioned as the ‘weakest member in society’. While still victimizing, but by not referring to them as ‘kontanthjælpsmodtagere’, which only defines them by the fact that they receive social security, she preserves the human dimension when using the word ‘family’. The same is evident

92 https://min.liberalalliance.dk/lcn/socialdl/download/POL_117086151405820
93 https://min.liberalalliance.dk/lcn/socialdl/download/POL_117086151405820
94 https://min.liberalalliance.dk/lcn/socialdl/download/POL_117086151405820
later on when Thorning states: “Vi skal give mennesker på kontanthjælp (...)” using the word ‘people on social welfare’ instead of ‘social security recipients’.

The dissociation from Venstre is an attempt to demarcate, define and thus close the discourse of the unemployed. By discerning between what the unemployed is - a disadvantaged member of society, whom the government should lend assistance - and what it is should never be - a scapegoat, this distinction creates the relation between the elements on each side of the boundary so that ‘to hound’ and ‘most vulnerable people’ is linked together in describing a ‘bullyish manner’, namely Venstres view of the unemployed subject.

Also in response to Venstre’s 2015 pre-election campaign, “Det skal kunne betale sig at arbejde”, Enhedslisten published a selection of counter-campaigns in poster format entitled Faktatjek. The posters satirize Venstre’s campaign posters, using identical font, blue background, and re-appropriations of graphs and economic figures. As the title implies, the ‘fact check’ posters communicate an understanding that Venstre’s posters present misinformation regarding the status and discrepancies regarding social welfare and employment-based incomes.

Enhedslisten’s poster presents a graph that differentiates between three categories of social welfare recipients and their respective incomes – younger than 30, older than 30, and over 30 while supporting dependents. The difference in income between the latter, at 172,992, -, and the full time wage earner, at 472,692, -, is shown to be much more substantial than Ventre’s initial figure presents. The last income on Enhedlisten’s graph is the annual income of Kristian Jensen (V), at 1,715,882, -. The poster thus addresses the difference of income between Kristian Jensen, as a member of parliament and an average wage earner, implying a certain moral hypocrisy on the part politicians, who with high incomes and generous pensions criticize, or conduct ‘character assassinations’ in regard to the ‘luxurious’ incomes of social welfare clients, while invoking a status as defenders of ‘working people’.

98 IBID
Enhedlisten’s gesture of criticizing politicians for moral hypocrisy can also be seen in their campaign slogan “Kommer du til Danmark skal du betale skat”. This campaign, featuring Stine Brix (Ø), is, like the spoof posters directed at Venstre, a satire that re-organizes and ‘hacks’ the discourse of the “Kommer du til Danmark skal du arbejde” campaign of the Social Democrats. The Social Democrats’ slogan is aimed at migrant workers - or rather the Danish voters who might be sympathetic to Dansk Folkeparti’s view of migrants as being detrimental to the welfare state - insisting that new arrivals must work and that their access to social welfare securities should be limited. The message of Enhedlistens’s poster is that multinational corporations and capital funds operating in Denmark should pay Danish taxes. Enhedlistens emphasizes that multinational corporations, or ‘multinassern’, who profit from their presence in Denmark, but via loopholes and ‘sister’ companies residing in tax havens, such as Luxembourg and the Cayman Islands, are the real ‘samfundsnasser’, not the unemployed or migrants. Stine Brix articulates in this context an appeal to the notion of community and contribution: “Jeg ønsker mig et fællesskab, hvor de rigeste også bidrager.” This articulation links the aforementioned discourse of a work-based and national community, where contributions are valued and expected, to the issue of tax havens and low (if any) taxes on capital gains. This also serves to make clear, that a significant portion of state-political interest in high employment rates is focused to the tax revenues generated from wage incomes - Brix’s articulation playfully inverts the ‘prohibition’ of ‘attacking the weakest members of society’ into a Robin Hood-like attack on the strongest.

SF’s labor market spokesperson, Eigil Andersen, also opposes Venstre’s recent “454.215,00 Kr” campaign, describing its way of relating to social welfare recipients as being ‘swine-like’ (‘noget svineri’). He states that a social welfare recipient receives around 14,000 dkk per month, before taxes, which after taxes is approximately 9,000 dkk. It is therefore, Andersen insists, obscure, manipulative and misinformative to place emphasis on the number ‘454.215,00’ - an amount, which includes a wider range of benefits that are not specific or exclusive to social welfare (kontanthjælp) recipients: some of these include, children’s benefits (børnepenge), housing security benefits (boligstøtte), childcare subsidies (friplads). Venstre’s calculations did not apply.

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99 [http://frederikshavn.enhedslisten.dk/node/21903](http://frederikshavn.enhedslisten.dk/node/21903)
100 [http://frederikshavn.enhedslisten.dk/node/21903](http://frederikshavn.enhedslisten.dk/node/21903)
101 IBID
these benefit amounts to their example of an annual average wage income.\textsuperscript{102} Andersen articulates that Venstre uses this misinformation to ‘beat on’ (tæske løs) people who are at ‘the bottom of our society’, which he states is both ‘unjust’ and in ‘poor taste’.\textsuperscript{103}

‘Share the Work’ as counter-hegemony
We have located a discourse that contests very common understandings of how to solve ‘unemployment as a problem’, most of which propose only marginally diverging versions of ‘stimulate economic growth and create jobs’. This discourse proposes, that instead of focusing on creating new jobs, structured on the basis of the 37-hour work week status-quo, the existing work should be re-distributed.

The newly formed party Alternativet proposes three central reforms of the labor market and its regulation, all of which could have significant consequences for the normative conception of employment and unemployment. The first of these is the proposal of a 30 hour work week.\textsuperscript{104} The proposal for the 30-hour workweek entails a redefinition of ‘full time’ work status, rejecting 37 hours as a ‘norm’. This proposal is predicated on the issues of both unemployment and work-related stress. This alteration, they argue, would facilitate the redistribution of existing employment hours among a wider group of people, who would be able to ‘share’ the work. This measure, we are told, would also function to reduce the levels of chronic stress, of which there is a great deal of - according to Alternativet, 430,000 persons displaying symptoms of stress, resulting in 35,000 illness notifications daily. Moreover, and most interestingly, Alternativet informs us, that ‘everything indicates’ that the future will be marked by ‘jobless growth’ due to ‘advances in technology’.\textsuperscript{105}

In her 1st of May speech, Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen from the party Enhedslisten articulated this alternative conception of employment politics, also challenging the paradigm of full-time work and full-time unemployment. She addresses both the issue of systemic employment, due to lack of jobs, and that of work-related stress, suggesting the sharing of jobs and the reduction of work

\textsuperscript{102} http://eigilandersen.dk/venstres-kampagne-mod-kontanthjælp-er-svineri/
\textsuperscript{103} IBID
\textsuperscript{104} http://alternativet.dk/valg-tema/#serios-social-omstilling
\textsuperscript{105} IBID
hours: “Hvorfør skal vi piskes til at arbejde endnu mere, når tusindvis af børnefamilier er ved at knække midt over af stress. Samtidig med at andre tusinde går ledige. Lad os dog dele arbejdet.”

‘More Free Time is Progress’ as Counter-hegemony
The position of Alternativet regarding the labor market, exemplified in their ‘three-point program’, articulates certain elements linked to unemployment in ways that displace pervasive hegemonic discourses. Firstly, the proposal of redefining ‘full time’ employment, from 37 to 30 hours, is of twofold interest: on the one hand, a weekly reduction of seven hours, which equates to one full work day, articulates more ‘free time’ as progress - for the worker, who would ‘gain’ ‘free-time’ and reduce stress levels, improving health (and socio-economic factors effected by stress issues). This additional ‘free-time’ may be understood as ‘unemployed-time’. Thus, the prevailing hegemonic discourses regarding ‘unemployment is a problem’ and ‘economic growth/job-creation as the solution’ are both contested. The social and identity value attributed to employment by these discourses is partially maintained and partially altered, becoming: ‘full-time employment and unemployment are equally problematic’ and ‘redistribution of existing work is a solution to both full-time employment and unemployment’.

‘Mistrust is More Expensive’ as a counter hegemony
Radikale Venstre places much blame for long-term unemployment on the inefficiency of bureaucracy - on the ‘useless’ system of job ‘activation’. They have negotiated an employment reform deal with other parties - this appears to be aimed at improving the coordination and efficiency of the ‘job-centers’ and placing emphasis on education, qualifications etc.

”Vi har gennemført mange såkaldte strukturelle reformer, der skal styrke jobskabelsen i Danmark. (...) Og til sidst: Hvor mange mennesker ønsker at gå ledige i stedet for at have et job? Jeg kender ingen. Så denne reform er også en tillidserklæring til de arbejdsløse!”

106 https://enhedslisten.dk/artikel/laes-hele-johanne-schmidt-nielsens-1-maj-tale-her-74662
107 http://alternativet.dk/valg-tema/#serios-social-omstilling
108 http://bm.dk/da/Aktuelt/Pressemeddelelser/Arkiv/2014/06/Forlig%20om%20ny%20beskaeftigelsesindsats.aspx
109 https://radikale.dk/content/”ny-beskaeftigelsesindsats-sætter-den-arbejdsløse-i-centrum”
The articulation regarding unemployment here defines unemployed subjects as being overwhelmingly dissatisfied with their situation. RV’s plan for the creation of private sector jobs is predicated on the belief that people derive a very important, if not primary, sense of individual and communal identity from their work - thus RV believes that the narratives portraying unemployed persons as ‘lazy’, ‘unmotivated’ and ‘self-satisfied’, living in luxurious conditions that function as disincentives to work, are fictions. The statement above also deploys personal anecdotal ‘evidence’ that this is indeed the case - asking ‘how many people would rather live off of social welfare than have gainful employment?’ - ‘no one’. This is summarily articulated as a ‘declaration of trust’ towards the unemployed. RV is in this way articulating the discourse ‘Work constructs and influence identity’.

The proposal of simplifying the social welfare system - the consolidation of existing social welfare benefits into a single ‘basis income’ (basisydelse), which would abandon the costly and ‘mistrusting’ regimes of bureaucratic control - presents us with another articulation that contests ‘unemployment is a problem’: Alternativet’s party program articulates ‘social welfare without mistrust’, and explains how mistrust generates an expensive and ineffective administration of social security. Alternativet’s program articulates that trust alleviates the need for bureaucratic control and supervision, which are very expensive.

This articulation contests the discursive hegemony present in the broader political spectrum - that ‘unemployment is a problem’ where ‘economic growth and creation of jobs is the solution’. Furthermore, the articulation of ‘everything indicates a future with jobless growth’ can be read as ‘job-creation and re-education as solutions are unrealistic’, and that ‘technological innovation alleviates the scope of need for human labor, which is good’. This compound point is unique in the context of the Danish unemployment debate as well as the general political landscape. Whereas all of the other political parties pre-suppose a future labor market functioning on similar principles of the historic and present one, Alternativet invokes, and perhaps not even consciously, the classic Keynesian notion of technological unemployment: “This means unemployment due to our discovery of means of economising the use of labour outrunning the pace at which we can find new uses for labour.”\footnote{https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/keynes/1930/our-grandchildren.htm} Alternativet’s conception of the ‘basis-
income’ as a solution for the problems arising from a new technological paradigm, or *technological unemployment*, does not however, presuppose that the change in ‘mode of production’ will in itself, and without political/cultural articulatory intervention, alter the structure of social relations: for this purpose, they indeed articulate the need for ‘trust’, which can be understood as an indirect challenge of the notion of ‘only work or property legitimizes rights to resources and goods’.

**Summary of second level**

On the second level of the analysis, a discursive struggle for fixing the meaning of ‘unemployment as a problem’, ‘the unemployed’, ‘unemployment’ and ‘social security’ have now all been analysed - yet not exhaustively. Amongst the most hegemonic discourses we find ‘Working community’, reproduced by DF, Venstre and SF containing the notion that the subject should be a part of it, contributing to the society and to become a whole person. Being outside of it have major personal and societal consequences. We also find the discourse of ‘Incentives’ advocated by Venstre and Konservative, which hold the idea that people will be economical motivated if the wage is higher than social security. As a counter hegemony to ‘Incentives’ we have found ‘Critique of ‘Incentives’’ given by Enhedslisten, which is simply a critique of that logic and more specifically a critique of cutting in social security with the notion that it will create more jobs because people are expected to be motivated by earning a wage that is higher than the social welfare.

Another hegemonic discourse is ‘Unemployment as a problem’ which we found articulated by, amongst others, Socialdemokraterne and Liberal Alliance. This is a very fundamental discourse, as all the parties in the parliament share it - their policies are aimed at formulating solutions to deal with unemployment. Another one is the ‘Weakest in society’ reproduced by Socialdemokraterne, SF and Enhedslisten which hold that the state should not attack the people with minimal resources. In addition to the counter-hegemonic discourses already mentioned, we found the discourses ‘Share the work’ advocated by Alternativet and Enhedslisten, as well as ‘More free time is progress’ articulated by Alternativet and ‘Mistrust is more expensive’ reproduced by Radikale Venstre and Alternativet. The first one advocates for a societal structure where the work force is distributed on less hours so that jobs will be created. The second
contains the idea that working less will improve health related societal issues, stress for an example. The third holds the idea that there should be cutbacks in expensive bureaucracy and controlling authorities, and the money should be used on education and job-creation (RV) or be used in revolutionizing the system of social security into system, where one receives a basis income without mistrust or conditionality.

This brings us to the discussion.

Discussion

In the first and second level of our analysis we identified a range of discourses that appear in the articulations of persons and parties participating in the unemployment debate. We have identified a number of these discourses as being hegemonic, albeit having differences in scope and force. We have also identified certain counter-hegemonic interventions, which challenge prevailing and pervasive social constructs. We will now attempt to relate the discourses found on the two levels to each other and to our theoretical framework, discuss the political aspects of our theoretical framework in conjunction with an articulation from the second level, and finally, relate our findings to our initial questions and the thesis of Engelbrecht, which again, prompted our initial curiosity regarding these issues.

The articulations we have seen in the public media scene, are again diverse and represent a range of discourses, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic. However, they all do seem to reinforce the wide-ranging hegemony, that a central aspect regarding the ‘problem of unemployment’ is, how identity is constructed, effected, maintained and undermined by employment status. Thus it appears that the focus within the first level is the unemployed and related questions of subject position and identity. This is seen in both Daley and Werge’s gesture of rehumanizing the unemployed subject, and supplying a more diverse identity than they think the politicians, amongst others, are ascribing to them. Whereas Daley constructs a telling list of identity positions, as a mother, an academic, feminist, unemployed etc., all of which indicate that she is articulating her own overdetermination, her plurality beyond her employment status, she still maintains the importance of employment via her positioning of herself as ‘speaking from the bottom’. Other articulations have engaged with positioning the unemployed as being
picky/choosy, which is to say, having preferences for or limitations on, which jobs they are happily willing to take. This situation results in them being personally blamed for their situation, but also as being seen as victims of a ‘spoiled’ culture. Thus the positioning of oneself and of others in relation the problem of unemployment has been a consistent act in the articulations.

The role of these articulations all have to do with the position/s the subject occupies within the social, or the ‘community’, and how these positionings are heavily influenced by employment status. Funch articulates a rather traditional liberal position that imagines the ‘community’ as being comprised by individuals - classic transcendental subjects, as the originators of the social - who ‘buy’ into their position within society by being economically active - by insuring themselves, either through an ‘uncorrupted’ state welfare system, or through an ‘incorruptible’ private system. Funch’s understanding of the social is permeated by social contract thinking, whereby he advocates the ‘rights’ of people who ‘don’t wish to participate’ to be ‘free’, to subtract themselves from the social contract and ‘do as they please’ without the ‘community’ being obligated to support them. Thus it appears that Funch is both expressing an indignant worldview in his reproach of Parum, but it also seems that he articulates a connection between Parum, Dovne Robert, and the impossibility of a just social welfare state, in an attempt to support and further neo-liberal hegemony.

On the political level, the parties within parliament have been concerned with unemployment as a societal problem, a problem regarding social organization and resource management. In dealing with unemployment as a problem, they articulated different solutions, ranging from cutbacks in the social security to reducing bureaucracy. All the parties attempted to define and formulate solutions to the ‘problem’ of unemployment and therefore we have considered the discourse ‘Unemployment as a problem’ as the most pervasive and thus hegemonic discourse on the second level. We will go on to discuss how these two levels interact.

Regarding the second level, we argue that the positioning of the unemployed subject is an important step in articulating unemployment as a specific kind of problem in conjunction with what is perceived and articulated as appropriate solutions. For example, Lars Løkke articulates the unemployed as an economic burden, but also as people suffering from not being in the ‘community’ of the labour market, thus positioning them as victims - this legitimizes the
The validity of the solution is reinforced by articulating the ‘human nature’ in terms of the subject feeling pleasure and existential meaning in being able to provide for themselves. This is about positioning the unemployed subject, defining their identity, in order to justify different political solutions to the ‘problem of unemployment’. When the subject is articulated in terms of preferring receiving social security to working, they are positioned as primarily economically motivated, which also serves to legitimate cutbacks in social security. Different positionings of the unemployed legitimize different solutions to ‘unemployment as a problem’. However, the positioning of the unemployed subject is also important in defining the problem so that other political agendas may be incorporated into the solutions.

DF articulates unemployment in terms of being a very expensive problem, and highlights how a specific group is largely responsible for this expense. In order to do that, they primarily position the unemployed as being lazy, ungrateful towards the (host) ‘community’, and passively receiving social security when the subject is an ‘immigrant’. This legitimizes the solution of increased control and tightening of the immigration policy.

Liberal Alliance criticizes the current system of social security, and in doing so the unemployed subject is positioned as a victim of the social welfare system, excluded from the labour market and with little control over their life. This positioning legitimizes the proposed solution of reforming the system of social security making it a temporary and uncomfortable safety net, thus minimizing it.

Socialdemokraterne mainly positions the unemployed as ‘the weakest members of society’, in this way legitimizing the solution of creating/maintaining a social security system characterized by more safety and fewer people falling out. But in tune with a more neo-liberal approach, Socialdemokraterne advocate economic growth, which they have faith will result in new jobs, thus helping some of the ‘weakest members of society’. On grounds of facilitating economic growth, the party is also in favor of privatization, and free trade agreements, i.e. selling DONG

stock options to Goldman-Sachs\textsuperscript{112} and supporting the TTIP\textsuperscript{113} - this type of policy, ‘the politics of necessity’ is predicated on maintaining the welfare state in a globalized economy, which demands deconstructing crucial aspects of the state’s ability to regulate i.e. energy infrastructure and trade regulation. These ‘necessities’ can be said to be, at least partially, justified by the discourse of defending ‘the weakest in society’.

Enhedslisten points to a ‘real’ problem, namely the problem of multinational firms and concerns not paying taxes when coming to Denmark and thus not contributing to the ‘community’. In doing that the party articulates the unemployed subject as not being the ones sponging off the society.

Even though the articulation and thus the positioning of the unemployed subject can be perceived as a crucial step in the process of articulating unemployment as a specific kind of problem with specific solutions, they are very generalizing; they do not articulate the unemployed as a very multifaceted human being as Daley for an example articulates herself as.

The counter-hegemonic discourses found on the second level do also make use of positioning the unemployed subject in order to legitimize alternative solutions to the aforementioned societal problems. An example is Alternativet’s articulation of the solution of a basis income, which presupposes a positioning of the unemployed as trustworthy and socially motivated. This implicit positioning of the unemployed subject enables the solution of basis income.

The discursive struggles we have been analyzing have most likely not been articulated as specific hegemonic strategies, as Laclau and Mouffe advocate (the political left) doing. In the following part of the discussion we will investigate, on hypothetical grounds, what could be the possible scenario if the counter-hegemonic discourses of Alternativet ‘share the work’ and ‘mistrust is more expensive’ were formulated and strategized on the basis of Laclau and Mouffe's prescriptions for a hegemonic strategy.

\textsuperscript{112} http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Politik/2015/04/24/0424082843.htm
\textsuperscript{113} http://www.altinget.dk/artikel/handelsminister-dumt-at-traekke-isds-ud-af-frihandelsaftale-nu
In considering the hegemonic strategy advocated by Laclau and Mouffe - how articulatory interventions can identify, alter, destabilize, and partially stabilize localized aspects of social reality for the purpose of creating socio-political change, we could, and indeed do, point towards each and every discourse that we have identified as actual and potential sites of struggle for hegemony. We have, however, also identified certain deeply entrenched hegemonies, which albeit many political disagreements, seem to appear as commonalities between the various represented positions. This commonality, or ‘existing consensus’, could be expressed as such:

Unemployment is a problem, for persons regarding their social identity and self-understanding, and for the State - as a problem of social organization and resource management. Therefore, the preferred solution to the problem would be: the achievement of near-full employment, within jobs that are experienced as meaningful - maintain social security as a security, but prevent it from being or becoming a substantial income for a substantial segment of the population.

We would now like to consider one articulation present in our analysis, which we identify as having a large potential for discursive destabilization - a destabilization that could potentially disrupt, what we have identified as the ‘existing consensus’. This articulation indicates an access point to a vulnerable site, one in which a new discursive struggle of strategic dimensions could take place. This articulation is from Alternativet’s party program and, within the context of Danish party politics, is entirely unique:


What we would like to consider is, how does this articulation presently challenge, as counter-hegemonic intervention, the present range of discourses regarding the ‘problem of unemployment’, and what we have formulated as the ‘existing consensus’. We would also like to consider the possible future implications to unemployment discourses, if one were to take Alternativet’s prediction seriously. We are aware that considering this involves a portion of

114 http://alternativet.dk/valg-tema/#serios-social-omstilling
speculation, but as we will not attempt to claim any ultimately valid and necessary conclusion grounded on the basis of this prediction’s actualization, we do not consider treating it hypothetically as a problem.

Again, Alternativet’s party program for ‘social re-structuring’ (socialomstilling) argues that sharing the existing work among a larger group of people, or rather, sharing the existing work with those persons presently unemployed, is a possible solution for both the present problem of unemployment and of ‘full-time’ employment - it also plays into a possible future that could entail a reduction in available jobs due to ‘advances in technology’ - where economic growth will not necessarily generate new jobs. Whereas suggesting sharing the work is an interesting and potentially productive proposal, we do not view it alone as having the ability to exploit the hegemonic strategy to its fullest. The articulation we isolate as having this potential is, ‘everything indicates that the future will entail jobless growth due to advances in technology’. In order to productively discuss the implications of this articulation in relation to existing hegemonic discourses, we will need to unfold the meanings that we derive from it.

Firstly, ‘everything indicates’ appears vague, in that ‘everything’ is not substantiated with references. However, this vagueness indicates a potential reserve of unnamed factors, all of which could be articulated, i.e. information regarding capital investments in automation\(^{115}\), technologically enabled outsourcing of ‘knowledge work’\(^{116}\), technological trends, recent developments and expectations. Thus articulating the element ‘everything indicates’ in greater detail and with more support for the claim, the hegemonic discourses regarding i.e. economic growth and the creation of new jobs could be challenged, thereby having the potential to undermine the authority and credibility of the political-economic establishment that constantly re-articulates economic growth as the primary locutor of both solving socio-political problems and facilitating ‘progress’. Thus, articulating ‘everything indicates’ as such, could generate support for Alternativet’s political agenda.


\(^{116}\) [https://hbr.org/2013/01/redesigning-knowledge-work]
Secondly, ‘jobless growth due to technology’ could also be substantiated, or set into discursive relations, such as equivalency chains, with other discourses and elements that are already common and are sources of worry and discontent. These could be in relation to both general jobless growth, and specific jobless growth with causal factors stemming from technological innovations and implementations. The so-called ‘jobless recovery’ from the 2008 economic crisis could be a validating reference point - that ‘recoveries’ measured in GDP, and increased stock market values, have not been accompanied by job creation. The articulation could also be tied to traumatic narratives of social displacement due to changes in the ‘mode of production’, i.e. the outsourcing of unionized industrial jobs to the Global South that has facilitated the economic transition in the Global North, from the Fordist to the Post-Fordist, or industrial to postindustrial - from material to immaterial labor. These narratives could be tied to recent and present actual labour displacements due to information technologies and automation, such as online and cash-less banking resulting in the disappearance of bank teller jobs - self-service checkout lanes in supermarkets - online self-service interactions with state and municipal bureaucracies having replaced low-level functionaries - stock market traders displaced by trading programs. Finally, these narratives could be articulated in conjunction with existing predictions and warnings coming from technology innovators concerning i.e. advancements in machine learning that are liable to cause labor displacements: algorithmic natural-language generators displacing journalists, translators, secretaries and other functions based on writing and reading - algorithmic visual recognition displacing medical-diagnostic work - algorithmic raw data-set analysis displacing juridical ‘discovery’ work, accountancy, statistics, quantitative research, etc.

It appears to us a feasible, that if these issues were to be discursively constructed and directed in ways conforming to Laclau and Mouffe’s hegemonic strategy, the possibilities for disrupting the ‘existing consensus’ and formulating new adaptive political proposals, could achieve a higher degree of success. The discourse of ‘unemployment as a problem’, ‘economic growth’ and ‘job creation’ could thus be disarticulated, where the elements could be reformed into ‘activities

118 http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/08/opinion/sunday/if-an-algorithm-wrote-this-how-would-you-even-know.html?_r=0
120 http://cdslegal.com/knowledge/the-basics-what-is-e-discovery/
influencing and facilitating identity are valued’, ‘egalitarian and sustainable management and distribution of resources legitimizes political work’, and ‘necessary tasks should be distributed.’

We will finish this section by returning to Engelbreth and discuss our results with his thesis about the shift from involuntary to self-imposed unemployment. Compared to Engelbreth’s thesis regarding the oppositional ideologies, what we might paraphrase as ‘structure’ vs. ‘agency’, our results, emanating from applying a ‘discursive lens’, are considerably more nuanced. Rather than reducing the reviewed material in order to isolate an ideological binary opposition, we have allowed every substantial articulation to maintain semantic and political status. Whereas we do indeed find aspects of ‘structural determination’ and ‘agent responsibility’ in our findings, we cannot deem them central or dominant. What we have identified as being hegemonic, i.e ‘unemployment as a problem’ and ‘work constructs and influences identity’ could be argued as being present across the ‘red-blue’ or ‘structure-agency’ scale. Rather than viewing the unemployment debate as a positional scale, correlating to the political spectrum, we have identified the positions as networked, interrelated, unstable and even intersectional. Also, rather than stressing the ultimate conformity and defeat of the political left in regard to liberal political discourse, we have identified a range of discursive sites that present possibilities for political differentiation and discensus.

Conclusion

By analyzing articulations regarding unemployment and the unemployed in the public media debate and the political scene, we have identified the two following discourses as being pervasively hegemonic, which is to say, they are assumed and maintained as both discrete and interconnected discourses: ‘Unemployment as a problem’ and ‘Work constructs and influences identity’. We have identified a number of hegemonic discourses that are uncontested by the select groups in which they appear and are reproduced - these hegemonies struggle for dominance with other hegemonies that similarly appear in contrasting groups. These hegemonies are: ‘economic incentives motivates’, ‘individuals are responsible for their employment status’, ‘structural factors determine employment status’, ‘people want to work’, ‘the labor market is the working-community’, and ‘it is immoral to attack the weakest in society’. We have also identified a number of counter-hegemonic interventions, such as ‘share the work’, ‘mistrust is
more expensive’, ‘the labor market is not a community’, and ‘incentives are not effective’. These all, as critique, disarticulate the hegemonies and struggle to replace them, or sometimes re-organize their fragmented elements into new or existing discourses, which in turn strive for hegemony.

We have demonstrated in the first part of our discussion that, viewing a socio-political political topic through a discursive lens, can provide a diverse representation of how meanings are produced, reproduced, dispersed, and challenged. We have shown that this approach can help make some sense of seemingly contradictory positions, where judgments of inconsistency, contradiction, or ideological confusion could otherwise claim all attention. We have shown an example of how we imagine the hegemonic strategy as political theory could be intentionally applied for the purpose of achieving socio-political goals.

Lastly, we have come to better understand the political landscape in Denmark, not least of all matters related to the labor market and common concepts of community. This understanding has nuanced, what immediately appeared to be an attractive and conclusive thesis, namely Engelbrecht’s point regarding the binary-ideological opposition of ‘structure’ vs. ‘agency’, and how the left has abandoned its historic position of defending labor rights. We have seen how there is some truth to this argument, but also that there are so many other important issues and meanings to consider.

**Resumé**

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