
SCHULDIG
wie betaalt de rekening?
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Guilty and in debts: Who is paying the bill?

A qualitative content analysis of the portrayal of poverty in the documentary series '*Schuldig'*

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ABSTRACT

The twenty-first century is an era increasingly being dominated by the logics of the neoliberal market, which goes accompanied by a declining welfare state and the subsequent emergence of the *participatory society*, all of which together lead to the paradoxical effect of a growing rather than a decreasing, new kind of poverty: debts. However, this 'neoliberal poverty' that debts are, is structurally made invisible through the strategy of *depoliticization* that favors this participatory policy. A contemporary and increasingly popular way of executing this strategy throughout the media, is the genre that British scholars labelled *'poverty porn*', that upholds an anti-welfare message through representing poverty in a stigmatized, stereotypical, and individualized manner that neglects important structural causes of poverty. The case of the Dutch documentary series '*Schuldig*' about people in debts in a neighborhood of Amsterdam, challenges this logic due to an approach that seems to offer an alternative to *poverty porn* and was acclaimed by many. Moreover, the series has contributed to opening up a public and political debate that effectively seems to tackle poverty. Goal of the current study is to examine the precise formula of *Schuldig*, through answering the research question 'In light of conventional media representations of poverty, what makes the case of *Schuldig* a relatively novel and unique discourse about poverty?', through the implementation of a discourse analysis on newspaper coverage on *Schuldig* as well as on the series itself. Starting from concrete elements that are evidence of the concept of *poverty porn* and the discourse of neoliberalism and *participatory society*, findings of the analyses show that the series *Schuldig* has adopted elements of *poverty porn* in such a way that it transforms so-called 'judgement shots', aimed to evoke moral disgust, into the conveyance of a message that favors the poor. Using the rhetoric of dissociating, "self-*Othering*", the addition of context, and a multifaceted view of the poor, the case shows that the concept of *poverty porn* is not simply a black versus white issue, but can be implemented in more elaborate ways in order to foster a diverse debate that can lead to political and societal change. Moreover, with these findings, the case of *Schuldig* delivers a relevant contribution not only to the dominant portrayal of poverty, *poverty porn*, but also it sheds new light on more conventional media framing of poverty such as Iyengar's *thematic* and *episodic* framing, and the *Othering* framing as posed by Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010).

KEYWORDS: *neoliberalism, participatory society, depoliticization, poverty porn, Othering*

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1. Introduction

Schuldig: a 'magisterial portrayal of poverty'

In the late autumn of 2016, a media storm of positive criticism blew through the Dutch public debate in response to the broadcast of a documentary series about poverty in a neighborhood in the north of Amsterdam. In the series '*Schuldig: wie betaalt de rekening*?'[1] (hereafter referred to as: '*Schuldig'*), different people were followed that have one particular theme in common, namely debt problems (Sylbing & Gould, 2016). In the press, television critics were full of praise about the series, for instance in *NRC Handelsblad*, it was described as being 'magisterial' in delivering a nuanced view on poverty (Beerekamp, 2016). In *De Volkskrant*, it was considered a "vigorous, moving series, showing the vulnerability of the residents that were followed" with a narrative structure that is both "lighthearted while simultaneously using a complexity of layers", making clear "how the problems are put together", creating "a sense of understanding that is part of the solution" (Bervoets, 2016), and by "flawlessly recording the ins and outs of how things work in practice, the makers are implicitly pleading for a different view on debts" (Gualthérie van Weezel, 2016). In the opinion magazine *De Groene Amsterdammer,* the series *Schuldig* was described as "unsensational, unsentimental, brilliant television about an extraordinary, non-sexy subject" (Van der Kooi, 2017), and in *Het Parool* two reasons were given for the series' success: first, the series has "many striking inhabitants who are in themselves already reason for a documentary", and second, the makers of the documentary "do not judge" (Lips, 2016).

Contemporary poverty portrayals

These claims reflect a view on the portrayal of poverty that is rather divergent and outstanding in a contemporary context in which poverty on television is often condemned to a quite different kind of representation. For instance, van Weezel (2015) wrote an opinion piece in *De Groene Amsterdammer,* in which she took a closer look at several Dutch television programmes about poverty of the past years, and concluded that none of those shows either elicit empathy, or contribute to more insights into the perceptions of the poor themselves (van Weezel, 2015). Likewise, in response to the television show '*Rondkomen in de Schilderswijk*', urban sociologist van Eijk (2014) questioned in an opinion piece whether viewers can actually learn anything from such television. This show, that portrays life in a disadvantaged neighborhood in the Netherlands, as well as many similar television programmes that claim to

[1] loosely translated as 'Guilty: who is paying the bill?'

be ‘documentaries’ about poverty, according to van Eijk (2014) have the tendency to create a distorted portrayal of life in the poorer social class, through linking poverty to blameworthy behavior. More specifically, they would contribute to disguising the social problem of poverty by depicting it as an individual problem, and in doing so, they reinforce the idea that poverty is a consequence of personal failure (van Eijk, 2014). By merely pointing towards people’s individual responsibility, yet ignoring the reality of social inequality and limited social mobility, the shows do not give the audience the chance of seeing how those people make ends meet. Instead, viewers only get to see a superficial and stereotypical portrayal of poverty, based on which they are ought to make a moral judgment, altogether contributing to a high entertainment value (van Eijk, 2014).

Based on this, van Eijk concludes that we can only wait until the day arrives that a television programme will truly address the issue of poverty (van Eijk, 2014), as it would lead to a more diverse and elaborate image of the poor through counteracting such representations. Moreover, it would contribute to a more comprehensive public and political debate, one that does not ignore the structural, underlying problems of poverty and can actually contribute to social change (van Eijk, 2014).

Poverty porn

In their descriptions, both van Weezel (2015) as well as van Eijk (2014) make a reference to the concept of ‘*poverty porn*’, a term frequently used by British scholars who made similar observations of British television shows about poverty, particularly based on the series *Benefits Street*, a show about a ‘poor’ street in Britain, that came under fire with the British audience. The concept of *poverty porn* can be defined as exploitation of the stereotypical image of the poor, only in order to enhance a show’s viewing ratings and make spectators feel good about themselves. This is being doing through showing a distorted depiction of poverty in which the focus is only on all kinds of problems that make poverty appear as an individual problem instead of a result of structural social inequality (van Eijk, 2014).

Overall, the critiques on this conventional portrayal of poverty as defined under the denominator of *poverty porn*, can therefore be subdivided into two kinds of criticism. First, there is the criticism of accuracy and realism, in which it is implied that there exists a ‘true’ way of representing poverty, yet this conflicts with a tendency of media portrayals that does not pursue this veraciousness and shows an image of the poor that would be considered unfair. Second, lies a political critique holding that certain representations of poverty neglect structural issues that are not meant to be overlooked, as they take up an important share in the story as a

whole. Hence, the focus is said to be too much on the individual. Together, these two criticisms reflect a discourse that according to Arts (2015) could have severe consequences for the reproduction of poverty and social inequality, and particularly the tendency of portraying poverty as an individual problem, while submitting solutions to the individual and ignoring structural factors, closely connects to a shift that has been going on within the Dutch political climate.

Participatory society

In his very first king's speech presenting the renewed budget memorandum of 2013, King Willem-Alexander officially introduced the term '*participatory society*', which reflects and pinpoints an important change in the Dutch governmental climate. The king stated that, in the current network- and information society, people have become more empowered and independent than ever before. Combined with an essential need of the government to withdraw, the system has slightly moved away from a classical welfare state (Rijksoverheid, 2013), meaning that now, growing responsibility is expected from all citizens that are in the ability to act likewise, reflecting an increasing will of people to make their own choices, organize their own lives and take care of one another (Rijksoverheid, 2013). Hence, the logic of the participatory society is based on the idea that life circumstances of all citizens are based on choice (Verhaeghe & Quievy, 2016).

In line with this logic of the participatory society, a reciprocal relationship between the two criticisms on the portrayal of poverty seems to be at play. There is a tendency of talking about and representing poverty as a consequence of individual failure and choice, which simultaneously distracts the audience from structural issues that are at the root of poverty, and in doing so, this favors the current policy that only benefits from this discourse. Hence, the public debate may be stirred toward a focus on individual cases rather than on the social problem as a whole. Yet, at the same time, the critique of misrepresentation and inaccuracy when portraying poverty, may lead to a negative public opinion that on its turn negatively impacts the policies on poverty as well. Altogether, this stresses the importance of accurately representing poverty that would be in favor of the poor instead of problematizing.

Schuldig: an answer to poverty porn's dominance?

Two years after the critical observations and references to *poverty porn* as becoming a dominant media format in Dutch television, the documentary series *Schuldig*, that was broadcast in 2016, might offer a part of the answer to van Eijk's question as posed in 2014. The

series consists of six episodes that show the ins and outs of different kinds of people that are all somehow involved in debts, located in the 'Vogelbuurt', a northern neighborhood of Amsterdam, not just the city with the highest poverty rates of the Netherlands, but also the district in the city being known as one of the poorest in the city (Goderis & Vrooman, 2016).

The title of the series is twofold, referring both to 'schuldig', implying that people are living with 'schulden' (in English: debts), yet 'schuldig' also means 'guilty', hence raises the question of *who* is guilty and can be held accountable for those debts and its subsequent problems (Sylbing & Gould, 2016). The programme therefore shows different people involved in the issue of debts: the everyday struggles of five debtors are shown in their attempts of becoming debt free. Yet, in attempting to solve their problems, they encounter several organizations and authorities that are also given special attention, hence, people professionally involved in debt problems are also followed, ranging from a housing association and a debt collector, to social workers of a welfare organization, and an alderman of the Amsterdam municipality standing up for the poor (Sylbing & Gould, 2016).

The documentary series *Schuldig* was broadcast on one of the Dutch public channels and produced by the broadcaster Human, which is a broadcaster that works from a humanist perspective and ideology, and wants to "contribute to a society of concerned citizens that take their responsibility", their method is always aimed at bringing about positive change in society, by "putting relevant themes on the agenda" (Human, 2018). The two directors of the series, Sarah Sylbing and Ester Gould, have been doing research and making films in the field of poverty, debts and other social problems already for many years, particularly in the Vogelbuurt (Human, 2018). Before making *Schuldig*, they have written a book about residents of the Vogelbuurt, focusing on the different problems that they encounter, and moreover, the makers have created two documentaries, that feature one particular problem family living in the Vogelbuurt (Human, 2018). Altogether, these formed the basis of making the documentary series *Schuldig*.

In an attempt to become more familiarized with and sensitive to both the topic of debt problems, as well as the series and the neighborhood itself, preliminary background research has been done, of which an interview with Ester Gould gave more insights into the production process of the series. An interesting finding deriving from this interview reveals that the directors of *Schuldig* have been in contact with the directors of *Benefits Street* before making *Schuldig*. Due to the vast amount of negative reactions and criticisms to *Benefits Street*, the directors of *Schuldig* considered it relevant to hear from its makers what are important factors to take into account when making a series that touches upon similar issues, and also focuses on

one particular neighborhood. The makers of *Benefits Street* particularly underlined the relevance of taking people in the neighborhood very seriously and to act carefully, through maintaining good contact and investing in relationships with the people involved in the series, so-called 'aftercare', as well as using a correct title for the series that does not evoke any negative stigmas, something that *Benefits Street* did elicit.

Social impact of Schuldig

The documentary series seems to have impacted and re-opened the public debate about poverty in the Netherlands in several ways, and has reached over a million of viewers weekly, leading to lots of publicity (Human, 2018). This started immediately after the broadcast of the last episode of *Schuldig*, with the talk show *Pauw* dedicating an entire episode to *Schuldig*. In the talk show, all main characters as well as the directors were invited to discuss the issue of debts more in-depth, and had the chance to evaluate the impact of the documentary on their lives (VARA, 2016). Moreover, the makers of *Schuldig* have won several prizes, including the prestigious television price 'Zilveren Nipkowschijf' in 2017, which lauded them for both the authenticity of the programme, but more importantly for its societal relevance (Bos, 2017). This is first of all visible in the impact of the programme in raising awareness and getting people into action, both in the public as well as the political realm (Bos, 2017). The series led to direct acts of sympathy, as can be illustrated with the experience of a pet shop owner in the series, whose business was on the verge of bankruptcy, yet gained so much popularity throughout the series, that from all over the country people started visiting his shop, to buy his products. In the end this led to an enormous uplift in his financial situation (Bos, 2017). Besides this, the series has led to mobilizing people in similar situations, due to the fact that the negative stigma on poverty and debts slightly appeared to decrease, stimulating people to come into action instead of ignoring their problems out of embarrassment (Bos, 2017).

Furthermore, the topic of debts has received so much attention after the series was aired, that in a response to the series, a journalist initiated a national petition in order to push poverty and debts further on the political agenda. Together with a debt counselor and the directors of *Schuldig*, they released the '*Manifest Schuldvrij*'[2] (Frederik, 2017), which led to a parliamentary debate in the Dutch government, and by May 2018, the campaign turned out to be successful, with the State Secretary for Social Affairs and Employment, Tamara van Ark,

[2] loosely translated as 'Manifest Debt-Free'

pleading for a broader approach to solving debt problems and promising to make massive changes on all fronts, in reducing those problems (Frederik, 2018).

Moreover, *Schuldig* not only led to this much impact due to spontaneous actions as initiated by the audience, but the documentary series *Schuldig* itself was part of a larger campaign that attempted to push poverty on the agenda, which was funded by different organizations and foundations. The campaign was carried out with a national debating tour through cities, '*Schuldig On Tour*', the release of a magazine called '*Schuldig- en nu verder*'[3] that further investigates potential solutions to debt problems, and a follow-up podcast series released one year after the broadcasting of the documentary, in which the makers further analyze the current status of debt problems with experts, as well as giving an update on the financial circumstances of the main characters (Human, 2018).

Schuldig's contribution

In light of conventional representations of poverty, the case of *Schuldig* appears to shed a light on poverty that has woken up people throughout the Netherlands, and opened many people's eyes. Studying the case of *Schuldig* is relevant, considering the alleged reciprocal relationship between the public opinion and the leading policies on poverty, which underlines the importance of more accurate media representations of poverty. On top of that, statistics of 2016 show that there has been an increase in the chance that people are living in long-term poverty in the Netherlands (CBS, 2018) and in addition, the amount of people dealing with debts has increased to one out of five households in the Netherlands (Movisie, 2017). These facts are clear evidence for a change of policy, which appears more crucial than before. Yet, these realities even reach beyond borders, as a report by the Central Statistical Office, CBS (2018) shows that within the European Union, the 'Europe 2020 strategy', directed at reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion, is still at work, as figures show that by 2015, the amount of poor European citizens increased to 17.3 percent, which is equivalent to 87 million people (CBS, 2018). Studying the case of *Schuldig* can, from these numbers, also be of added value for other countries that are dealing with similar issues.

Moreover, it is relevant to further examine the exact formula of the documentary series *Schuldig*, because this case broadens the scope of possibilities for representations of poverty on television. The approach towards poverty seems innovative not only because it knew to engage its viewers for a length of six weeks and attract an audience that was impossible to be

[3] loosely translated as 'Schuldig - How to proceed'

overlooked. What is more, it was able to simultaneously convey a serious social message that, up to the present day, has positively impacted the Dutch public and political debate. Therefore, studying the case of *Schuldig* may have a valuable contribution to the current literature and theories on media and poverty, in relation to —eventually as a contrast—the phenomenon of *poverty porn* in particular.

Hence, the starting point of the current study involves an examination of newspaper coverage of the series, that gives insight in how the series was received. Subsequently, a content analysis of the six episodes of the documentary series was conducted that more specifically focuses on the portrayal of poverty in *Schuldig* in light of conventional poverty representations. In doing so, together these analyses will contribute to answering the main research question: '*In light of conventional media representations of poverty, what makes the case of Schuldig a relatively novel and unique discourse about poverty?*'.

Outline of the thesis

The remaining part of this thesis starts with the second chapter that consists of a literature review. Firstly, an introductory overview will discuss the current political state of Dutch society, the *participatory society*, to sketch a picture of the context within which the strategy of *depoliticization* paved the way for both a new, neoliberal poverty, as well as for a dominant representation of poverty in the media that is called *poverty porn*. A more detailed definition of *poverty porn* is subsequently discussed in order to give a clearer image of what the genre consists of.

Thereafter, the third chapter will discuss the research design and methodology of the current study. The relevance of studying this particular case is further discussed and the outline for the analysis is elaborated, consisting of a discourse analysis of newspaper coverage on *Schuldig* that focuses on the way in which the series was perceived in the news, and a combination of a discourse analysis with elements of a narrative analysis has been implemented to examine the way in which poverty is portrayed in *Schuldig*.

The fourth chapter will give an overview of the main results deriving from these analyses, firstly offering three approaches within which *Schuldig* was treated in the newspaper coverage. Subsequently, four sections will discuss the results deriving from the analysis of *Schuldig* itself, that put into perspective the themes of location and environment, judgement shots, the family situation, and lifestyle, in the context of *poverty porn*, and a neoliberal, *participatory* discourse.

The fifth chapter will conclude this study with arguing that the series has adopted elements of *poverty porn* in such a way that, using the rhetoric of dissociating, the addition of context, and "self-*Othering*", transforms 'judgement shots' into the conveyance of a message that favors the poor, and in doing so, shows that the concept of *poverty porn* is not simply a black versus white issue.

2. Theory and previous research

In this section, different poverty representations in the media are discussed, that eventually are interconnected through the influence of a growing market dominance. Altogether, these have formed the breeding ground for the genre of *poverty porn* to emerge.

First of all, it is relevant to make clear how the ideology of equality in the *participatory society* has on the contrary, paved the way for a growing inequality of participation. It is being argued that the neoliberal logic of the *participatory society* has contributed to a bigger emphasis on the individual when it comes to questions of responsibility, and the strategy of *depoliticization* caused that no longer the issue of poverty is being associated with one's class position in society, but rather is to be viewed from the perspective of neoliberalism, posing that debts are the new, 'neoliberal poverty'. This new poverty is used as an instrument for neoliberal governments to maintain their policies that distance themselves from the welfare state.

Secondly, the intertwining, reciprocal relationship between the portrayal of poverty, the public opinion, and subsequent policies, explains how *depoliticization* is at play in the media, and how the different ways of framing and portraying poverty, respectively *thematic* and *episodic* framing, *Othering*, and alternative counternarratives, have contributed to the emergence of *reality television*, *Factual Welfare Television*, and eventually, to *poverty porn*. Due to its sensational and addictive narrative elements that strongly reinforce an anti-welfare message, *poverty porn* appears to have a bigger negative impact on the public opinion than before.

2.1 From participatory society to a 'neoliberal poverty' and how we got there

Global redistributions of responsibility

The Dutch governmental system, as mentioned before, used to be a welfare state for many decades, and was something all Dutch citizens could appeal to, reflecting a social democratic model (Jensen, 2014). Yet, it has undergone severe changes, moving towards, what King Willem-Alexander defined, a *participatory state* (Rijksoverheid, 2013), in which the role of the state is considered differently. This 'official' label that well defined the social and political circumstances of 2013 in the Netherlands, reflects a process that has been going on for much longer and fits into a global shift in which societies deal with redistributions of responsibility between the government, the citizens, and the civil society. This is influenced by neoliberalist policies and often accompanied by societal and demographic changes (Verhaeghe & Quievy, 2016).

Although there exist differences between countries, Verhaeghe and Quievy (2016) created a definition of a *participatory society*, based on frequently observed commonalities. What lies at the heart of a *participatory society*, is six dimensions: the government lets go of its responsibilities, local administrations take care of the needs of the community, civil society and volunteer culture are encouraged, responsibility for oneself, one's family and one's community has shifted to the individual, citizens actively participate in society, and last, one's life circumstances are based on choice (Verhaeghe & Quievy, 2016). Hence, although the concept of *participatory society* is only being used within Dutch context, the neoliberal turn appears not to be something exclusive to the Netherlands and is visible in different countries as well.

In the UK, such shifts, influenced by neoliberal ideas, are often translated into the concept of '*Big Society*' and this discourse is offered as an alternative to the dominant anti-welfare discourse of what British politicians have started labelling '*Broken Britain'* or '*Broken Society*', which holds a "condemnation of 'poor' places and people" (Mooney & Hancock, 2010, p.15). The discourse of *Big Society* instead, focuses rather on how individuals can gently, without any force, be steered towards individually making the best choices for themselves (Mooney & Hancock, 2010). In Chile, two liberal models that were implemented during the past decades, which were predominantly concerned with dominance of the market and a focus on economic growth, have rapidly changed the system into a "neo-liberal economic model" (Méndez, 2008, p.222). Here too, similar tendencies of privatization, market deregulation and trade liberalization make the Chilean system fit into this neoliberal tendency as well.

Emergence of a participatory society

Going back to the Dutch context of 2007, scholars already sensed an important shift that was happening within the Dutch political context. Ossewaarde (2007) describes this 'shift of governance', viewed from a rather optimistic perspective, in considering this new *participatory society* as an interpretation of democracy that starts from the principle of equality. In his view, society has been moving away from a paternalistic government, a 'simple society' with passive citizens, to a new and 'complex' society, with actively participating citizens. The idea of equality hereby lies no longer in equality in the sense that all groups of society are able to claim generic regulations, but rather an updated interpretation of equality as the cooperative relationship between citizens and the government, as part of a 'new social contract' (Ossewaarde, 2007).

Now, "actors in governance" (Ossewaarde, 2007, p. 495), thus have their own responsibility in receiving the services they need. Hence, people can no longer simply call on

their rights: obligations have become a precondition in order to receive those rights and the corresponding aid by the government (Ossewaarde, 2007). No longer is the conduct of citizens thus shaped by and dependent on the leading policies, within the participatory society citizens are required to actively cooperate with the government and the only role of the established government has become "providing a new governance framework for shaping 'good citizenship'" (Ossewaarde, 2007, p.511), within which citizens can govern *themselves*. This idea of good citizenship holds that because of the equal relationship with the government, citizens bear just as much responsibility for policy outcomes, and are hence considered "autonomous, professional subjects" (Ossewaarde, 2007, p.497).

However, Borghi and van Berkel (2007) adopt a much more pessimistic view on what they call the shift into 'new modes of governance'. They define the political climate as located somewhere between a liberal and a participative policy. By this, it is argued there is a so-called 'situated state', a withdrawing state that offers incentives in order to activate citizens, yet this is moving further towards an 'absent state' - in which institutions are only there to mediate rather than to intervene (Borghi & van Berkel, 2007). The equality interpretation of "give a little, take a little", is viewed as more problematic, when seen from this perspective.

An optimistic interpretation in line with the argumentation of Ossewaarde (2007), influenced by capitalist, neoliberal ideologies, would view a circumstance such as unemployment, as a mere consequence of personal failure and a lack of responsibility and participation. On the other hand, in line with Borghi and van Berkel's interpretation (2007) of the withdrawing or even absent state, one would argue that unemployment cannot simply be ascribed to the individual, but rather should be considered a consequence of a complex and failing system. Unemployment should, just like during the welfare state, be supported by the help of a benefit from the state to temporarily fit potential financial gaps. This safety net provided by the state was a system that all citizens contributed to through taxes and made sure to prevent people from the extremely negative consequences and circumstances that could derive from situations such as unemployment. The romantic interpretation of equality as propagated by the idea of the *participatory society* is therefore usually nothing more than a neoliberal ideology, and the reality often seems to show a different outcome that on the contrary only leads to more inequality, which is what the following section will elaborate on.

Inequality of participation

Services have thus shifted from the public to the private sphere, in which the rules of the economic market have been applied to the public service system (Borghi & van Berkel,

2007). Verhaeghe and Quievy (2016) even describe citizens as 'market actors', who ought to make their own choices in the 'market of welfare services', in order to shape their lives. The citizen has in that way become an individualized consumer, responsible for its own life (Verhaeghe & Quievy, 2016). Interestingly, this then makes one's living circumstances a result of choice. This so-called 'equality' that the participatory society is said to be based on, might then be less equal as it seems: for people in poverty, the threshold for equally participating in society is higher due to different factors. It appears that higher educated and older people have more means, expertise and time to be socially engaged than people from lower classes (Verhaeghe & Quievy, 2016). Moreover, the question remains to what extent citizens are truly empowered, if they cannot actively participate. Furthermore, people in poverty experience more financial, social and geographical obstacles to participate, and often lack the right social networks that could stimulate them in engaging in society. Lastly, the notion of 'good citizenship' is being criticized, as it raises questions to what extent people can be considered 'good' if they lack the resources that make them act responsibly (Verhaeghe & Quievy, 2016).

As these researchers argue, the former welfare state used to have a mediating function in that it managed to decrease the inequalities between lower and higher classes. A withdrawing state on the contrary, would then be counterproductive and only lead to more inequality as people are dependent on their own resources (Verhaeghe & Quievy, 2016). Jensen (2014) describes this new model as characterized by a punitive demeanor, "littered with sanctions and restrictions and characterized by conditions to be satisfied, rather than by universal entitlements" (Jensen, 2014). Hence, the ones without the means to participate are being punished. Yet, as Ossewaarde (2007) argued, in the current participatory society, intervention in socio-economic issues is considered unnecessary, as the government has stated that Dutch society is no longer "seen to be dominated by class conflicts" (Ossewaarde, 2007, p.496).

Depoliticization of class

The disguise of the existence of class is one of the strategies that is implemented in the new neoliberal era, which is defined as *depoliticization* of social positions such as class. Within the context of a withdrawing state, new mechanisms are put into working to control the individual conduct (Lazzarato, 2009). As access to private property and wealth has become individualized, the task of the government lies in 'neutralizing' and 'depoliticizing' the increasingly elaborate social policies (Lazzarato, 2009). Yet, in doing so, the government is only creating bigger "polarizations of power and income" (p.116). This individualizing of access to private property, as Lazzarato (2009) argues, is therefore "one of the most powerful

instruments of neoliberal depoliticization" (p. 124). Thus, it can be argued this strategy of *depoliticization* has a counterproductive effect: on the one hand, under neoliberal policy, social positions such as class are only increasing in inequality, yet on the other hand, in now considering the government as 'neutralizer' of this inequality, those social positions are made invisible, and their existence is being denied (Lazzarato, 2009). They are dismissed as issues that do not matter anymore, even though they now matter more than ever before.

A way in which this artificial elimination of class is being implemented, which clearly shows the result of a neoliberal discourse, is the way people refer to class identities. A study by Méndez (2008) towards class identities in Chilean society shows that people refer to these identities in individualized, rather than collective ways. Besides that, although people do use class as a means to define their own identities, they do not consider themselves as being part of that class culture. This way of approaching class is according to Méndez strongly influenced by the neoliberal market dominance and it is argued to be a "rhetorical attempt to establish 'normalness'" (Méndez, 2008, p.222). In a similar vein, this is then also seen in Dutch society where the neoliberal market has increasingly grown in dominance: the way that people talk about the potential existence of class, is influenced by notions of individuality that are central within a neoliberal context (van Eijk, 2012). Through the assumption that class positions are individualized and consequential of (in)equality, they flatten the hierarchy of class and in doing so, class differences are denied (van Eijk, 2012).

Debts as neoliberal poverty

As a consequence of neoliberal strategies, an increase in poverty is nowadays even further at play than before (Lazzarato, 2009), and has led to the creation of the "new poor", or a "neoliberal poverty" (p. 128). Arguably, poverty is no longer a consequence of lagging behind the rest, but rather a result of differences and segmentations in society that are created by neoliberal policies (Lazzarato, 2009). Inequality and insecurity are artificially maintained and viewed as necessary, as neoliberal policies are dependent on a so-called 'equilibrium' between wealth and poverty. Hence, they are considered vital instruments for the neoliberal policies to survive (Lazzarato, 2009).

As several studies on poverty in the Netherlands show, poverty has indeed been increasing. Yet, when taking a closer look at poverty in the Netherlands, a contradiction occurs. On the one hand, when put into a comparative perspective with respect to other European countries, the Netherlands is, after Luxembourg, the country with the lowest poverty rate, scoring only 10,5 percent (Wildeboer Schut & Hoff, 2018). A national study shows that the

amount of people in poverty lies around 1.2 million, which makes up 7.6 percent of the Dutch population, with the biggest poverty rates located in the three largest cities, respectively Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague (Hoff & Wildeboer Schut, 2016).

However, on the other hand, another international comparative study that focused on debts, shows that by 2014, the Netherlands was after Denmark going through the biggest debt problems (Jungmann & Madern, 2017). The number of people dealing with debts in the Netherlands has grown extensively from the mid-nineties on. This has increased to one out of five households, which represents approximately 1.4 million households that have to deal with severe debts or are even involved in a debt counselling process (Movisie, 2017).

Debt problems appear an important indicator of this new, 'neoliberal poverty' as Lazzarato (2009) defines it. Some even describe the contemporary ubiquity of debts as a 'debt-hype', as poverty and debts are closely interrelated (van den Berg & Ham, 2017), and which together can cause people to entering a vicious circle. Hence, debts can be both the result of poverty, as well as its starting point (SCP, 2016). For instance, debts could lead to a seizure of one's salary or benefits. In particular people already coping with a low income, appear to have difficulty of keeping track on their financial situation, since within the neoliberal, bureaucratic system they have to deal with many different organizations and authorities (SCP, 2016). Coping with a simple delay of a certain payment could easily lead to a person being entangled in a negative spiral that consists of fines, reminders, bailiffs and even worse punishments (SCP, 2016).

The neoliberal logic as an influential factor in the emergence of this 'new' poverty, is also revealed when focusing on the underlying reasons of people dealing with debts. A study by the national budget information institute, Nibud, shows that whereas by 2012 the reason for debts lied predominantly in negligence, by 2015 this shifted towards payment and debt problems that were mainly caused by the inability to paying bills, due to higher fixed charges or higher health service costs (Nibud, 2018). With an increasing influence of the market logics on the national health care system, simultaneously, more problems concerning debts emerged.

2.2 Media representations of poverty

Media, depoliticization and the public opinion

Depoliticization is further at play through the media. Public opinion relies heavily on the way media shape reality, and the impact of media is therefore significantly relevant (Iyengar, 1990). Yet, since media, particularly television, are often controlled by powerful organizations, their interests on certain topics are inclined to be reflected in the content. This

means that on issues that are highly politicized, like poverty, television may have a large impact, steering viewers' attitudes in ways that represent poverty inaccurately (Bullock, Wyche & Williams, 2001). As mentioned before, based on the most common representation of poverty nowadays, *poverty porn*, a distinction can be made between two kinds of criticism that together form a circular relationship within which the public opinion, the dominant policies and the way poverty is represented, are mutually influencing.

The first criticism, of accuracy and realism, underlines the severe societal consequences of inaccurate misrepresentations of the poor. An American study of 2000 by Clawson and Trice already made clear that inaccurate, stereotypical portrayals of poverty do not only negatively impact the public opinion, yet in their turn also influence the public policies on poverty. Together, this may even lead to a failure to supporting services such as welfare programmes (Clawson & Trice, 2000). Throughout this literature section, the argument will be further developed that makes clear that with the more recent emergence of *poverty porn*, this is also the case.

The second criticism, a political critique on the portrayal of poverty, holds that poverty is increasingly attempted to be explained "through individual pathologies" (De Benedictis et al., 2017, p.340), while neglecting potential structural explanations of poverty. In doing so, an incomplete image of poverty is being given, that favors the prevailing anti-welfare policy discourse. This fits well into the discourse of the *participatory society*: a study by Arts (2015) on contemporary views of poverty by non-poor citizens, based on news media coverage on poverty in the Netherlands, reveals a relevant contradictory discourse within the current society. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on solidarity and collectively tackling the problems of poverty, based on connectedness and willingness to change (Arts, 2015). Yet, on the other hand, simultaneously the ideas of self-reliance and individual responsibility reveal the idea that poverty in the end is a choice, and being poor is then a consequence of knowingly, insufficiently participating within the *participatory society*. Arts (2015) argues that dominance of such a discourse, —poverty resulting from individual choice, therefore leaving structural causes aside— could have severe consequences for the reproduction of poverty and social inequality.

Traditional poverty representations

Although those two criticisms particularly fit well within contemporary discourses, they touch upon ways of representing and framing poverty that have been observed before. In a now classic study, Iyengar (1990) identified two framing types of poverty, based on an analysis of televised news about poverty, broadcast during the eighties of the past century in the US. Firstly,

the *thematic* frame, focuses on societal trends that are in the interest of public policies, that is, the broader context makes stories of poverty as abstract and impersonal as possible. In that case, viewers are inclined to blaming poverty to structural factors (Iyengar, 1990). By contrast, the more frequently observed *episodic* frame, focuses on the individual and its personal experiences. The study shows that when spectators are provided with news that suits within the *episodic* frame, they tend to not blame poverty to the structural context, but to the individual itself. Hence, the poor are considered causally responsible for their own life circumstances. Subsequently, this also reduces the will of people to support governmental assistance for the poor (Iyengar, 1990).

Another prevailing way of framing poverty that is in line with Iyengar's (1990) *episodic* frame and further elaborates on it, is the discourse of '*Othering*' (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010), a "process of differentiation and demarcation" (Lister, 2004, as cited in Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010, p. 695). With *Othering,* there is also a general preference of the individualistic account over the structural one when portraying the poor. Yet, *Othering* takes a step further in creating a distance between 'us' versus 'them', that establishes a superior position for the viewer, while simultaneously upholding the idea that poor people are deviating from 'normal' people (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010). The *Othering* framing in this way creates a stigmatizing, punitive image of poverty, that views poor people as objects that do not possess a voice. Their existence is in doing so not being acknowledged, which leads to the maintaining of a limited, stigmatized view on poor people that justifies inequality (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010).

Counternarratives of portraying poverty

To resist and challenge the hegemonic discourses of *Othering* and *episodic* framing, narratives that both have an individualizing, "blaming the victim approach" (Wright, 1993 as cited in Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010, p. 694), Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010) offered three counter-narratives. Yet, although these alternative narratives offer some solutions, they simultaneously also risk to implicitly reproduce these dominant discourses again. First, the "*structure/context narrative*" is in line with the *thematic* framing as posed by Iyengar (1990). Here too, poverty is viewed as "the result of a limited structure of opportunities" (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010, p.698) and hence, does not give any attention to individual causes but instead, entirely focuses on the structural context. Individual conduct is then viewed as result of the context one is being steered by. The risk of *depoliticization* and individualizing lies in

the fact that it does not recognize the individual as an agentic being, which contributes to a passive image of the poor that resembles of *Othering* (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010).

Second, the "*agency/resistance*" narrative on the contrary focuses on the empowered position that the poor possess, that makes resisting poverty possible. Poor people are not passive, but rather considered creative in finding strategies to actively make efforts to breaking away from poverty. However, again the risk of *Othering* emerges, due to considering the poor as resistant, which simultaneously addresses them with more responsibility and choice, which can be used to blame them again for their own situation (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010).

Last, the "*voice and action*" narrative focuses on viewing the poor as real experts of poverty, which can be used as a strategy to influence the dominant political agenda. Seen from this view, the poor are relevant, meaningful citizens as they can voice their opinions and "transform the life knowledge […] into political statements" (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010, p.704). Generating more diverse knowledge about poverty through giving the poor a voice, both challenges the *Othering* discourse, but also risks enhancing it, again through *depoliticization* and decontextualizing these voices from their structural context. To sum, despite of the flaws and risks that come with these alternative narratives, they do offer a more nuanced view on poverty, and do not encounter poverty as a black versus white construction, yet rather give complementary views on the issue.

Reality television as governmental medium

Another way in which *depoliticization* is implemented, is often seen in a typical neoliberal genre: reality television. Shows of this genre often have a very strong "reality effect" (Bourdieu, 1999, as cited in van Eijk, 2015) meaning that viewers will be inclined to think that what they see is reality, featuring 'social actors' with stories that revolve around ordinary, 'authentic' people (Wood & Skeggs, 2008). Reality television focusing on the everyday life in poverty, is what British scholars labelled '*Factual Welfare Television*' (FWT) (De Benedictis et al., 2017). Not only does FWT coincide with the prevailing debate in the UK on poverty as influenced by austerity policies, but moreover, it also "actively shapes public understandings of poverty" (De Benedictis et al., 2017, p.339), and in doing so, "in its claim to 'realness', assembles powerful forms of 'class-making', […] at a time when the vocabularies of social class are denied and euphemized" (Wood and Skeggs, 2011, as cited in De Benedictis et al., 2017, p. 339). Thus, reality television and more specifically, FWT, are ideal formats for *depoliticization* to be at play.

What is more, Wood and Skeggs (2008) argue that these formats shape conditions under which people have to perform, that steer them in such a way, that they have no other choice than to live up to their stereotypical, cliché-image that appear to represent their social positions. Hence, so-called 'reality' television does not reflect reality, but a stereotypical version of it. Furthermore, "through the promotion of self-management [...] made spectacular via melodrama" (Wood & Skeggs, 2008, p.178), class is reproduced. Moreover, in doing so, television can be argued to have become "a new governmental medium" (p.178) that, through showing how to be a 'good citizen', for instance with healthy living, good appearance, or taking care of one's finances, makes people govern themselves (Wood & Skeggs, 2008).

Emergence of poverty porn

This genre of *Factual Welfare Television* is an alternative term for the phenomenon of *poverty porn*, and shows similarities with the *Othering* framing, in which the creation of superiority plays an important role. *Poverty porn* is often criticized for exploiting the lives of poor people in service of entertainment, through sensational, stereotypical and stigmatizing depictions of poverty, that give the viewer a superior feeling, of being a 'good citizen' (van Eijk, 2015), who is a rather "'hard-working', future-orientated, individualistic and entrepreneurial neoliberal citizen" (Allen et al., 2014, p.3). The poor are hereby viewed from the perspective of the "bourgeois gaze" (Law & Mooney, 2011), in which the audience takes on the role of scrutinizing the poor, and judges how much they deserve to be poor (Jensen, 2014). Through evaluating their behavior, bodies, and way of dressing, the audience can decide if the poor are "in need of transformation" (Allen et al., 2014, p.2). It is 'porn', in the sense that it "aims to arouse and stimulate the viewer, to provoke an emotional sensation through a repetitive and affective encounter with the television screen" (Jensen, 2014, in Feltwell, 2017, p.352).

The genre of *poverty porn* primarily shows up in British literature that analyzes the presentation of welfare reforms in the UK, which were executed in the context of the financial crisis of 2008. Generally, the effects of welfare reforms in the UK that are represented in the media, can be divided in two approaches (Beresford, 2016). Left-oriented media are inclined to showing the 'painful reality' of those suffering from welfare cuts, with an emphasis on the "inefficiencies and arbitrariness" (Beresford, 2016, p.422) that comes along with those cuts. At the opposite, right-wing media are more engaged with attempting to legitimize and increase support for policies of continuing welfare cuts, and therefore uncritical representations that focus on benefit frauds and attacks on those dependent on welfare benefits are primarily being

shown (Beresford, 2016). The ultimate strategy hereby is *poverty porn*, that polarizes people by making use of the *Othering* frame. By representing the effects of welfare cuts in this way, and hence creating and maintaining a feeling of dissatisfaction, right-wing media are able to support the neoliberal policy of welfare cuts (Beresford, 2016).

Jensen (2014) further argues that *poverty porn* contributes to the 'crowding out' of 'doxa', meaning that it makes people uncritical of social issues and instead, makes these issues appear as natural and self-evident, which creates "new forms of neoliberal commonsense" (Jensen, 2014, p.1). Again, *depoliticization* is then brought into operation. Roberts (2017) explains that since political communication is nowadays focused on the selling of particular policies, through the creation of a common sense, everyone will agree on what is the problem and what the solution. This is being done to the extent that even people who are living on the edge of poverty themselves, will adopt the idea that people relying on benefits are inclined to cheating and should therefore be kept an eye on. In this way, the neoliberal policies will continue to exist, ironically enough due to the cooperation of poor people themselves (Roberts, 2017).

The content of poverty porn

Many television shows in the UK have gained popularity by implementing this strategy, and British scholars have been analyzing shows, in particular *Benefits Street*, but also similar programmes, which have been aired in the aftermath of the austerity policies, in particular broadcast in the period starting from 2008's financial crisis on. In their analyses, it is further investigated how the conveyance of an anti-welfare message is executed through *poverty porn* television. Stories in these television shows focus on the daily experiences of people being poor, and the audience gets to see how people in such circumstances are dealing with money (Paterson et al., 2017). For a programme to be entertaining, exaggerated and extreme examples score better than average stories would do, meaning that mainly extreme examples of people failing in the welfare system, are being shown. In order to make the programme more entertaining and to "elicit the preferred emotional response" (Law & Mooney, 2010, p.6), *mood music* is being used that intensifies the dramatic effects. An analysis of the television programme '*The Scheme'* even describes the embellishment of people's experiences as a "modern day equivalent of the carnival 'freak show'" (Mooney & Hancock, 2010, p.16). Moreover, the people starring such shows often do not accurately reflect the population that is actually dealing with poverty and benefits in the UK, yet reveal a preference towards showing a non-representative, small group of people with stereotypical features (Mooney & Hancock, 2010). Furthermore, by not

providing any reference to the nature of the problems of poverty, people are being decontextualized from all the potentially affecting factors and processes (Mooney & Hancock, 2010).

This is particularly being done by focusing on the assumed problems that are related to these poor, on benefits dependent people, who are therefore described as having a 'bad lifestyle', often with drugs, tobacco or alcohol addictions (Mooney & Hancock, 2010), coping with health problems and illnesses and therefore having a low life expectancy (Law & Mooney, 2011). Their behavior is primarily led by their biological instincts and therefore every action is being conducted with the aim of "immediate gratification" (Law & Mooney, 2011, p.12), leading to anti-social, problematic and deviant behavior ranging from petty crime to territorial violence and knife crime, sometimes followed by imprisonment (Law & Mooney, 2011). The overall attitude that is associated with these 'scroungers' (Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2015) or 'benefits shirkers' (Jensen, 2014), is that they are undisciplined, loathsome, inarticulate and lazy, reinforcing the 'chav' stereotype that lacks any purpose or aspiration (Law & Mooney, 2011). Their entire 'bad' culture derives from bad choices, irresponsibility and moral laxity combined with a lack of the individual will to participate in the labor market (Jensen, 2014), and are in short, "personally, socially, culturally and morally incompetent" (Law & Mooney, 2011, p.3).

Jensen (2014) offers a term for this kind of people, that symbolizes the commonsense notions of welfare in the UK, which she calls the 'skiver'. The skiver can take on different forms, but always evokes a feeling of disgust with the audience, that reinforces the idea that 'they' are merely wasting national resources, hence, the hard-earned money of taxpayers (Mooney & Hancock, 2010). The skiver for instance appears in the form of "the single mother", "the troubled family", or "the unemployed, absent, or feckless father" (Jensen, 2014, p.7). Besides that, families are often dysfunctional and deal with teenage pregnancies or abortion (Mooney & Hancock, 2010; Law & Mooney, 2011).

Poverty porn television programmes are usually taking place in one specific neighborhood, and preferably focus on one particular housing scheme (Mooney & Hancock, 2010), hence, people featuring the shows are living in social housing or subsidized accommodations (Paterson et al., 2017). Their environment is often shown as being messy and littery, and so-called "judgement shots" (Skeggs et al., 2008, as cited in Allen et al., 2014) zoom in on these images to elicit reactions of disgust with the audience. For instance, people are sitting on sofas on the pavements in front of their houses, amidst bags or piles of rubbish that are lying on the streets; hence, they are often surrounded by waste (Allen et al., 2014). Other

'shots' zoom in on their cigarette usage and dirty ash-trays, their alcohol addictions are made visible for instance by showing piles of cheap beer cans, and furthermore, children are loitering in the streets at times they should be lying in their beds. Satellite dishes on the roofs of houses are another indicator of "the poor" living in these housing schemes (Jensen, 2014). Furthermore, associated with their 'bad' lifestyle comes a bad taste, and the poor are therefore described as 'flawed consumers', with large television screens or expensive telephones as indicators of this bad taste (Law & Mooney, 2011).

Implications for the current study

As has become clear by now, the genre of *poverty porn* is the outcome of a discourse that has been become common sense in many countries in which the economy has become dominated by a neoliberal, capitalist ideology and policy, and is the ideal, ultimate format to maintain an anti-welfare message and hence, let the strategy of *depoliticization* continue to operate. *Poverty porn* consists of two things that are primarily criticized, namely its tendency to not accurately represent reality, and the focus on the individual while neglecting the structural context. Also, to make all of this possible, it combines different already existing representations of poverty, such as *Othering* and the *episodic* framing.

Getting back to the case of the current study, *Schuldig*, it is relevant to see where precisely in this story the series can be placed, particularly since it was received rather differently as compared to television shows such as *Benefits Streets*, which was heavily criticized. Also, as mentioned before, *Schuldig* has brought about several changes within the public realm. Interestingly, both series were created in a time that is dominated by the logics of the *participatory society* or *Big Society* and hence, influenced by a neoliberal discourse. How come that in the case of *Schuldig*, such a different outcome was possible, and how has this been done? Does this imply the series *Schuldig* does not reinforce a certain anti-welfare message? And if so, does it convey a different message?

In order to gain an answer to these questions posed, it is important, as a starting point, to gain more insight into the reception of the series *Schuldig* within the Dutch news, to see where these claims were based on and how they relate to the neoliberal, participatory discourse and the concept of *poverty porn*. Therefore, a first sub question that will be answered through analyzing the reception of *Schuldig*, is: *How has the portrayal of poverty in Schuldig been perceived in newspaper coverage on the documentary series?* Subsequently, to gain a clearer understanding of the way in which poverty was portrayed in *Schuldig* as compared to *poverty porn*, a second question that will be answered through analyzing the series, is: *Related to the*

dominant mode of portraying poverty in television today, in particular poverty porn, how is poverty portrayed in the documentary series Schuldig? Together, these will answer the main research question that aims to find out what in particular makes the case of *Schuldig* rather unique.

3. Research design and methodology

Research design: case study of Schuldig

Based on the discussed theories that describe ways in which poverty is frequently portrayed within the contemporary era, which is dominated by a neoliberal, *participatory* way of addressing issues such as poverty, two research questions will help answering the main research question, '*In light of conventional media representations of poverty, what makes the case of Schuldig a relatively novel and unique discourse about poverty*?'.

There are several goals in further examining the portrayal of poverty in this specific case. First of all, it is relevant, since it has been shown the series *Schuldig* and its broader campaign was effective in opening up a political and public debate, to see what the exact formula of the series is to get to such a debate. With this, an important contribution can be made to the existing theories on poverty representations in the media such as the theory of *episodic* and *thematic* framing by Iyengar (1990) as well as the narrative of *Othering* and the alternative counternarratives as posed by Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010), and more specifically to the concept of *poverty porn* as defined by several British scholars. Since the overall public response towards this genre is predominantly negative, the presumed positive criticism of *Schuldig* is worth further analysis in order to find out how one can reach a different reaction. What is more, the series has shown to not only influence the debate, but also led to actual political changes in Dutch society.

Moreover, since most of the literature about *poverty porn* has focused on British television programmes, this case of Dutch origin may shed an innovative light on the phenomenon, that can simultaneously be perceived as a starting point that helps address and tackle the problematic nature of the concept of *poverty porn*. Also, since the neoliberal shift is not a trend occurring exclusively in the Netherlands, but is seen in many other countries that are dominated by a growing neoliberal market system, within these contexts this case-study can therefore also be relevant. Last, there exist few studies that have systematically scrutinized the phenomenon of *poverty porn*, and with this study, that examines more closely and in detail the way in which the representation of poverty is implemented in television, an initial step is undertaken that can lead to a clearer, more elaborate definition of *poverty porn*, through more thoroughly demarcating what it consists of. In doing so, this can bring new insights that can lead to more future research on this topic.

Method of analysis

In order to get those insights, preliminary research has been done to become more familiarized with and sensitive to the context within which the series *Schuldig* is placed. More specifically, this consists of a visit to the neighborhood of the Vogelbuurt in Amsterdam, the reading of books about the history of poverty in Amsterdam-Noord (Jansen, 2008) and the operation of the market in Dutch society (Heijne, 2018), the viewing of the British film '*I, Daniel Blake*' (Loach, 2016) about unemployment in the UK, and the viewing of Dutch documentary '*Episode III: Enjoy Poverty*' (Martens, 2008) about the exploitation of poverty in Africa by western culture. Furthermore, British television programmes '*The Scheme*' (Angus, 2010) and '*Benefits Street*' (Cracknell, 2014) as well as Dutch television programmes '*Probleemwijken*' (SBS, 2005), '*Rondkomen in de Schilderswijk*' (RTL, 2014) and '*Een dubbeltje op zijn kant*' (RTL, 2009), all resembling of *poverty porn*, have been watched. Moreover, there has been contact with Ester Gould, one of the directors of *Schuldig* which contributed to more insights into the production process of the series.

After this, it makes sense to get a more detailed image of how specifically *Schuldig* was received and treated within the Dutch public debate, particularly in the news. More specifically, clarity is needed about the basis on which the series has been acclaimed and how it relates to the conventional ways of portraying poverty, and how this is discursively treated. Therefore, a discourse analysis was executed as a starting point for the analysis of the series itself, focusing on the way in which the portrayal of poverty in *Schuldig* is described and defined. This analysis contributes to an answer to the first sub question, '*How has the portrayal of poverty in Schuldig been perceived in newspaper coverage on the documentary series*?'.

Subsequently, the series itself has been examined through a content analysis that uses elements of discourse and narrative analysis, in order to find out in what way poverty is portrayed in *Schuldig*. Hereby, the case of *Schuldig* has systematically been compared and analyzed in light of conventional portrayals of poverty, starting from the most important aspects and characteristics of the concept of *poverty porn* that were based on the literature. With analyzing this kind of data, a conclusion could be obtained that answers the second sub question: '*Related to the dominant mode of portraying poverty in television today, in particular poverty porn, how is poverty portrayed in the documentary series Schuldig?*'. Together, the analyses of these complementary data sets contribute to a better understanding of *Schuldig*'s formula, and investigate whether and to what extent the series actually differs from conventional poverty representations and in particular the dominant mode of *poverty porn*.

To analyze these data sets as efficiently and precisely as possible, a qualitative approach is chosen as methodological direction of the current study for examining both sub research questions. Qualitative research focuses on the way in which human beings give meaning to the social reality, and when following the Thomas theorem, "if men define a situation as real, it is real in its consequences" (Jorgensen, 1989 as cited in Boeije, 2010, p. 13). Particularly since the current case of *Schuldig* is said to fit into the genre of documentary, as well as the fact that it is being analyzed based on literature that fits within the tendency of so-called *Factual Welfare Television* (De Benedictis et al., 2017), thus, television that claims to accurately reflect the reality of poverty and welfare, such 'realities' can have important consequences for the way people perceive this and hence, for the way in which this is subsequently being discussed in the public and political debate and how this eventually might impact the policies on poverty.

Data analysis

In the current study, a qualitative content analysis has been executed, which is characterized by data reduction, following a systematic and flexible approach that makes the qualitative data more clear (Schreier, 2013). A coding frame, a tool that is "at the heart of the method", (Schreier, 2013, p.174) is used in order to execute this. This framework is visualized in the according operationalization table (see Table 1). The strength of such an approach towards the data lies in its informed position at the start of the analysis, which will prevent the research from any naivety (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

More specifically, the content of this data has been analyzed doing a discourse analysis, which is an analysis that focuses on the role of language in contributing to the process of shaping the social world (Tonkiss, 1998). It is argued that language does not simply reflect reality, but rather has a constructing, organizing approach towards the social reality (Tonkiss, 1998). Thus, how reality is perceived is dependent on the way language is shaping this reality. Foucault described this as "a realm in which institutions, norms, forms of subjectivity and social practices are constituted and made to appear natural" (Foucault, 1984, as cited in Tonkiss, 1998) and therefore it is related to questions of power that are implicit and latent within texts. Making phenomena appear natural through the use of language resembles of the neoliberal strategy of *depoliticization*, which makes social constructions appear as natural and normalized, as part of the 'commonsense' (Jensen, 2014). In order to examine what lies behind this commonsense, a discourse analysis in the case of *Schuldig* is therefore very suitable. Moreover, a discourse analysis has close connections to the textual data in order to find out how these meanings are constructed (Tonkiss, 1998).

The discourse analysis, "a process of sifting, comparing and contrasting" themes (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 255) was firstly carried out with analyzing the newspaper coverage on *Schuldig*. This was predominantly directed at finding key themes, since this data functions as an initial examination of relevant discourses or approaches about poverty in *Schuldig*. Subsequently, the transcripts of the documentary series itself were analyzed, combining elements of discourse analysis and narrative analysis. This part of the analysis was driven by *a priori* themes that derived from the literature (Boeije, 2010), gave direction throughout the data, and was primarily concerned with discourse in the sense that it focuses on the logics and discourse of neoliberalism and the *participatory society*. Besides that, this part of the analysis adopted elements of narrative analysis as well, as it suits well in analyzing the stories of people in marginalized groups such as people in poverty, since "the marginalized, and the muted […] 'get a life' by telling and writing their stories" (Langellier, 2001, as cited in Kohler Riessman, 2011, p.2). Looking at the narrative elements of the data allows to focus both on 'what' is said as well as 'how' stories are told, in order to see how this contributes to a story's persuasiveness (Kohler Riessman, 2011).

Both the newspaper data as well as the transcripts of *Schuldig*, were analyzed with the usage of the software programme 'NVivo12'[4], that was helpful in reducing the data through a coding process that was visualized with a coding tree, that made patterns more clear, which was a supportive contribution to making relationships between different aspects and categories more easily to interpret, all of which is suitable in a qualitative approach that is aimed at systematically making sense of data (Schreier, 2013).

Data collection

The data collection for the data set of newspaper coverage on *Schuldig* in Dutch news articles was based on several sampling criteria that had to be met for an article to be worthwhile and this can therefore be defined as '*purposive'* sampling (Boeije,, 2010). First, the articles had to be published in national newspapers, which led to the eventual dataset consisting of articles from 'De Telegraaf', 'De Volkskrant', 'Trouw', 'NRC Next', 'NRC Handelsblad', with the exception of online journalist platform 'De Correspondent' (which also covers national rather than local news) and the Amsterdam based and -focused newspaper 'Het Parool', which, due to its special interest to stories from Amsterdam applied well in the case of *Schuldig*. All news articles covered the subject of *Schuldig*, of which some were clearly television reviews or recommendations, whereas others covered more broadly the topic of debts in response to the

[4] https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/home

broadcast of the series, or even included interviews with main characters or the directors of the series. In this way, the data consists of a various set of articles that has different perspectives towards the topic, coming from differently orientated newspapers and in doing so fulfilled the second requirement. Eventually, this led to a size of fourteen news articles being part of the data for the discourse analysis.

Data collection for the content analysis on the documentary series itself did not require any sampling criteria: the series *Schuldig* only consists of one season and therefore, the entire season, containing six episodes, was part of the data set to be analyzed. The episodes were found on the website 'NPOstart'[5] of the Dutch public broadcaster NPO. The episodes were broadcast in November and December of 2016, making this the time period to be researched. The episodes have a duration of approximately 45 minutes each, and in order to transform the content into researchable data, the audio has been transcribed into textual content. These consist of the chronological transcripts of everything that has been said throughout the episodes: the voice-over, the dialogues, and everything else that consisted of verbal content. Besides that, the transcripts have additional information with concise, as objective as possible descriptions of what happened visually, thus, for instance with the start of a new scene, a description of what was shown, was used as complementary to the transcripts.

Operationalization

As mentioned, the analysis of newspaper coverage was an initial analysis to find out how poverty was approached in articles about *Schuldig*, aimed at finding key themes, and therefore the operationalization process applies mainly to the part of the analysis that focused on the series itself. In order to explicitly examine how poverty was portrayed in *Schuldig*, observable, measurable concepts, subdivided into different categories, were composed, based particularly on literature that has been written about *poverty porn*, as can be found in the operationalization table (Table 1). The implementations of *poverty porn* derive from theories about the topic as defined by Jensen (2014), Allen et al. (2014), Law & Mooney (2011), Mooney & Hancock (2010), Paterson et al. (2017), and Runswick-Cole & Goodley (2015)[6].

Besides this, the analysis of the discourse of neoliberalism and the *participatory society* was a secondary step in the analysis, meaning that based on the outcome of analyzing the relationship of the data towards *poverty porn*, references and reflections were made of how these results fit into this specific discourse. Therefore, the operationalization of these concepts

[5] https://www.npo.nl/
[6] See Appendix A for the used topic list

was not included in the table. However, the way in which the data was approached concerning the discourse of neoliberalism and the *participatory society*, was based on a convergence of theories as described in the literature review chapter, including those of Verhaeghe & Quievy (2016), Allen et al. (2014), Mooney & Hancock (2010), Ossewaarde (2007), Borghi and van Berkel (2007), Lazzarato (2009), Méndez (2008) and van Eijk (2012).

Altogether, these concepts could then be used as 'glasses' through which the data was approached. Not necessarily did the operationalizations when observed in the data, directly imply that this would be evidence for *poverty porn*, but rather, through comparing and contrasting the data with the theory, a critical analysis of the similarities and differences emerged.

The categories within the operationalization table (Table 1) were constructed as follows: the category 'Location and environment' focuses on the location in which the stories take place and on the way in which their community was constructed. Secondly, with the category of '*Judgement shots*', the focus was more specifically on the way in which the characters were placed into a context, with the sub category of '*Objects of consumption*' that went even more in detail through focusing on specific elements that are considered evidence of poor people as 'flawed consumers'.

Furthermore, the category of 'Family situation' was used to examine the familial circumstances people are living in, through looking at elements such as 'the skiver'. The category 'Lifestyle' consists of several sub categories with each a different direction: the sub categories looked at the way the issue of '*Health'* was approached, the way in which certain kinds of '*Behavior'* would be made visible, the '*Life situation*' and circumstances that go accompanied with this, and last, with the sub category '*Attitude*', attention was given to the way in which people would approach issues around poverty in life.

Table 1: Operationalization of poverty porn

Category	Operationalization
1. Location and environment	"Council housing schemes"[7]; "social housing"[8]; "subsidized accommodations"[9]; "problem places and welfare ghettoes"; "places of misery, apathy, despair"[10]; "community spirit"; "working class solidarity, care and more communal forms of living"; "community relations and inter-reliance"; "desire for a 'time past'"[11]
2. Judgement shots	"the ash-tray"; "rubbish bags piled"; "dilapidated sofa […] outside a house"; "cigarette usage"[12]; "dog soiled carpets"[13]; "the sofa abandoned in the street"; "the satellite dish"; "tins of cheap lager"; "kids loitering in the street"[14]
Sub category a: Objects of consumption	"Bad taste"; "flawed consumers"; "disreputable object of consumption" (plasma TVs, alcohol, tobacco, etc.)"[15]
3. Family situation	"Dysfunctional family life"; "family breakdown"; "teenage pregnancy"[16]; "abortion"; "single parenting"[17]; "the 'skiver'": "single mother", "troubled family"; "unemployed, absent or feckless father"[18]
4. Lifestyle	
Sub category a: Health	"Drugs, alcohol addiction"; "tobacco use", "low life expectancy"[19]; "ill health and bereavement"[20]
Sub category b: Behavior	"anti-social, problematic, deviant behavior"[21]; "personality defects"; "petty crime"; "territorial violence"; "knife crime"; "foul language"; "imprisonment"; "biological instincts"[22]
Sub category c: Life situation	"Unemployment", "worklessness"; "personal debt"; "welfare dependency"; "educational failure"[23]; "low incomes"; "working-class"[24]; "biopolitical constructions made invisible"[25]

[7] Law & Mooney (2011)
[8] Mooney & Hancock (2010)
[9] Paterson et al. (2017)
[10] Mooney & Hancock (2010)
[11] Allen et al. (2014)
[12] Allen et al. (2014)
[13] Law & Mooney (2011)
[14] Jensen (2014)
[15] Law & Mooney (2011)
[16] Mooney & Hancock, 2010)
[17] Law & Mooney (2011)
[18] Jensen (2014)
[19] Mooney & Hancock (2010)
[20] Law & Mooney (2011)
[21] Mooney & Hancock (2010)
[22] Law & Mooney (2011)
[23] Mooney & Hancock (2010)
[24] Paterson et al. (2017)
[25] Allen et al. (2014); Runswick-Cole & Goodley (2015)

Sub category d: Attitude	"personally, socially, culturally and morally incompetent"; "loathsome", "inarticulate", "lazy", 'chav' stereotype; "undisciplined"[26]; "lack of purpose and aspiration"[27]; "irresponsibility"; "bad choices"; "bad culture"; "moral laxity"; "greed"; "lack of individual forces to work"; "lack of resilience"; "benefits shirkers"[28]; "scroungers"[29]; "abject Other of the 'good', hard-working', future-orientated, individualistic and entrepreneurial neoliberal citizen"; "product of a bloated welfare"[30]

[26] Law & Mooney (2011)
[27] Mooney & Hancock (2010)
[28] Jensen (2014)
[29] Runswick-Cole & Goodley (2015)
[30] Allen et al. (2014)

4. Results

The current chapter discusses and covers the results of the analysis of newspaper coverage on *Schuldig*, and the results of the analysis of the series itself. First of all, the main results of the analysis of newspaper coverage on *Schuldig* will be discussed. After this, the main results of the analysis of the six episodes are discussed, which are structured following the same themes as described in the operationalization table of the methodological chapter. Yet, before starting the results, a short description of the series *Schuldig* will be helpful in familiarizing with the characters and their life circumstances.

Introduction to Schuldig's characters

To start, additional information about the main characters will give a clearer idea of what and whom the series is about. The series *Schuldig* follows the everyday life of five main characters who have two things in common: they are living in the 'Vogelbuurt', a neighborhood located in the northern area of Amsterdam, and they are all facing the problem of debts. Throughout the series, we see them visiting social workers, accountants, the food bank, encountering people like bailiffs, judges, and so on; all kinds of people that are concerned with these debts (Human, 2018).

The main characters are Ditte, Carmelita, Dennis, and the couple Ron and Ramona (Human, 2018). Ditte, a woman in her fifties, is a single woman, who for many years used to have a glamorous career on Ibiza as a dancer but she got into trouble when being diagnosed with breast cancer, leading to unemployment and having to move back to Amsterdam, where she is now living on disability. Her debt problems emerged as a result of this sudden change of lifestyle, with the usage of credit cards leading to financial problems (Human, 2018). Carmelita is a single woman in the beginning of her sixties, also dealing with health issues, she has rheumatism. She had gotten into debts when she had to take care of her granddaughter and the purchase of a bed for her to sleep in and the moving into a house with an extra bedroom, has over the years developed into a large debt (Human, 2018). Dennis, the owner of a pet shop, is a single man in the end of his forties, who has gotten into financial trouble a couple of years ago, when the interest in a physical pet shop declined and people started buying their products online. Since then, he is trying everything he can, together with his seventy-year-old father, to keep the shop from going bankrupt (Human, 2018). Ron and Ramona are the parents of two young children, and their financial problems are an assemblage of different circumstances such as illness and unemployment. Their story of being forced to leave their house due to payment arrears, the subsequent moving in with the parents of Ramona, and their meetings with the debt

assistance agency that wants them to go into receivership, is what is being shown in *Schuldig* (Human, 2018). Besides these five characters, primarily the bailiff Ed, the social worker Paul, who is head of the 'Leefkringhuis', and the debt counselor Will, head of a large debt assistance agency, are being followed in their fight to solve the problems of these five main characters and additionally, many other people feature in the series that have a smaller share in the stories (Human, 2018).

4.1 Discourse analysis of newspaper coverage on *Schuldig*

Different approaches, same starting point

Overall, almost exclusively, positive criticism was found in the selected newspapers that have written about *Schuldig*. To see more clearly on what basis these criticisms were predominantly positive, three different approaches to portraying *Schuldig*'s main characters were found: the *pathetic* view, showing the characters as 'victims' of a system, the *nuanced* view, putting forth the question of guilt by complementarily adding the stories of 'the other side' of debts, and lastly, the *heroic* view, which, through considering the main characters as fictional, turns them into agentic rather than passive human beings. Yet, despite of these approaches being quite different from one another, often these different approaches coexist within the same news articles, meaning that often there does not exist only one particular view on *Schuldig*, but rather several complementary views.

Interestingly, what all of them do have in common, is the basic idea that the series was affective, poignant and heartbreaking. This means that overall, phrases that were often used when talking about the series, consider *Schuldig* as touching and engaging, and this seems to primarily have to do with the main characters, for whom the spectators develop sympathy. The series is said to be so engaging, that it evokes emotional responses with the audience. One journalist described the series as being "one of the most heartbreaking documentary series I have ever seen", sketching a painful image of the reality of poverty in the Netherlands (Vermeulen, 2016). Yet, it seems to lay bare both the vulnerability as well as the resilience of the main characters. Due to this emotional engagement of the audience, one can sympathize with them in 'good' as well as in 'bad' times. One critic mentioned that overall, because the series reveals the hopelessness of the depressing situations of these characters, the question is raised whether the problem can ever be truly solved. Although overall, this idea of *Schuldig* being heartbreaking and touching fits well with the first approach that considers the main characters as 'victims', the series being so emotionally engaging is also used as a starting point for the other two approaches.

4.1.1 First approach: The pathetic view

Victims of a system

One of the descriptions of the series that was used most frequently and mentioned in virtually every analyzed newspaper article, was the description of the characters being a victim of a 'twisted' system, of a "machine that keeps on running" (Beerekamp, 2016). The series is talked about as showing 'average' people that have gotten into misery due to unforeseen circumstances, who all of a sudden ended up entangled in a web, overwhelmed by a complex bureaucratic system, all of which happened to them. The emphasis on the characters being 'victims', places them oppositely towards the idea that their situation is a consequence of their bad, consciously made choices, or by unwillingness. Responsibility for the 'guilt' is therefore rather addressed to the 'bad' people that control the system and the subsequent inequality deriving from this system. Moreover, the stress that their insecure circumstances cause, seems to play an important role for these 'victims', making them more vulnerable for wrong choices that lead them further into trouble. Hence, all of this emphasizes the vulnerability of the main characters, as opposed to the "failing services of the government and politicians, that continuously come up with new measures to bother the citizen" (Beerekamp, 2016). They are viewed as people experiencing bad luck, for instance due to health problems. One news article illustrates precisely this view of vulnerability on the series: "debts appear to be a condition that can affect a neighborhood, the same way as a tree disease can ravage the trees in a park: an invisible, but disastrous plague." (Bervoets, 2016).

Hidden poverty

The idea of an invisible plague destroying people's lives, is even further developed in the category of hidden poverty, which is described as something that appears to be made visible for the first time with the broadcast of *Schuldig*. The specific poverty that the series is talking about, namely debts, according to the news articles, appear to be made visible for the very first time, implying this has never been done before. The poverty concerning debts is therefore frequently mentioned as poverty that at first instance, cannot be simply discovered by judgements based on the appearance of the main characters. Therefore, the main characters are being described as average, ordinary people, and the debts they have are the result of something that could overcome 'all of us', simply affected by fate, for instance in the form of a broken washing machine. One article describes how "the pile of bills is one of the few visual indicators of the main characters being in trouble" (Bervoets, 2016). However, despite of the fact that the

idea of hidden poverty indicates that it could happen to anyone and anywhere, it is in some articles mentioned that the series are located in the 'Vogelbuurt', which is known as "being the poorest neighborhood of Amsterdam" (De Telegraaf, 2016), indicating that debts as poverty is a problem specific for that area.

4.1.2 Second approach: The nuanced view

Nuanced, non-judgemental

Another category that contributes to the idea of the series delivering engagement with the characters, is the nuanced view of the series, that puts into question the idea of guilt. Here, it is meant that in the series, "no judgement is made" (Vermeulen, 2016), it is "without any moralist commentary" (Kok, 2016) and it is not all a "black-and-white question" (Beerekamp, 2016), precisely because 'the other side' is also being viewed, meaning people like the debt collector that are also followed throughout the series. Realizing that they are also doing the best they can, creates more understanding with the spectator, and therefore one also seems to sympathize with them. This idea is quite contradictory when comparing it to the idea of the characters as being 'victims' of a system, yet is frequently mentioned within the same news articles, indicating that these two views can simultaneously coexist. This also contributes to the idea that showing all the involved perspectives within debt problems, leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the entire world of debts, and moreover can even lead to a different view on debts. As one journalist described it, "the series show that everyone has their own truth, and everyone is guilty in his own way" (School, 2017).

Societal impact

Because of this more comprehensive understanding of the entire problem of debts and poverty, many references were made to the exceptional impact of the series on the Dutch society. Not only frequently the impact was explicitly mentioned, but also did the criticisms touch upon the potential solutions that the series attempted to put forth. A quote from one of the news articles covers this idea of societal impact well: "Television is often merely a mirror of society. Yet, sometimes it can truly change things, like with 'Schuldig'" (Bos, 2017), which is a criticism that in addition, also refers to the rather deliberate way of editing the series instead of simply 'documenting' or 'capturing' life in poverty in the way reality television would do this. Furthermore, one critic describes *Schuldig*'s format as not being simply 'help-television' but going further through raising awareness on the topic of debts, thus it is emphasized how *Schuldig* has had an effect on the social and political debate. The series is said to have stirred

up a great deal of emotions, raising questions of how to solve this 'twisted' system, and pointed towards structural solutions to debt problems. As the title of one of the articles illustrates well: "A touching documentary can reach more than a hundred of policy documents" (Bos, 2017). Furthermore, some articles also focus on the more direct impact in response to the series, such as the fact that main character Dennis' pet shop was saved from bankruptcy due to the contributions of empathic viewers, or people in similar situations who have started asking for help without feeling embarrassed for their debts.

4.1.3 Third approach: The heroic view

Fictional format

Besides the two mentioned approaches, there is a third approach that differs due to its references to fiction instead of the "painful image of reality". Still, this is also a rather positive consideration of the characters and the series in general, tending to refer to the series as resembling of fiction, lauding it for being so well-made and edited and praising the makers for "being master in storytelling" (School, 2017). A couple of times, references are made to American television series produced by HBO, with one critic even suggesting to define *Schuldig* as a "literary docu-soap" (Bervoets, 2016), as it resembles of the format of a fictional series. Yet moreover, the references to *Schuldig* as being fictional is becoming even more clear when critics describe the main characters of the series itself, which leads to the next sub category of good characters and heroes.

Good characters and heroes

One of the reasons that would make the series *Schuldig* so good, has to do with the main characters. One journalist described the inhabitants of the ´Vogelbuurt' as striking characters that in itself "are reason enough for making a good documentary" (Lips, 2016). The main characters here are described not just as pathetic victims, but also as striking characters, that do well with the audience, all having some interesting trait that makes people want to continue watching the show. Therefore, some articles describe the characters in a way that makes them come across as fictional characters with adjectives that alliterate well with their names: "Dierenwinkel-Dennis[31]" (Kok, 2016), "Ex-Diva Ditte", "Kokette Carmelita[32]" (Beerenkamp, 2016) and so on. Here, all people are described as good-hearted, even the creditors involved are viewed as unexpectedly reasonable and kind. At the same time of this reference to fiction, the

[31] Loosely translated as "Petshop-Dennis"
[32] Loosely translated as "Coquette Carmelita"

main characters also contribute to the series being so engaging, because viewers can identify well with them, as mentioned before since they represent more 'average' Dutch people. Interestingly, in an interview in one of the newspaper articles, one of the main characters, Paul, explains why even more these people represent better the Dutch society, namely because "they are no longer 'tokkies'" [33] and one cannot say these characters are unwilling to solve their problems (De Telegraaf, 2016).

In addition, in particular Dennis, the pet shop owner, and Paul, the social worker, are frequently described as real "heroes", with Dennis being described as a "knuffelondernemer"[34], meaning that everyone literally and figuratively embraced him and his persona, particularly because of this two-sided image of him: on the one hand, he is considered a 'victim', but on the other hand he is —in his own way— doing all he can to change his situation, as an agentic rather than a passive being. Besides Dennis, the social worker Paul is also often associated with possessing the status of a hero: one article describes him as a "*Mensch*, a protector" (Beerenkamp, 2016) with his 'fatherly advice-giving role' being "a relief when comparing it to the actions of the government and other organizations that merely follow rules but are particularly afraid of not being strictly enough" (Beerekamp, 2016).

Despite of the news articles not negatively criticizing the series *Schuldig,* in a couple of articles within which the makers themselves also speak, critical questions are raised about the way in which characters were constructed. This particularly focuses on Paul, of whom it has been suggested he was too much constructed as a "godfather", which, after the broadcast of the series, had led to his center for social work, the "Leefkringhuis", ending up in debts itself, as a result of receiving less donations which was related to this certain depiction of Paul, being depicted too much as capable of surviving without any donations or subsidies, leaving too much of a nonchalant impression that 'everything will be fine'.

Newspaper coverage on Schuldig in short

In short, the articles show that there are different, but complementary views on the portrayal of poverty in *Schuldig*. The overall touching and affective impact on the audience does not only derive from the idea that the characters are considered pathetic because they were hit by bad luck in the context of a complex, punitive system, but the nuanced view that poses these 'victims' into a bigger network in which different factors and people are 'guilty' of the

[33] For a long time, the word "tokkies", deriving from a rather sensational television reality show ("De Tokkies", 2005) about people on benefits in a Dutch neighborhood which arguably could be defined as *poverty porn,* was immediately associated with 'a-social', "scrounging" people only living on taxpayers' money.
[34] Loosely translated as "hug" entrepreneur

debts, is of added value. Moreover, considering the characters almost as fictional, contributes to the idea that these people are heroes and do all they can to 'save' the(ir) world of debts. Thus, based on these newspapers, apparently there seems to be the possibility of portraying poverty in a multifaceted way while at the same time particularly upholding the feeling of the series being touching, engaging and heartbreaking. Subsequently, going further on these views, the following results are based on the analysis of the series itself, in order to gain more insight into how the series has led to these diverse, but complementary views.

4.2 Discourse and narrative analysis of the series *Schuldig*

The following themes and categories, that are identified based on the analysis of the six episodes of *Schuldig*, are globally structured following the features of the phenomenon of *poverty porn*, as described in the operationalization table in the methodological chapter. In several cases, within these categories, new topics emerged, respectively the (in)visibility of bureaucracy, vehicles as objects of consumption, and the complex relationship towards one's appearance. Yet, these topics arguably fit well within the categories that already existed.

Overall, this result section starts with the theme of *Location and environment* that will discuss the neighborhood being shown as one entity, which is fostered by the presence of central, pivotal figures. After this, the section will continue discussing the results within the theme of *Judgement shots*, that reveals how the struggle with the bureaucratic system is a returning topic made visible throughout the series. Also, the relationship of the main characters with rubbish is here discussed, and another 'judgement shot' within which people are hanging on the street shows to be implemented in a more elaborate way. Then, the connection of the main characters with several objects of consumption such as televisions, vehicles and products associated with their appearance is being made. The next section of *Family situation* discusses the familial circumstances within which particularly 'the dysfunctional family' and 'the single mother' appear returning throughout the series. Lastly, the theme of *Lifestyle* covers several topics, respectively health, with the emphasis on substance usage and illness, and behavior within which the focus is on one's relationship towards criminality, foul language, and their overall attitude in life being poor.

4.2.1 Location and environment

Within the genre of poverty porn, the place or setting where a programme is located, can often be found in specific streets or neighborhoods. Not only do these streets often consist of houses that are subsidized accommodations, indicating that people with lower incomes are

living there, but moreover, because the focus is frequently on just one particular neighborhood, it comes across as if everyone who is living there, is similar to the people starring the shows, even though this might not be the actual reality. The main characters of these programmes might in this way also appear as representative for the entire neighborhood. Besides this, they visualize the idea that their neighborhoods are "places of misery, apathy, despair" (Mooney & Hancock, 2010). Yet, at the same time, certain people may reflect a "community spirit" and have a bonding function to keep the neighborhood tight-knit, which refers back to a "time past" (Allen et al., 2014). Viewed from the logics of neoliberalism, more responsibility in taking care of life has shifted to the individual and hence, this 'time past' seems to have returned with the emergence of the *participatory society*. The definition of the *participatory society* already made clear that people are steered towards taking care of one another within their community (Verhaeghe & Quievy, 2016).

Within the current category, firstly the image of the 'Vogelbuurt' being one entity or community, as well as the relevance of pivotal, central figures, will be further discussed in order to show where in this story they can be placed.

The neighborhood as one entity

Interestingly, in *Schuldig*, it immediately becomes clear that the series is also taking place in one particular neighborhood of Amsterdam, namely the 'Vogelbuurt', a neighborhood in the northern district of Amsterdam. This already becomes clear in the first episode, when the voice-over introduces the viewer with the neighborhood. The following introduction therefore returns in several episodes and contains more or less the following sentences: *"In Amsterdam-Noord, between the Meeuwenlaan and the Adelaarsweg, lies the Vogelbuurt. It is a village within a city, a neighborhood like many others. One where people still greet each other. With a pet shop, and a food bank…and with residents having debts. Many, many debts…"* (Sylbing & Gould, 2016).

Along with those lines introducing the neighborhood, a melancholic soul music piece plays in the background. The song creates a 'blue' or desperate feeling, that supports the phrase of the voice-over explaining the inhabitants are dealing with many debts. The Vogelbuurt appears as a place where one can find many problems, is what seems to be said here. Yet at the same time, the bluesy music in the background also creates a nostalgic feeling, that goes accompanied with shots of the streets that make the place come across as if there is still some hope left. In such shots, the streets and the houses of the Vogelbuurt are shown, viewed from a bird's eye perspective (see Figure 1). In those images, we see people walking their dogs,

children playing at a playground, having fun, dancing, and so on. While the voice-over says "where people still greet each other", a girl is waving at someone. Furthermore, we see images of Dennis, opening his pet shop and placing an advertisement in front of it, or we see Carmelita, driving through the streets of the Vogelbuurt on her mobility scooter. During transitions of one scene to another, images of the streets are shown, of the roofs of houses, of a cat walking on the roofs, or people walking down the streets.

Together, these images seem to contribute to familiarizing the audience with the neighborhood, and moreover, make the neighborhood come across as a place where people still know their neighbor and actually take the time to looking out to one another. In doing so, it seems to introduce the viewer with a neighborhood that they should recognize from earlier times, fostering their desire for a "time past" (Allen et al., 2014) and simultaneously makes the viewer identify with the neighborhood and the people living there, implying that this neighborhood could be any neighborhood in the country.

Figure 1: the Vogelbuurt

Besides the visual images of the series that contribute to implying that everything takes place in this one specific neighborhood, there seems an important role for the voice-over. The voice-over, a female voice, uses a narrative style that resembles of someone reading aloud from a children's storybook, with a simplistic choice of words and sentences that does not require too much thinking, immediately making clear what is happening and where, and who are the characters involved. In particular the intonation of the narrator, often suggesting warmth and empathy, but sometimes supplemented with subtle jokes that reveal a light ironic undertone, reinforces the feeling of being told a story from a book. In doing so, the voice-over seems to suggest that 'everyone' in the Vogelbuurt knows each other and is dealing with the same problems. The title of the first episode summarizes this well in two words: '*Het Schuldendorp*', loosely translated as 'The Village of Debts'. Because the voice-over refers to the inhabitants of the Vogelbuurt as being one group, referring to 'them' or 'the Vogelbuurt', it thus appears as being one entity. For instance, when introducing a scene about the debt collector Ed, the voice-over tells that 'they' have bad experiences with people like Ed, and later on, the voice-over mentions that the people of the Vogelbuurt have decided not to take the risk of opening their doors in case of debt collectors ringing the bell, implying that this is a decision that was commonly taken.

In some sense then, it seems like *Othering* (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010) is at play here, through this presentation of the neighborhood as being one entity, as 'them' versus 'us', the audience. However, with *Othering,* Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010) argued that the idea was implied that 'they', the poor people, are deviant as compared to 'normal' people. On the contrary, here it rather seems that the overall message is that these people are similar to the audience: ordinary people that do not at all deviate so much from the average.

Besides that, although one could conclude from watching the series, that the neighborhood of the Vogelbuurt must be a place where poverty is the major feature that characterizes the entire neighborhood, in the very last episode this is being nuanced, when the voice-over mentions that not just the Vogelbuurt, but many other neighborhoods in the country exist that are coping with similar issues, and that people with debts are living everywhere.

Central, pivotal figures

With this creation of a neighborhood in which everyone knows each other, the idea of people being "entrepreneurial, future-oriented, self-sufficient and individualistic selves" (Allen et al., 2014, p.4) is to a large extent being replaced by people taking care of one another which is reminiscent of more solidarity being at play and makes the viewer desire for a place away from "the cruel and penal neoliberal state" (Allen et al., p.4). Simultaneously, as mentioned before, the idea of the community taking care of one another, is also exemplary of a consequence of the *participatory society,* and seen from that perspective, is something that can be considered rather contemporary and modern. Nevertheless, the operation of solidarity throughout the neighborhood is being implemented through pivotal characters that have a central role in contributing to creating this community, and therefore these figures can be considered having a 'community spirit' (Allen et al., 2014) in which they take care of their neighbors and look after them. They can be seen as resilient, as the 'father' or 'patriarch' of the neighborhood. First of all, this becomes visible with the role that Paul has: a social worker and head of the center called the 'Leefkringhuis'. His community center is open for anyone that needs help when being stuck in a troubling life situation. The voice-over introduces this center as located at the heart of the Vogelbuurt and being a place that everyone in the neighborhood can count on for help. The voice-over describes Paul as 'the godfather', someone on whom everyone in the Vogelbuurt can count, whom people know as someone that is always capable of finding a solution for whatever problem there is, because, as the voice-over says, "*he knows the right people*" (Sylbing & Gould, 2016, episode 1). Moreover, Paul, who is also known as

Said, his Islamic name, is an important connector and seems to bridge the gap between different cultural backgrounds in the neighborhood.

Likewise, the role of Dennis, the owner of the pet shop, also suits well with the idea of a central, pivotal figure. Throughout the series, Dennis appears as a well-known figure that people in the neighborhood are familiar with due to his pet shop that has been there for ages. The voice-over introduces him and his pet shop in a way that makes the viewer feel familiar with the place, by saying "*In the middle of the Vogelbuurt, just around the corner of the Food Bank, is Dennis' pet shop*" (Sylbing & Gould, 2016, episode 2). This way of describing the location reinforces the feeling of being known with the neighborhood and with Dennis himself, as if the viewers have been there themselves and know what she is talking about. Dennis' situation illustrates well the problems that many people in the neighborhood are dealing with, and when a journalist of the local newspaper interviews him in order to write a piece about his situation, the voice-over mentions that *"The article in the newspaper has shocked the entire Vogelbuurt. They all know the store*." (Sylbing & Gould, 2016, episode 6). Again, this confirms the feeling of the neighborhood being an entity that has a strong feeling of solidarity, which is being 'glued' by the presence of pivotal figures such as Paul and Dennis who contribute to a social cohesive atmosphere.

Dennis in particular, is even better defined as a caring, nostalgic figure that almost seems to have a different sense of time, standing for more "slower and caring forms of community relations and inter-reliance" (Allen et al., 2014, p.3). Following this idea, does not fit well into the logics and discourse of the neoliberal age, in which there contrarily, never seems to be enough time. As will be exemplified within different categories later on, his way of doing things appears as rather rebellious in a time that is dominated by *participatory* logics.

4.2.2 Judgement shots

Typical *poverty porn* television shows are inclined to bolster their programmes with 'judgement shots', that in the end support an anti-welfare message. In order to uphold the idea that people in poverty and in particularly, people on benefits, are merely lazy 'shirkers' that only want to take advantage of those benefits, these judgement shots, therefore tend to emphasize and zoom in on all the 'bad' things that are resultant of their 'bad' choices and 'bad' taste. For instance, the focus of the camera goes to dirt and rubbish, to remainders of addictive behavior, like cigarettes or tins of beer, or, to on the one hand cheap and worn-out furniture and on the other hand luxurious and expensive technological devices, or tends to only show people when hanging around on the streets. In this sense, these people would be viewed as "products

of a bloated welfare state" (Allen et al., 2014) and therefore should be treated punitively and be taunted, implying they should feel ashamed of themselves (Jensen, 2014). In *Schuldig*, several of these kinds of images are made visible throughout the episodes, as will be described in the following categories. However, overall, the focus appears to be rather on creating context about the nature of people's problems, and showing the negative effects of the *decline* of the welfare state, instead of depicting the characters as 'bad' citizens that have ruined themselves and their surroundings due to 'bad', convenient choices. What is striking at first instance, is that the emphasis is often on the effects of a complex bureaucratic system and therefore, this will firstly be discussed as a subsection within the overlapping category of 'judgement shots'.

The (in)visibility of bureaucracy Frequently, scenes featuring Ditte, involve images of piles of paperwork and administration. Here, we see Ditte during her continuous struggle to keep all the plates spinning, making phone calls and appointments with creditors, institutions and insurance companies. The bureaucratic burden which she has ended up in is made visible through piles of receipts, envelopes, letters and gags of paper. This also applies to the other characters, they are often viewed while struggling with their administrative work, for instance when Carmelita visits her social worker who asked her to bring along all of the paperwork of the past years. As she described it, "so much paperwork, it almost looks like a museum!" (Sylbing & Gould, 2016, episode 1). Here, attempts to gain control over their administration reflects the idea of the participatory society that now, people have to take care of their own problems, and also have to solve them by themselves, taking their own responsibility. However, it is also shown how a character like Ditte is having a hard time managing this, and viewed this way, rather depicts her as a 'victim' of the bureaucratic system that is struggling to find its way.

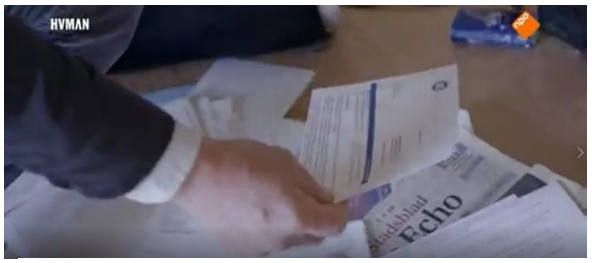

Figure 2: Piles of letters


Figure 3: Ditte, struggling with her administration

Furthermore, those piles of paperwork and unopened envelopes also return when following debt collector Ed, yet are in his case often lying in a corner of an emptied house that has recently been left by the owners. The 'forgotten' or 'hidden' envelopes appears a theme that more characters in *Schuldig* seem to share: For Ramona, whom together with her family was forced to leave her house in the context of an eviction, her main reason of the situation having gotten out of hand, was shame. Due to circumstances, in the series she reveals that she

hid all the letters sent by creditors and debt collectors, as a means to avoid being confronted with her problems. This avoidance of the mailbox is also being shared by Satcha, one of the social workers who had, until recently, dealt with debts herself, explaining that "[..] *you make sure to stay away from those things that give you the feeling of drowning. This also applies to the mailbox. Because it constantly confronts you with the fact that you do not have any money, that your life is a mess. […] So yeah, at a certain moment I just didn't open the envelopes anymore*" (Sylbing & Gould, 2016, episode 3). Interestingly, Jensen (2014) argues that *poverty porn* television often attempts to convey the message to the audience, that the only feeling that people with financial problems should have, is shame, and therefore these people should be repudiated. In *Schuldig* however, people are indeed experiencing shame, yet their explanations contribute to a better understanding that would rather lead to a sense of empathy than disapproval.

Another way in which this feeling of shame in the context of the bureaucratic system returns, is when some scenes make clear that even in the year of 2016, there are people lagging behind in the developments of new technologies, and are experiencing trouble in staying up to date with their skills and knowledge. For instance, this is seen when Carmelita has to admit to her social worker that she has never before submitted an online tax return, which is a relatively simple task. Her reason for this is that she does not know about it, simply because of the fact that she has never done it before. Although at first sight this seems to reflect a mindset of carelessness, it also indicates towards feelings of shame and an attempt to hide her inability of carrying out such a simple task.

In the case of Dennis, shame does however not appear to be a prevailing emotion, he rather embodies a nostalgic longing for the past, which simultaneously reveals the nature of his failing to succeed in fixing his financial problems. For instance, Dennis keeps his administration together with old-fashioned folders, and writes his letters to official organizations by hand, even though he owns a laptop. Besides that, when making phone calls, he uses a rotary dial that hangs on a wall in his pet shop. When he makes payments to his creditors, he often visits the authorities in person, to pay them with 'real', paper bills. He mentions frequently that he thinks it is important to, every once in a while, drop by at the organizations and authorities whom he owes money, in order to show that he is putting effort and time in managing his payments, and that he has not forgotten about them.

His overall dealing with the bureaucratic system is illustrated best when he desperately attempts to find a solution for his problems by calling a former civil servant of the Amsterdam municipality, of which he still got the telephone number. The woman, who emphasizes she

cannot help him any further, advises him to take the higher ground. Dennis then answers: "*Yeah but you are not getting anywhere, that is what they call this democracy, or how was it called.. bureaucracy, it's like.. this person is passing it on to this other person.. and this one is passing it on to him..*" (Sylbing & Gould, 2016, episode 2). Here again, Dennis could be read as embodying a "figure of nostalgia and desire" (Allen et al., 2014), as a person that does not seem to live in the neoliberalist, capitalist era, but rather comes from a different time, and hence, prefers to ignore the dominant tendencies of neoliberalism and bureaucracy.

Rubbish

As mentioned before, the focus on images that show rubbish and filth are typical 'judgement shots' in the genre of poverty porn, containing primarily remainders of alcohol or tobacco usage, remainders of unhealthy food consumption, garbage bags, sofas on the street or "dog soiled carpets" (Law & Mooney, 2011), and altogether contribute to the bad image of the people dealing with poverty. Throughout *Schuldig*, similar images are viewed, yet often the particular link to the main characters seems to be missing, and a certain distance is being maintained, making it more difficult to simply point towards the one who is responsible for instance for the garbage that is shown.

For instance, occasionally, images appear with large containers placed in the streets of the neighborhood, with machines dumping the contents of a household into those containers. The containers are filled with furniture and clearly show that frequently, houses are being cleared due to evictions. Another image that is shown is that of a man going through a pile of rubbish and furniture, dumped on the corner of a street, clearly hoping to find any valuable objects, which reinforces the sadness and the poor situation of the neighborhood. Scenes involving Ed the debt collector, often demonstrate this hopelessness even more: they show the empty, abandoned houses that reveal the aftermath of a sudden eviction in which the residents did not manage to take all of their stuff out of the house on time due to the hurry. Remainders of rubbish, toys, food packages, children's CDs, writings on a wall, soccer posters, are lying in the corners of the house, indicating that the house until recently, used to be filled with busy, young family lives.

Another image of a house that is being cleared, led by Ed, shows the remainders of a tough life: a balcony filled with empty beer crates, burnt cigarettes, garbage, a hole in the wall, packages of fast food, piles of empty alcohol bottles, even crystal meth and a weapon were found. Interestingly, this particular scene did not only focus on 'bad' things, but also zoomed in on a quite good-looking school report of the previous tenant, as an inducement for Ed to

clarify the underlying context of this particular tenant, namely being left by his father, a mother that deceased at a young age, leading to the boy being abandoned and his life subsequently getting out of control, in spite of potential hope-giving school results. Showing it this way, could then be read as a demonstration of the misery people can end up in, rather than an opportunity for judging.

Even more striking are the images that two employees of the clearing company are watching on a computer, pictures that were taken during the emptying of a house, which reveal that sometimes it can get even worse: on the pictures, we see severely polluted houses that are stuffed with garbage all around and in some cases the furniture is not even visible anymore due to all the garbage entirely covering it. One picture shows a room filled with beer cans up to the ceiling, and even on a mattress, another photograph shows a bathroom of which the original white color is not visible anymore, yet has turned into brown filthiness. This feeling of hopelessness that derives from the described images, even though they convey quite some harshness, are edited and placed within the story in such a way that they give a rather nuanced view on poverty, and the shocking images do not take the upper hand. For instance, some images are alternated with more positive views of the neighborhood, of children in the playground.

Figure 4 and 5: Looking at images of rubbish

Interestingly, such shocking images are not shown in combination with the main characters. For instance, Ron, Ramona and their children, are primarily shown with moving boxes that they are surrounded by since they are spread throughout Ramona's parents' house. Although their situation and house was probably not in such a bad state as the examples previously described, the viewer only gets to see images of abandoned, soiled houses that were owned by people that remained anonymous, and were not directly associated with one of the main characters of the series. Focusing on Dennis in his own house, it is clearly visible that he currently does not have enough time or energy to clean up his house as it seems like quite a mess. However, because such scenes are combined with seeing him taking care of and feeding his pigeons in a very loving way, this compensates the messy house immediately.

Another scene in which we actually do see one of the main characters associated with 'judgement' images such as rubbish, is when Ditte is collecting plastic garbage off the streets. She does this in exchange for coins that she can redeem for a free drink or a dinner at a restaurant. Thus, she is turning the 'garbage' into something beneficial, and this providing of a compensation suits well within the logics of the *participatory society*. This example however perfectly illustrates the subsequent inequality that is a consequence of the ideal of equality within the *participatory society*: although in *Schuldig*, it is demonstrated how any person nowadays is more vulnerable for getting into debts and poverty, a person like Ditte seems to have relatively more know-how of how to make use of inventive, creative strategies that allow her to be able to still be actually participating in society. Yet, this does not seem to apply to everyone and therefore reveals an inequality.

People 'loitering' in the streets

Another image that is a 'judgement shot' within *poverty porn*, would be one in which children are hanging around on the streets without their parents at night. Such an image is also seen in *Schuldig*, particularly with one of Ron and Ramona's children. Their son shows where he plays hide-and-seek with his friends, and where his favorite spot, on a square is located, a place where he likes to be on his own. As he explains himself, this spot is very silent, without all the noise of his grandparents' home. In another scene, his parents also explain the situation, saying that their son is only fleeing from everything and is outside so often because he does not want to be with them, which is why Ron and Ramona are transforming the tiny attic of Ramona's parents' home into a temporary 'own' living space. With this, the issue of their son does not seem entirely isolated or decontextualized from the situation, rather, it is shown that they are putting effort in changing the problem and are not simply giving up on such problems but still have hope that things will get better, showing their resilience. Besides this, other images in which children are being outside, are simply showing them playing on the streets or at the playground, thus, they are not 'loitering' but clearly enjoying themselves and having fun.

Furthermore, in a couple of scenes we see some women 'hanging' on the streets or on a bench at a square. Sometimes only one of them returns in the series, and sometimes they are with the three of them, talking for instance about their daily lives or their debt counsellors. One of them comes across as quite a 'tough' woman, due to her way of talking that can be considered quite rude, as well as her way of making jokes that are accompanied with foul language. At first glance, they might appear as women that are simply

Figure 6: Women 'loitering' on the streets

hanging around doing nothing, and considering that, they could be defined as 'skivers', who would symbolize 'everything' that ought to be wrong with the welfare state (Jensen, 2014). However, when we hear them talking, we find out all of them have experienced severe debt problems, and one of them even tells she has just gotten out of debts, after over ten years of being involved in a process of debt restructuring. Thus, they may be 'hanging around', yet not necessarily because they are unemployed and are not doing anything.

Objects of consumption

Besides these 'judgement shots' showing that everything that people in poverty are surrounded by, is filthy and worn-out, in poverty porn there is also a tendency of zooming in on the consumption behavior of people. The contrast between on the one hand dirty, messy furniture or a messy front yard that is not taken care of, and on the other hand often luxurious technological objects such as plasma televisions or the newest smartphones, can sometimes not be bigger and explicitly seems to steer the audience into making a moral judgment, aiming to make the audience dismiss this kind of consumption behavior. Within this subsection, not only will the focus be on such technological devices, but also on the —whether or not controversial— possession of motor-driven vehicles, as well as on the relationship towards one's appearance. These different kinds of consumption behavior all seem to reveal the complexity of consumption, poverty, and representation.

a. Television

The television as an object of consumption is described in the literature as an indicator of people in poverty having a "bad taste" and are "flawed consumers" (Law & Mooney, 2011). Even though, ironically enough, the audience that is watching television shows is in the possession of a television itself, certain objects of consumption such as plasma TVs are viewed as something 'they', the poor people, should not own because 'they' should be spending their money on products and services that provide them from primary needs. In *Schuldig*, the television as an object of consumption is returning several times.

Occasionally, there are images of the streets at night, where the flickering television lights, coming from living rooms, are reflected on the sidewalks. One short peek inside the living room of Ron and Ramona's family, shows a similar picture: everyone, the grandparents, children, and Ron and Ramona, while eating fries, is sitting around the television or focused on his or her own mobile device. Such images both seem to function as a means to show that people in this neighborhood, are, just like anywhere else, watching television at night. Yet also, they

reflect an overall feeling of sadness that suggests that there might be people who have nothing else that can help them to feel happy, and the television is all that is left to provide them some comfort and joy.

This particularly applies to Carmelita, who is regularly viewed while sitting on her couch in the living room, clearly enjoying the activity of watching television. During a visit to her social worker, she tells him she even has one television in her living room and one in her bedroom. This might sound like quite a lot for a woman living on her own, yet, as she explains, she considers her television the only company there is, almost functioning as a substitute of the partner she does not have. This is also the reason why she insists that she does not want her television subscription to be reduced to the minimum. Eventually, her social worker agrees upon this decision, because he realizes how much the television means to Carmelita. Considering this, the television seems the only hope she has left, that she does not want to give up on, hence, television watching might even more function as a form of escapism for people in these circumstances, which would legitimize them consuming such products.

With another scene it even becomes more clear how large companies are taking advantage of this need of something like a television. Ramona explains how alluring technological products can be, when she gives the example of an energy company that attempted to convince her of becoming their member while seducing her with the offer of a free tablet. Although she now knows that she should say 'no' to such offers, this example reveals the fragile position of many people in debts, and moreover, puts into question whether poor people also 'deserve' to enjoy some luxury or should deal with the fact that they do not have the 'right' to and, so to speak, lie in the bed they have made.

b. Vehicles

Not only there appears the question of who deserves luxury products, but moreover, there is also the question of what counts as luxury, particularly for people in poverty. For instance, Ditte has to give up her car and sell it, in order to be eligible for the services of the food bank, so that she can demonstrate she has no large expenses other than her fixed charges. The car for her is a resource that makes her life more comfortable, but is also crucial because she needs it because it is the only way for her to get to the doctors' appointments in the hospital that is located at the other side of the city. Yet, being in possession of a car could seem as something unfair towards other people that receive aid from the food bank, meaning that Ditte eventually has no other choice than to sell it and to find an alternative way of visiting the hospital.

The possession of certain luxury products as already mentioned, would particularly in *poverty porn* be considered 'wrong' because, viewed from the audience, those are not the products they should be consuming while being poor and on benefits. Interestingly, within the series, specifically the possession of a car is something many poor people themselves detest and look down on: considering a car a luxury product, appears to be an idea shared by other people in the Vogelbuurt. A woman in the street that just arrived from the food bank, while showing the camera crew what kind of food is in her bags, responds to an expensive-looking convertible that passes by. Jokingly, the woman makes a gesture of hitchhiking with her thumb, after which she yells "*Nice waggie waggie*!", referring to the wagon, while laughing (Sylbing & Gould, 2016, episode 1). Another reference to cars as luxury product is jokingly made by Carmelita when she describes her mobility scooter. When Paul mentions that in order to make a request for a client-linked budget, he needs certain documents, Carmelita says: "*Well, I live less than five minutes away from here, I am here with my.. I am here with my Maserati. That grey one with those three wheels*." Paul answers to her: "*Ah, the one that the CEO of the housing association also owns! He also owns a Maserati*." (Sylbing & Gould, 2016, episode 1), after which Carmelita drives home on her mobility scooter.

Yet, as opposed to a car, a mobility scooter can easily be thought of as the ideal vehicle for lazy, overweight, 'scrounger' people that claim to be dealing with health issues, while 'spending' the money of the state, of taxpayers, to transport yourself from one place to another. At first glance, it is quite easy to think of Carmelita in a similar vein. However, references are made to her chronic illness, suffering from rheumatism made Carmelita severely restricted in her everyday life and a mobility scooter seems to somewhat facilitate her circumstances.

A motor scooter might elicit similar associations as the mobility scooter: benefit 'shirkers' are lazy people that appear to have so much laxity that they let themselves being moved forward passively, with the help of a motor drive. In the series, Ron and Ramona, both (former) benefit claimants, are also in the possession of a motor scooter, and after a meeting with the debt assistance agency, we see them driving home, with Ramona on the back of the scooter that Ron is driving. The scene is played in slow-motion and uplifting sixties rock music is playing in the background, the couple looks happy, the sun is shining, Ramona lovingly leans against Ron's back, and the overall vibe of the scene has something romantic (see Figure 5).

This particular scene illustrates well the conflict of responsibility and agency they encounter: on the one hand, Ramona and Ron have decided they will fix their debt problems on their own, with the confidence in their own capabilities, and without going into administrative receivership. Their desire to be free and to buy what- and whenever they want, especially if it

concerns their children, outweighs any sacrifice they are pushed to make. On the other hand, Will, the head of the debt assistance agency, attempts to gently steer the couple into going into receivership. She clearly explains that although she truly believes in the couple doing the best they can, she is also aware of the fact that, based on her knowledge and experience, people like Ron and Ramona unfortunately often fall back into the same circumstances if they do not follow the advice of professionals, talking about them as part of a specific target group in which poverty seems to be passed on intergenerationally. Yet, the scene with the motor scooter sheds a different light on the couple, that arguably transforms them from their 'benefits shirker', 'scrounger' label into agentic, independent human beings, capable of making their own decisions.

Figure 7: Ron and Ramona on their motor scooter

c. Keeping up appearances

In a similar way as with the discussed objects of consumption, when it comes to one's appearance, the same discussion seems to be at play: should poor people be occupied with their appearance and do they deserve to do so? On the one hand, within the genre of *poverty porn*, one would say that appearance is not something poor people should be spending any money on as it would be a waste and moreover, it should be spent on 'real', essential things. Their consumption behavior when it comes to their appearance therefore would focus on their 'bad taste' (Law & Mooney, 2011) which is manifested in expensive clothing or flashy jewelry. On the contrary, viewed from a *participatory* perspective, an investment in your own appearance would pay off positively in other areas, and thus would be worth it. Debt collector Ed gives his opinion about this issue in one of the episodes, arguing that in case you are facing large financial problems, you have to deal with the fact that people might have an opinion about you, for instance because you do not drive around in the newest car, or because you do not wear the prettiest clothes there are. He argues that this is something that often brings people only further into problems, while calling it 'keeping up appearances'.

In *Schuldig*, in different ways it becomes visible how people are dealing with and interpreting these ideas about appearance in different ways. Particularly Carmelita seems to be actively counteracting the idea that she would be worth less than other people, and would not deserve to look good. Very frequently, she is seen during her visits at the manicurist or hair dresser, and as the voice-over, but also she herself describes it, she is above all, "a lady",

meaning that despite of the fact that she deals with debts and is dependent on the food bank for her daily bread, this does not mean she has to give up on her appearance. Not only does it make her look good and contribute to avoiding any negative judgements that are based on her appearance, but it also seems to be a way in which she, despite of her circumstances, continues to taking care of herself. This idea is being shared by Valerie, a young student who also deals with debts, when she is being filmed in her dorm room, which is filled with more than twenty pairs of shoes. As she describes it, "*you just have to look decently even though you have no money […] because ever since history, people will judge about you very easily*" (Sylbing & Gould, 2016, episode 5).

For Ditte as well, appearance is a very important matter and it is clear that it makes her feel insecure and uncomfortable, for instance when she is standing in front of the mirror, doubting about what to wear during her first visit to the food bank. However, for her it is not so much a question of looking too poor, but rather of looking too 'chic', and she does not want to stand out as compared to others who might think she does not belong in a place such as a food bank.

Again, Dennis seems to be rejecting the logics of neoliberalism when it comes to the issue of appearance, which is a recurring theme and a confronting factor that, according to his accountant is the main reason for his pet shop balancing on the brink of bankruptcy. His accountant is convinced that transforming his own appearance, as well as the appearance of his shop, would lead to an uplift in his financial situation, mentioning "*you should change yourself, because if you look fresh, your store will start looking fresh*" (Sylbing & Gould, 2016, episode 4), whereas Dennis is convinced that those twenty euros spent at the hair dresser could also be invested in his own shop, and would lead to three or four pleased customers. In the end he does follow up the accountant's advice by investing some money in redecorating his pet shop, yet eventually, it does not seem to pay off. This example illustrates clearly how the neoliberal idea of 'transformation leading to success' is not a universal rule that would always be effective, and that trying to solve the issue of appearance does not automatically lead to tackling the underlying nature of debts and poverty.

4.2.3 Family situation

In *poverty porn* television programmes, often people's family situations are rather unstable and dysfunctional, focusing on broken families that are dealing with issues like teenage pregnancy, abortion, or large families with many children as these would yield more benefits. A typical returning figure that Jensen (2014) labelled 'the skiver', a figure that symbolizes all

that is wrong with the welfare system, can for instance turn up in the form of a single mother, or a father that is unemployed or absent in the family situation (Jensen, 2014). In *Schuldig*, some of these are also manifest, but there seems an additional focus on the underlying structural nature of these problematic circumstances.

The dysfunctional family

The clearest example of 'the dysfunctional family' is the family of Ron and Ramona. Their financial problems and insecure situation started with an incapacity for work, leading to unemployment and dependence on state benefits. The moving in of Ron's ill mother and a subsequent lagging behind in rent payments, led to them being evicted and forced them to move in with Ramona's parents. Yet, next to them, also Ramona's sister and her child have moved in with the parents, resulting in eight people living in a tiny house that is owned by people who clearly do not live in straitened circumstances either.

Particularly the striking image of all these people living together in one tiny house, seeing that they, over different generations, do not seem to know how to resolve this returning problem with poverty, demonstrates the idea that poverty is often sustained intergenerationally and particularly in combination with certain life circumstances such as unemployment and illness shows that the chain of poverty is difficult to be broken. This is also clearly seen with Carmelita's situation: she came into debts when difficult family circumstances led to her having to take care of her granddaughter that was not able to live with her single mother. Yet, more than in earlier times, the combination of troubled families together with a new, "neoliberal poverty", namely debts (Lazzarato, 2009) that are artificially made invisible and are not recognized as being 'real' poverty, leads to even more problems for people like Ron, Ramona and Carmelita.

The single mother

Furthermore, there are several examples of single motherhood, yet none of these are about a main character. Rather, these are people with smaller shares in the series, or examples given from a more distant point of view. Some of these examples emphasize the resilience and strength of single motherhood, for instance the story of Satcha, a social worker, who explains the main cause of the debts she once was dealing with. She tells that her position as a single mother is tough, especially since she is raising a disabled daughter, but precisely because she has managed to do this on her own, this seems to testify of her ability as an agentic human being to counter these problems.

Another example in which single motherhood is being discussed, shows two women that were invited to the Leefkringhuis to talk with an alderman of the municipality, mister Vliegenthart, about their poignant situations, in order to give him a clearer image of the problems they encounter as persons living in poverty. Both of these mothers emphasize the fact that their problems have changed their motherhood in such a way that they feel like not being themselves anymore, and are mainly driven by feelings of stress, as one of the mothers describes it "*I am a ticking timebomb […] and I am no longer the cosy mother that I used to be"* (Sylbing & Gould, 2016, episode 4). In this way the audience gets the opportunity to become more familiar with their feelings, and immediately judging them for their positions in society would be too simple. Besides this, their testimonies could be viewed as fitting into the counternarrative of "*voice and action*" as posed by Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010), as these women's expertise and experiences in poverty can influence the political agenda.

The most extreme example however is given from a more distant and abstract point of view, in a scene where Ed tells about his experiences of being a debt collector: during one of the evictions he was leading, they found an entirely neglected baby lying under a pile of clothes, in the house of a woman that was presumably living on her own. The distance that is being kept with this example makes it difficult for the audience to immediately link a rather shocking story to one of the main characters. With showing the daily troubles of the families of Ron and Ramona, Carmelita, and the two single mothers, one can still get a sense of empathy that helps understanding the difficulties of poverty but seems to avoid the audience from truly judging them for their situations.

4.2.4 Lifestyle

Health

In poverty porn television, focusing on people's lifestyle frequently only shows their 'bad' consumption behavior, with drugs, alcohol or tobacco usage appearing as rather normal. Resultant of this bad behavior is therefore a low life expectancy and many kinds of illnesses. Again, following the logics of neoliberalism, taking care of oneself in such a way that it pays off, would be considered better, yet illnesses would in this way be perceived as resultant of 'bad' behavior and would erase the idea of bad luck.

a. Substance (ab)use

Substance abuse is present throughout the series, yet often shown in a subtle way, limited to a minimum, and overall seems to be rejected by the poor people themselves. For

instance, when Ramona and Ron are unpacking their moving boxes, one of the first things they unpack is the box with bottles of liquor. However, it is not shown for instance whether, or in what quantity they consume those bottles. A scene in which we see their son consume energy drink could be another signifier for this family to be consuming 'bad', noxious products, however the kid himself acknowledges that energy drink is not good for his health.. The one time alcohol is being consumed, is when Ditte is drinking her glass of wine that she earned through collecting plastic garbage, which insinuates she deserved it because she has actively put effort into it. Overall, drugs usage or addictions does not at all appear in the series. Interestingly, the only one time it is being shown, is when Ditte is smoking weed. However, she smokes medical weed that she obtains through a medical prescription at the pharmacy. Using drugs in this sense is only associated with illness and therefore also legitimizes it.

When it comes to tobacco usage, occasionally Dennis is shown smoking a cigarette inside his pet shop, something that is not very common anymore these days. This could be read again as more 'rebellious' in the sense that it does not seem to matter to him that smoking would be bad for your health. Furthermore, scenes in which he is shown while smoking, are usually moments in which he seems rather desperate because of his problems, and his cigarette seems like a legitimization for this 'bad', unhealthy behavior. Furthermore, smoking appears to be primarily associated with disapproval, as a conversation between the head of the food bank, Abdelmalik, and a client, illustrates well: Abdelmalik clearly explains to the man that if the man chooses to invest the little money he has into his smoking addiction, the consequence of his 'improvident' behavior is that he is not eligible for a food box.

b. Illness and health

The presumably 'bad taste' of the main characters in *poverty porn* television would be made clear through showing their unhealthy eating behavior. However, most people that are shown food in *Schuldig*, are people that are depending on the food bank, where, except for left-over cakes of Christmas, most of the food is healthy. Ditte even seems quite satisfied with all the vegetables that she received in her food box. Furthermore, some people, among whom also Carmelita, joined a workshop in which they learn how to eat healthily with a small budget, and hence, how to take good care of themselves to avoid illnesses. Namely, many people in the series are coping with illness: Ron and Ramona had gotten into financial trouble due to illness. Their situation deteriorated because they let Ron's mother stay at their place because she was recovering from a stroke. Also, Ditte had gotten into debts because of breast cancer, and Carmelita's opportunities were restricted due to severe rheumatism.

Besides the depoliticization of class, as mentioned in the theoretical section, which is a strategy used particularly in *poverty porn*, to hide social, biopolitical constructions, there is another construction that Runswick-Cole and Goodley (2015) argued is being depoliticized, namely (dis)ability. The researchers argue that in *Benefits Street*, the disability of several people is chosen to be made visible or invisible, dependent on whether this favors the dominant storyline, namely that "people on benefits are scroungers" (p. 646). In case people are favored to be seen as 'scroungers', they are often not associated with a disability, whereas they are being associated with a disability in case of wanting to portray them as being needy. In *Schuldig*, as far as we as viewers know, we are familiar with all the (dis)abilities of the main characters, yet this does not support the idea of them being needy, but rather as being part of a group in society that is extra vulnerable and sensitive for the "punitive" workings of the neoliberal market, indicating they are part of the group of people with insecure positions as compared to others without a disability.

Furthermore, being part of the workforce is easily associated with being a "good" citizen, and it is being questioned how people that are not able to work due to disability, should then be considered (Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2015). In *Schuldig*, an example of a "good" citizen could be Ditte, who, despite of her disability still attempts to work three days per week. On the other hand, Carmelita's disability is also clearly visible, yet we do not know for sure whether she is involved in any kind of job. Following this, the approach towards (dis)ability throughout *Schuldig* seems ambiguous.

Behavior

The behavior of people in poverty, according to *poverty porn* television, would be primarily considered negative: people would behave anti-socially and in a deviant way, use foul language, have personal defects and disorders, are tended to use violence if that is needed, and are even engaged in all kinds of criminal behavior. All of this behavior would be led by a need to satisfy their consumption needs, and therefore they cannot seem to resist their instincts.

a. Criminality and violence

When it comes to criminal or violent behavior, there are limited incidents that would indicate the characters are being involved with criminal behavior. One example of petty crime is given by Ditte, who admits that she had once stolen a pack of butter from the grocery store, which happened on a moment in her life that she hardly had any money left and got frustrated and angry about that. Besides this, the association with criminality is usually one in which

people *feel* like they are being treated as if they were criminals, by the big organizations and companies that punish them for not paying. For instance, a client at the Leefkringhuis starts crying when he tells to Paul that he was treated badly by the police who arrived at his door because of payment problems he had with his car. The man explicitly emphasized that he had never had these kinds of problems before and felt like he was treated like a criminal.

The moments in which there actually is violent or criminal behavior involved, are approached in a more abstract way. For instance, there is a scene in which a man acts violently and starts screaming to a social worker, yet after a while we find out this is a role-play within the context of a training workshop for social workers. Another example of violence is also viewed from a certain distance, as it is an example of violence that Ed, the bailiff, once experienced. He tells how a man, after ringing his door bell, aggressively came his way and started beating him. Although Ed himself knew to get away from this man in time, he had afterwards heard that a couple of days later, this same man had beaten someone from a housing association to death.

b. Foul language

Apart from the fact that some of the main characters have a typical 'Amsterdam' accent that could be associated with the working-class, none of the main characters use any explicit indecent language. Again, the only time we hear some very aggressive, cursing words, is illustrated from a distant perspective, namely when an employee of a housing association starts reading aloud an e-mail he recently received from a tenant. In the e-mail, the tenant uses phrases and wordings associated with all kinds of illnesses and inappropriate body parts. However, the employee explains, a couple of days after receiving this e-mail, the tenant had sent another e-mail writing his apologies for his bad language and behavior, blaming his behavior on a bad mood that he derived due to feelings of stress.

c. Attitude

Viewed from the audience perspective, what *poverty porn* television attempts to convey, is that the audience will think of the people in poverty as having a wrong attitude which would be the main reason for their poverty. Such an attitude reflects the idea that people are not competent enough, but moreover, that they are not willing enough to change and are therefore viewed as irresponsible, lazy and not consisting of any discipline. Moreover, such a view is in line with the *Othering* frame as posed by Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010), which holds that the distance between 'us', the audience, and 'them', the poor people is maintained through creating a contrast between a 'normal' and 'deviant' attitude. What becomes clear in analyzing

the attitudes of the main characters of *Schuldig*, is that these people are approached in various ways, which makes it almost impossible to only consider them from this one perspective only. Although there seems an overall, common idea that portrays all the main characters as 'victims' of the neoliberal, participatory society, hence, this commonality brought them together in the series, far from only showing them in simplistic and stereotypical ways, they should be seen as multifaceted characters that approach poverty differently and in their own, agentic ways.

For instance, Ditte is shown as being someone who has mainly gotten into financial trouble due to illness. Although she explains that during her having cancer, she made ill-considered choices that led her to becoming bankrupt, the overall idea remains that she was plagued by illness. Also, it is emphasized that before this life, Ditte used to be very successful with a glamorous life. This emphasizes the idea that she did not deserve to be in debts. Moreover, she also does not represent a typical image of the poor, especially when she is working at an office, dressed in a classy office-outfit. The idea of her not belonging 'here', in this place of debts, is also reinforced when she reads aloud the free advice she received from the municipality of Amsterdam, of how to save money: 'of course she knows how to save money', 'she is not stupid', seems the message conveyed here: she is savvy enough to fix her own problems. The creative strategies that Ditte carries out, such as the collection of plastic garbage, are suitable in the counternarrative of "*agency/resistance*" (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010), with poor people being empowered and attempting to break away from poverty. However, a risk that these scholars warned for, is that in portraying poor people in such a way, this only reinforces the *Othering* perspective, namely through the idea that this agency simultaneously comes with a new reason to still blame her for her poor situation.

Focusing on Carmelita, an entirely different approach seems visible: as a viewer, one could get the idea that Carmelita does not care enough about her situation and is not willingly enough to actually tackle the problems. Her inability of getting her administration fixed, implies that she is incompetent, nonchalant, or lazy, and together with seeing her very occupied with her appearance and with enjoying her spare time, it might appear as if she is "shirking" and only taking advantage of her benefits, which altogether resembles of a *poverty porn* approach. Yet, on the other hand, knowing that she is still busy with doing 'fun' things and taking care of herself, could also be viewed from a different light: she knows how to be still standing, even in times of financial troubles, and this reflects a sense of resilience, still having hope for a better future, and not allowing to be defined by the problematic circumstances she is in.

A similar twofold image is also seen with the portrayal of Ron and Ramona. On the one hand, based on their appearance, Ron and Ramona could be best described as "benefits

scroungers" that do not seem to be taking care of their own appearance and health properly. Additionally, their way of talking, indicates they are not highly educated, which contributes to this idea. The fact that they have ended up in such a complex, problematic situation with so many different factors that have contributed to this, makes them appear as slightly ignorant. The way they are spoken about when the voice-over is talking, comes across as if they are lower in hierarchy, and seem rather stubborn, because they do not want to listen to the 'directress' Will, from the debt assistance agency, implying she stands higher in hierarchy than they do. However, on the other hand, as was illustrated by the example of the couple on their motor scooter, they could also be viewed as independent and agentic, making their own choices, and are instead good, hard-working people that have aspirations through working on their and their children's future, for instance with the renovation of the tiny attic that functions as their temporary home.

Lastly, when analyzing the character and attitude of Dennis, his way of mastering the situation could be read in even more than two ways. First of all, one could view him as being an incompetent person, and seen from the perspective of his accountant, he would be making the wrong, 'bad' choices, by not investing in his or his shop's appearance and hence, not having the ability to prioritizing and tackling the debt problems. However, it is shown how he is struggling and instead, does surely care, which he also mentions, saying that "giving up is no option", and hence, neither Dennis can simply be viewed as the "abject Other of the 'good', hard-working', future-orientated, individualistic and entrepreneurial neoliberal citizen" (Allen et al., 2014). Yet, he does prefer to solve the problems in his own way and seems to resist the suggested and expected way of doing this. The second way in which his attitude then could be interpreted, makes him come across as a 'nostalgic figure', that inclines towards a heroic idea of him doing what he wants to solve his problems, which could contribute to sympathizing with him. Thirdly, Dennis not appearing to live in this same era as most people do, by lagging behind in the modern technological world, could also be seen as him being innocent and naïve, and since he does not seem to entirely do this on purpose, this could also be interpreted as sympathetic.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusion

The current research was introduced with an urgent issue that needed to be resolved. Van Eijk (2014), among others, noticed something problematic going on in Dutch television programmes: they bear resemblance to the genre of *poverty porn*. Overall, this genre is considered problematic due to two issues, respectively its disreputable relationship with reflecting reality, and the coinciding ignorance of the structural reasons of poverty while emphasizing the individual as main cause for its poor situation, which together leads to a stigmatizing, stereotypical image of the poor. Because of this, van Eijk (2014) raised the question when the day would arrive that television would address this differently, resulting in a more positive outcome. Two years after this question, the vast amount of positive criticisms on the documentary series *Schuldig* seemed to shed new light on this set issue. How is it possible, in a time dominated by the logics of neoliberalism, that a television programme could lead to such criticisms?

Based on this initial question, the goal of this study was to find out in more detail whether and how poverty could be represented in such a way that it could lead to different outcomes within the public and political debate. More specifically, through analyzing two kinds of data that were concerned with the reception and content of *Schuldig*, an answer could be found to the main research question of this study, which is: '*In light of conventional media representations of poverty, what makes the case of Schuldig a relatively novel and unique discourse about poverty*?'. In order to formulate a clear answer to this question, the main findings of this study are therefore discussed.

First of all, what the analysis of newspaper coverage on *Schuldig* found, was that poverty in this series can be viewed from not just one simplistic, one-sided view, but rather from an assemblage of various perspectives, that do not necessarily exclude one another, but are rather seen as complementary. Namely, the newspaper articles approached poverty in *Schuldig* as something in which the poor are undeserving victims of the failing system, which creates empathy with the characters, reflecting the *pathetic* approach. Besides this, a rather opposite, *nuanced* approach makes sure that poverty is constructed in such a way that it does not point towards 'the system' as the culprit of poverty, but through equal attention to all involved parties, rather raises the question of whom is to blame for this guilt, hence, "who is paying the bill". A third approach, the *heroic* view, that considers the characters almost as fictional characters resembling of a storybook, that emphasizes their heroic, agentic way of acting, even more contributes to the multilateral image of the poor.

This idea, of different, sometimes even opposing views of poverty that seem to coexist within one discourse, is a common main finding that derived from the analysis of the series as well. Not only within the narratives, the issue of debts is shown from different angles, but moreover, the characters themselves often appear to have a multifaceted image, leaving in the middle what the viewer should think of them. In doing so, it is up to the audience to make a judgement that is more critical, due to the broad range of interpretations that is provided, instead of the viewer being imposed with only one kind of negative interpretations that make it difficult to think of alternative ways in which to consider the content.

The themes that originate from the way in which the genre of *poverty porn* is constructed, thus, location, judgement shots, family situation and lifestyle, are actively at play within *Schuldig* as well, yet what is interesting, is that they are constructed in such a way that every time they appear to be demonstrable, a certain kind of rhetoric is doing its work, that transforms the 'bad' into something more positive. The example of Ditte collecting garbage that provides her with a free drink, thus, turning her problematic situation into something beneficial, seems metaphorical for the entire way in which poverty was portrayed throughout *Schuldig*: namely, the series has adopted the judgement shots of *poverty porn*, but instead of using them to evoke judgmental reactions with the audience, this seems to induce a reaction that can lead to more solution-focused discussion.

It can therefore be argued that in fact, all the findings of the analysis that are in this study reported as separate categories, could actually be placed together under the same overarching denominator of *judgement shots*. Whereas in *poverty porn*, judgmental shots would lead to confirmative opinions and judgements about poverty, implementing this technique in *Schuldig* seems an excellent rhetorical manner to make a loaded issue negotiable and in doing so, evoke a different, more diverse kind of debate. Thus, when certain elements are placed in a different way, this can turn out to be favoring the poor, instead of using those elements only as an instrument to convey an anti-welfare message.

More specifically, the way in which this technique is working, is executed in several ways in *Schuldig*. First, through focusing on the everyday life of the people in debts and simultaneously dissociating them from the more severely shocking visualized consequences of poverty that concern 'real' violence, more extreme family situations, or seriously contaminated environments, the possibility of directly judging the characters with whom the audience is more closely engaged, is thereby being erased. Thus, elements that from a *poverty porn* perspective could be considered more sensational, can still impact the audience, when viewing them from a more abstract point of view, and at the same time lead to a more nuanced image.

Second, the creation of additional context to poor people's (consumption) behavior and the choices they make in their struggle in a life with debts, seems to lead to a more comprehensive understanding of their situations. In *Schuldig*, not only is the viewer exposed to the specific events that happen to the characters, but these are embedded in a larger picture that gives more insights into the circumstances that are underlying these situations. In doing so, a more complex combination of both *episodic* framing as well as *thematic* framing as suggested by Iyengar (1990) is at play, leading to not being able to simply address the question of responsibility to the individual, but making the spectator more actively engaged in where to place the issues of poverty in this interplay between the individual and its structural context.

Third, an interesting way of *Othering* seems at play in *Schuldig*, which will be defined as "*Othering* in a beneficial way". Namely, whereas *poverty porn* would make a neighborhood seem homogenous as a means to support the underlying anti-welfare message, in *Schuldig*, the *Othering* framing is also used, but not as a means to create a clearer division between 'us' versus 'them', but rather to foster the idea that 'they' are just like 'us', hence, to make the poor more recognizable and make the audience identify more easily with them. Instead of creating distance, this rather contributes to a closer meeting between these two groups. Then, this kind of "self-*Othering*" seems to transform the underlying message into one suggesting that poverty could overcome all of us, and could be considered an additional counternarrative as posed by Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010), that makes advantageous usage of *Othering*.

In summation, based on these findings, it can be argued that the contrast between *poverty porn* and non-*poverty porn* seems less of a black versus white issue than initially assumed, and the formula of *Schuldig* is a rather complex one, meaning that it cannot simply be considered to be at the opposite of *poverty porn*. In fact, it can actually even be considered a form of *poverty porn*, yet implemented in such a way that it only adopts the benefits of the genre, namely the format being master in engaging the audience through dramatic, popular elements. Yet, it seems possible to leave the burdens of this genre, —exploiting a person in poverty as if it were an object— aside. To wit, in *Schuldig*, the multifaceted approach makes it almost impossible to blame the guilt to one specific person. Through including many different views on poverty that create a more balanced view of poverty, and giving the audience the opportunity of drawing their own conclusions based on these views, this results not simply in an audience that can only morally judge and consider the poor as an example of disgust. Instead, this would lead to more sympathy and subsequently, to judging the poor in a positive way. In this way, *Schuldig* has taken the best out of a controversial genre, and transformed it into something beneficial, even for the poor themselves.

Implications

With these findings, as has become clear, the current study has proven to give relevant contributions to theories on poverty representations. Moreover, also deriving from this study are implications to the societal debate. First of all, these findings are very relevant in a time where an increasing amount of taboos seems to be broken. The strategy of *depoliticization* has not only been implemented on class, but also on other social positions such as race or gender. For instance, the case of #Metoo has proven to be influential in opening up a debate about sexual misconduct. Yet, also the (in)visibility and representation of race in the media could be approached in a similar way as poverty has been approached in this study. Therefore, future research could be based on the concept of *poverty porn* in order to closely examine how questions of race or gender are represented and how this could be done alternatively.

Furthermore, the current study delivers societal relevance, in particular for media producers that want to stimulate societal change in a similar vein as with *Schuldig*. The current study is a starting point that reveals the formula of a format that can contribute to societal change, in the maintenance of a certain rhetorical strategy that could help make certain opinions and approaches be more powerfully presented in society. This is even more relevant, since the actual debate in the Netherlands has shifted to the question of the added value of so-called 'help-television'. Only recently, it was found that often, people in this kind of programmes are not only being portrayed in a stigmatized way, but moreover, also seem to be pushed into behaving in a certain way since they are often allured with the payment of money if they sign strict contracts (Nieber, 2018). Such findings reveal the necessity of an alternative approach to people in need of help, and with the examination of the formula of *Schuldig*, this kind of television could also be approached differently in order to avoid such scandals from happening.

Limitations and future research

Despite of the relevance of this study to social and scientific debates, there appear a couple of limitations for the current research that should be taken into consideration as well. First, the current research has focused primarily on transcripts of *Schuldig*, and has examined these through the operationalization of *poverty porn* as derived from the literature. Also, conclusions were based predominantly on textual transcripts, that, although these involved some visual aspects, did not entirely cover the visual aspects of the series. Therefore, this analysis could be supplemented with a more direct, visual comparison between *Schuldig* and another television programme in the genre of *poverty porn*, in order to get more into detail, which also allows to make more concise one-on-one comparisons between similar scenes that

for instance involve judgement shots. In doing so, an even closer perception of the way in which *poverty porn* is constructed is made possible and can deliver more insights in the technical aspects of constructing this as well, focusing for instance on the usage of certain camera techniques or the way the show has been edited.

Also, as mentioned, only during discussing the relationship between the different categories and findings of this study, it became clear that these actually all could be considered part of the same main category, namely 'judgement shots', this implies that in the case of double coding or reproducing the current study, these different categories should become more strictly demarcated and their relationships more clear. In doing so, the study would become transferable, causing a higher validity, and then attempts can be done to apply it to alternative cases as well, which would be of relevant additional value.

Furthermore, it should be taken into account that *Schuldig* was part of a larger campaign in order to get to the positive criticisms. Future research should examine therefore in a more detailed way how also the debating tours or the podcast as part of this campaign could be of added value. Also, the current study only touched upon a small part of the reception of *Schuldig*. Besides newspapers, there are naturally different kinds of reactions that were not necessarily written by professional journalists, but rather by the 'amateur' audience that responded on the series through social media. In particular the way in which *Schuldig* was received on Twitter could be additional for the current findings, as responses on Twitter are often more direct and 'right from the heart'. Since the platform can be perceived as having less obstacles for simply saying what one feels, there is the possibility of more negative reactions to be found on Twitter, that could shed new light on the reception of *Schuldig*, in addition to the findings based on newspaper coverage.

Also, in order to gain a broader image on how *Schuldig* was received and how the representation of poverty was perceived throughout the entire Dutch society, future research could focus on different groups of society with different demographical characteristics, for instance leading to qualitative interviews or focus-groups that examine the reception of the audience, or in order to make even bigger generalizations based on numerical data, a quantitative research could be carried out with the usage of surveys. Moreover, the current study has primarily focused on the reception of *Schuldig* in television reviews as covered in mainstream media, and on the representation of poverty in *Schuldig*, yet has not focused so much on its production process in which important decisions are taken, and more research could therefore be done towards the perspectives of makers to the representation of poverty. Lastly, the current study seems to be one of the few towards *poverty porn* in the Netherlands, as most

of the literature on this concept originates from British research. Therefore, it is recommended for future research to examine other programmes of Dutch or other cultural origins in order to make the concept more elaborate.

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7. Appendices

Full transcripts of all six episodes of *Schuldig* are available in a separate document elsewhere.

Appendix A: Operationalization / topic list *poverty porn*.

Location

- Living in council housing schemes **(Law & Mooney, 2011)** / social housing (**Mooney & Hancock, 2010)** / subsidized accommodations **(Paterson et al., 2017)**
- "Particular locales as 'problem' places and 'welfare ghettoes'" (**Mooney & Hancock, 2010, p.15);** "places of misery, apathy, despair" **(Mooney & Hancock, 2010, p.15)**
- "Focus […] on one housing scheme, and on a few particular individuals and families within it, in isolation from the wider issues around poverty, disadvantage and inequality" (**Mooney & Hancock, 2010)**
- Neighborhoods having a 'community spirit' (Allen et al., 2014): characterized by "working class solidarity, care and more communal forms of living" (p.3). "Community relations and inter-reliance" (p.4). Desire for a 'time past': Implying a "*desire for solace and escape from the surveillance of the cruel and penal neoliberal state, and the individualizing and competitive qualities of everyday life*" **(Allen et al., 2014, p.4)**

Environment/setting

- Judgement shots (designed to invoke disgust reactions): **(Allen et al., 2014)**
    - "the ash-tray" **(Allen et al., 2014, p.2)**
    - "the young family sat on the rubbish strewn street" **(Allen et al., 2014, p.2)**
    - "sitting together on a dilapidated sofa on a pavement outside a house" **(Allen et al., 2014, p.1)**
    - "rubbish bags piled" **(Allen et al., 2014, p.1);** waste surrounding people
    - cigarette usage **(Allen et al., 2014)**
    - "dog soiled carpets" **(Law & Mooney, 2011, p.1)**
    - "the sofa abandoned in the street" **(Jensen, 2014, p.7)**
    - "the satellite dish" **(Jensen, 2014, p.7)**
    - "tins of cheap lager" **(Jensen, 2014, p.7)**
    - kids loitering in the street after dark **(Jensen, 2014, p.7)**
- Bad taste, 'flawed consumers': "disreputable object of consumption (plasma TVs, alcohol, tobacco, etc.)" **(Law & Mooney, 2011, p.12)**

Family situation

- The dysfunctional family life /family breakdown **(Mooney & Hancock, 2010)**
- Teenage pregnancy (**Mooney & Hancock, 2010)**
- Abortion (**Law & Mooney, 2011)**
- Single parenting (**Law & Mooney, 2011)**

- The ‘skiver’: idleness, drain on national resources; **(Allen et al., 2014)** 'the skiver', a “figure of social disgust” **(Jensen, 2014, p.3)** who symbolizes/reinforces the commonsense notions of welfare; “The skiver inherits the ideological baggage of preceding abject figures”**:** (**Jensen, 2014, p.6)**
    - “the single mother” **(Jensen, 2014, p.7)**
    - “the troubled family” **(Jensen, 2014, p.7)**
    - the unemployed, absent or feckless father **(Jensen, 2014, p.7)**

Lifestyle

- Health
- Drugs / alcohol dependency / addiction **(Mooney & Hancock, 2010)**
- “Ill health and bereavement” (**Law & Mooney, 2011, p.1)**
- “Low life expectancy” (**Mooney & Hancock, 2010, p.15)**
- Tobacco use **(Mooney & Hancock, 2010)**
    - Behavior
- Anti-social/ problematic / deviant behavior (**Mooney & Hancock, 2010**); personality defects **(Law & Mooney, 2011)**
- Engaged in petty **crime**, casual / territorial **violence**: gangs, knife crime (Law & Mooney, 2011)
- “Foul language**” (Law & Mooney, 2011, p.1)**
- Imprisonment (**Law & Mooney, 2011)**
- “Governed by biological instincts, consuming and procreating for immediate gratification**”(Law & Mooney, 2011, p.12)**
    - Life situation/circumstances
- Unemployment / worklessness (**Mooney & Hancock, 2010)**
- Serious personal debt (**Mooney & Hancock, 2010)**
- Welfare dependency **(Mooney & Hancock, 2010)**
- Educational failure (**Mooney & Hancock, 2010)**
- Low incomes (lack of alternative economic resources) (**Paterson et al., 2017)**
- Working-class (**Paterson et al., 2017)**
- Biopolitical constructions such as race/gender/class (**Allen et al., 2014**) and (dis)ability made visible or invisible when/if needed (**Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2015)**
    - Attitude
- “Personally, socially, culturally, and morally incompetent” **(Law & Mooney, 2011, p.3)**
- Lacking social capital (**Paterson et al., 2017)**
- Loathsome / inarticulate / lazy / ‘chav’ stereotype (**Law & Mooney, 2011);** lack of purpose and aspiration (**Mooney & Hancock, 2010);** Undisciplined (**Law & Mooney, 2011);** irresponsibility /bad choices / bad culture / moral laxity / greed / lack of individual forces to work / lack of resilience **(Jensen, 2014)**; scroungers **(Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2015)** benefits shirkers (**Jensen, 2014)**
- “As abject Other of the 'good', 'hard working', future-orientated, individualistic and entrepreneurial neoliberal citizen” **(Allen et al., 2014, p.3)**; “the product of a bloated welfare” **(Allen et al., 2014, p.3)**

Narrative (optional)

- Day-to-day life experiences of those in poverty; central are the relationships with money (how they obtain/spend money) **(Paterson et al., 2017)**
- "Social suffering as individualized psycho-drama" **(Law & Mooney, 2011, p.12)**; personal failure as reason for situation (**Law & Mooney, 2011)**
- Exaggerated, extreme examples; stories of failure in welfare services; particular incidents as representative of more fundamental problems: modern day 'carnival freak show' **(Mooney & Hancock, 2010)**
- "focus on non-typical benefits recipients" […] a small group of individuals representing extreme stereotypes" (Paterson et al., 2017, p.208); hence, "not an accurate reflection of those depending on benefits receipt in the UK"(Paterson et al., 2017, p.208)
- Therefore: no reference/recognition of structural nature of problems decontextualized from structural, historical processes (Mooney & Hancock, 2010)
- Use of mood music "to elicit the preferred emotional response" (Law & Mooney, 2011, p.6)
- Key narrative threads in poverty porn are 3 myths: (and part of the commonsense) **(Jensen, 2014)**
  1. "'skivers' don't want to work and are encouraged to remain workless by a perverse system that rewards them" **(Jensen, 2014, p.9)**
  2. "full employment is possible in a fully marketized neoliberal economy" **(Jensen, 2014, p.9)**
  3. "paid work is always the best route out of poverty" **(Jensen, 2014, p.9)**

Audience position (Optional)

- The "bourgeois gaze" **(Law & Mooney, 2011, p.2)**: Moral judgement, superiority in taste and competence. "Spectacle of class dispossession" (**Law & Mooney, 2011, p.3)**
- "Scrutinise the habits of the poor and assess how deserving they are" **(Jensen, 2014, p.2)**
- Reinforcement of anti-welfare message: wasting "national resources and taxpayers' money" **(Mooney & Hancock, 2010, p.16)**: "'we' […] are being robbed by the 'scroungers'" **(Mooney & Hancock, 2010, p.16)**
- Contrast between "'normality' of middle-class lives […] and "dysfunctional working-class families" **(Mooney & Hancock, 2010, p.16); "**self-improvement and aspiration" versus "'backward looking' attitudes […] rendered shameful" **(p.16)**
- "The shaming of classed others through inviting audiences to read class stigma onto participants though evaluations of their conduct, bodies and dress as lacking and in need of transformation" **(Allen et al., 2014, p.2)**
- "invites voyeuristic opportunities to see people 'making do' and 'being thrifty'**" (Jensen, 2013 as cited in Allen et al, 2014, p.2)**
- "the only 'correct' feeling towards benefit receipt should be shame" **(Jensen, 2014, p.1)**

Appendix B: Overview of collected material - episodes of Schuldig

These short synopses derive from the website of Schuldig (Human, 2018). The full transcripts of all episodes are available in a separate document.

Episode 1

Almost everyone in the Vogelbuurt in Amsterdam-North is dealing with debts. Luckily for the residents there is Paul, the unorthodox caregiver who is there for them day and night. But for Ramona and her family, this help will be too late, because when they are put out in the streets in broad daylight by bailiff Ed there is no one who can help them.

Episode 2

Will is director of Doras, a relief organization in the Vogelbuurt. She is startled when she hears that Ramona has been put out in the neighborhood with her husband and young children. She promises them her help. Ditte and Carmelita also both come to Doras for the first time: they are in heavier weather now that the bills are piling up.

Episode 3

If the bell rings in the Vogelbuurt of Amsterdam-Noord, you never know if it is the bailiff Ed. But it can also be Satcha, the relief worker of Doras. Ed thinks it's okay to throw the letter through the bus, because when people open they are usually angry. At him. Who would always be the messenger of the bad news?

Episode 4

As the tension increases in the little house of grandmother and grandfather where Ramona and her family moved in, the shop owner Dennis loses his resilience and the desperation takes possession of him. Should he stop his shop anyway? And while politics and science brainstorm about solutions, Will and Paul fight to prevent new evictions in the Vogelbuurt.

Episode 5

Ditte feels again the grande dame of yore when she talks to friends about her old jet set life in Ibiza during a banquet. But the reality is already imminent: the UWV wants a re-inspection and she has to work more, despite her chronic pain. And Carmelita gives in to the pressure to go into receivership, but not without a struggle.

Episode 6

It is Christmas in the Vogelbuurt. Will Dennis keep his pet store, Carmelita keep her dreams and Ditte keep her dignity? Counselor Paul passed the baton to his successor at the age of 70. But can Paul exist without work and can the neighborhood be without Paul?

Appendix C: Evidence of the analysis procedure

The following images show the visualization of the coding tree as it was created in NVivo. The table on pages 119-120, shows the descriptions of the different codes.

Coding trees

Nodes

Name	Files	References
AUDIENCE POSITION	0	0
CENTRAL THEMES	2	14
CRITICISM	0	0
FAMILY SITUATION	3	11
LIFESTYLE	0	0
LOCATION	6	18
NARRATIVE	0	0
SETTING	6	93
TITLE	6	6
VOICE-OVER	6	156

Nodes

Name	Files	References
AUDIENCE POSITION	0	0
CENTRAL THEMES	2	14
CRITICISM	0	0
REASONS FOR NEGATIVE CRITICISM	3	6
REASONS FOR POSITIVE CRITICISM	14	48
AFFECTIVE, POIGNANT	4	8
FICTIONAL FORMAT	5	6
HIDDEN POVERTY	5	5
NUANCED	6	11
SOCIETAL IMPACT	5	11
VICTIMS OF SYSTEM	8	18
GOOD CHARACTERS, HEROES	8	11
NEGATIVE	1	4
REFERENCE TO OTHER SHOWS	2	2
FAMILY SITUATION	3	11
LIFESTYLE	0	0
appearance	4	10
attitude	4	8
behavior	4	9
health	3	11
life situation	2	5
LOCATION	6	18
NARRATIVE	0	0
SETTING	6	93
objects of consumption	3	4
TITLE	6	6
VOICE-OVER	6	156

Coding book

Name	Description
AUDIENCE POSITION	bourgeois gaze/ reinforcing anti-welfare message / shaming of 'classed others' / voyeuristic feel / scrutinize habits of the poor
CRITICISM	
REASONS FOR NEGATIVE CRITICISM	
REASONS FOR POSITIVE CRITICISM	
AFFECTIVE, POIGNANT	
FICTIONAL FORMAT	
NEGATIVE	
HIDDEN POVERTY	
NUANCED	
SOCIETAL IMPACT	
VICTIMS OF SYSTEM	
GOOD CHARACTERS, HEROES	
NEGATIVE	
REFERENCE TO OTHER SHOWS	
FAMILY SITUATION	dysfunctional family life; teenage pregnancy/abortion/single mother/absent father
LIFESTYLE	'bad' lifestyle

Name	Description
appearance	
attitude	incompetent; lacking moral/social/cultural competence; abject other of the 'good' neoliberal, individualized citizen
behavior	anti-social; criminal behavior; language; behavior driven by instinct
health	alcohol/drugs/addictions; ill/bereavement; low life expectancy
life situation	(un)employment/education/debt/welfare/(dis)ability
LOCATION	council housing/subsidized accommodation; place of misery and despair; community spirit
NARRATIVE	
SETTING	judgement shots; objects of consumption
objects of consumption	
TITLE	
VOICE-OVER	