

Imagining a Good Life without Children

An ethnographic exploration of how Dutch people who desire to not have children aspire and realize a meaningful life and future without having children

Master's Thesis

Submitted on July 3, 2022, to the Department of Cultural Anthropology as part of the master's program Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship.

Student: Michiel Suring

Student number: 6562765

Supervisor: Dr. Aditi Saraf

Word count: 20,667



**Utrecht
University**

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my supervisor Aditi Saraf for her confidence and adaptability, my interlocutors for their vulnerability and investment, the students for supporting each other, the professors for educating and inspiring, and my loved ones for their unconditional assistance.

However, it is almost impossible to express my gratitude in words. Therefore, to show my thankfulness while reflecting on this two-year academic and personal journey that with this thesis is coming to an end, I wrote a poem called liminality:

Amsterdam, July 3, 2022

“One day, I will look back on this hell of a ride. The blood, the sweat, and the days I cried.

Two years ago, on a sunny September. The start of my rites de passage I will always remember.

Entering as an ignorant and naive but hopeful person. Leaving as enlightened and inspired but concerns only worsen.

As an anthropologist, my goal is to share. My knowledge, my love, and time to spare.

Becoming aware of my privilege, my gender thus my position. Making sure that not me but my interlocutors gain recognition.

Despite this thesis, I still think that children bring hope. By letting them teach us an unbiased scope.

During this master's, I got to know many beautiful souls. Thanks to all the students for supporting each other's goals.

A special thanks to my parents and supervisor. For leading by example and being the best advisor.

The more I know, the less I know for sure. However, thanks to all my loved ones, I know that love is the cure.”

With love and hope,
Michiel Suring

Abstract

The Netherlands could be contextualized as a neoliberal country where the nuclear family as the cornerstone of society, derived from the Christian dominance of the past centuries, is embodied as the norm. This thesis explores how Dutch people who desire to remain childfree imagine and realize a good life and future. The individual accounts collected in this research show aspirations and concerns Dutch people who desire to remain childfree have regarding a good life and future. That is having the freedom and flexibility to develop and pursue the dreams they envision personally. The privileged and secure position these people are situated in enables them to realize aspirations and manage concerns about their life and future. Nevertheless, these people face stigmatizations such as selfishness, immaturity, and emotional instability in the exploration. These stigmatizations are constructed through heteronormative and pronatalist representations in popular media, advertising, healthcare, and education. These Dutch people who desire to remain childfree challenge these stigmatizations. They do this by exploring different forms of kinmaking and parenthood, such as raising children collectively instead of exclusively and establishing kinstructures based on friendship and identity instead of bloodlines. This thesis contributes to the interdependency between scholarship on voluntary childlessness and the anthropological research on the good life and anthropology of the future.

Keywords: cornerstone of society, neoliberalism, parenthood, pronatalism, the good life, voluntary childlessness

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	2
Abstract	3
Introduction	5
Theme and Questions	5
Conceptual Debates	8
<i>The Good Life and Future</i>	8
<i>The Dutch Cornerstone of Society</i>	9
<i>Families we Choose</i>	10
The Field	11
<i>Location</i>	11
<i>Population</i>	12
Methodology	13
<i>Ethics & Positionality</i>	14
Outline	15
Chapter 1: A “Good Life” without Children	16
What is The Good Life?	17
<i>Aspirations and Opportunities</i>	18
<i>Dignity, Fairness, and Committing to Larger Purposes</i>	21
A Future without Children	23
Chapter 2: The Cornerstone of Dutch Society	28
The Holy Family	29
Stigmas of Childlessness	31
Stigmatization Management	36
Chapter 3: It Takes a Village to Raise a Child	39
Different Perspectives on Parenthood and Kinship	40
Queer Up	45
<i>(Un)paid Work</i>	46
<i>Shared Responsibility</i>	48
<i>Kinship Structures</i>	49
Conclusion	51
References	54

Introduction

The moment I attend a typical Dutch family birthday in my late twenties, within minutes, I receive semi-joking questions related to moving in together, having children, and getting married. The desire of my parents to become grandparents is no secret. And to be honest, the idea of becoming a parent always appealed to me. It still does to a certain degree. Therefore, if at some point in my life I am convinced of my capability as a responsible parent and I feel that a child would not affect my aspirations in life, then, emotionally speaking, I desire to have children. Therefore, I never experienced uncomfortable encounters with my kin when discussing this topic because I gave them a satisfactory response. However, as I am getting older and seem sort of wiser, I learn more about myself and the world around me. At this point, I value my freedom and do not feel the responsibility of having children. Therefore, the age at which I aspire to become a parent has moved forward. Simultaneously, I am anxious about the increasing inequalities and affected ecosystems that endanger the habitability of this planet. Hence, I hear a rational voice that makes it harder to justify such a reproductive choice when living on a planet where the human population is exponentially growing. At the same time, we are unable to divide essential resources equally, and biodiversity is only decreasing. When I try to organize these considerations, I enter a state of ambivalence where my mind goes back and forth between emotions and rationality. This state of ambivalence sparked my interest in exploring how people who voluntarily desire to remain childfree experience these conflicting thoughts. In addition, how their environment responds to the desire to remain childfree and, in turn, how these people experience and manage the responses of their environment.

Theme and Questions

In this paragraph, I present how the research theme and question emerged and developed along the way of shaping and conducting this thesis. In preparation for the fieldwork, I conducted for this thesis, I did preliminary examinations in my social circle and popular media such as news articles and documentaries. I found that how people experience and manage considerations around having children varies immensely. Some have a powerful desire to have children. While for others, this aspiration is somewhat absent. As mentioned in the opening paragraph of this introduction, I turned from someone that always assumed becoming a parent to challenging the whole idea, which resulted in conflicting thoughts. Even though I could share these thoughts with like-minded people, I soon experienced that many friends, relatives, and acquaintances

could not grasp my point of view because, for them, having children was the ultimate goal. Therefore, I started to wonder how other people experience and cope with the question of whether they desire to have children and how they imagine a good life and future without them.

Thus, I started browsing through popular media and academic literature to discover how people experience and manage these ambivalent considerations of not wanting children. The voluntary desire to remain childfree proved underrepresented in popular media, advertising, health care, education, and anthropological research. The desire to want children is still the dominant image publicly and academically portrayed and researched. A practical example is how almost all pregnancy test brands advertise. Namely, displaying a positive test combined with a happy woman or couple shows the assumption that being pregnant is always something people desire (Lampen 2018). Furthermore, I read an article about women who desired to be sterilized. There was a woman who, after a general practitioner redirected her to the hospital, gynecologists did not allow the sterilization because they were not convinced that this woman would not regret her decision (Poyard 2022). The above-outlined examples show that the desire and ability to remain childfree is not self-evident and thus cannot be taken for granted.

Voluntary childlessness was neglected in social science because, in research on the family, the discipline excluded related and relevant themes to this field of study (Veevers 1973, 199). On the one hand, the reason for ignoring this topic was because the discipline was relatively young, and there were scarce opportunities for conducting research (Veevers 1973, 199). On the other hand, however, Lewis Anthony Dexter (1958, 176) argues that it was not solely a coincidence that this theme was underrepresented. That is because the topics scholars choose for research were often related to “the value preferences and biases of the social scientists involved” (Dexter 1958; Veevers 1973, 199).

Although anthropological research on voluntary childlessness gained ground in the 1970s, it is still a relevant field of study because it is underexposed in the societal and scientific debate (Gillespie 2003). When writing my proposal to prepare for fieldwork, I noticed that within my social circle and in news articles and documentaries, voluntary childlessness was mainly connected to anxieties about the future regarding climate change and other social issues such as warfare and overpopulation. An example is the BirthStrike movement, where women protest against climate change by rejecting the idea of having children (Hunt 2019).

Therefore, one of the primary motivations for this research was how people who voluntarily choose to remain childfree experience and perceive precarity and anxieties regarding their future. However, the data I collected and analyzed during my ethnographic fieldwork inspired me to give up my research intention on climate change-related anxieties

partially because most interlocutors were not very anxious or precarious that they would be directly affected by overarching societal and environmental issues in their remaining lifetime. Hence, I argue that this was not the dominant reason for them not to want children. Instead, the focus shifted to my interlocutors' more individualistic aspirations and concerns on how they perceived a good and meaningful life and future without children. That is because most interlocutors shared much more personal aspirations and concerns regarding their life and future, consisting of having freedom and flexibility but also feeling the expectation to focus on education, mental and physical health, career, traveling, housing, animals, financial situation, and friendships. However, also more collective aspirations and concerns that entailed exploring forms of family making and parenthood that deviate from heteronormative blood kin structures such as the nuclear family or exclusive parenthood.

This shift does not mean that there were no interlocutors who shared their anxieties regarding societal and environmental crises, which could affect their life and that of future generations, thus their potential children. On the contrary, most interlocutors believed that none of these issues would one day be solved. Instead, they argued that issues would probably only worsen. Therefore, most of them also acknowledged the privileged and secure position from which they currently are able to aspire and worry. Even though these concerns triggered their awareness of how this could affect their potential children, for most interlocutors, it was not the dominant reason for not wanting children.

In other words, when questioning the desire to have children, my interlocutors were mainly concerned about how this could directly affect their current life and aspirations and concerns about a good life and future. Therefore, within this research, I analyze how these first-hand aspirations and concerns, as outlined above, influenced my interlocutors to reconsider the desire of wanting children instead of how overarching indirect crises such as climate change did. Additionally, how these first-hand aspirations and concerns relate to the Dutch neoliberalist, heteronormative, and pronatalist context my interlocutors are situated in. Thus, this thesis aims to answer the following question:

How do Dutch people between twenty-five and sixty imagine and realize a good life and future without having children?

This thesis analyzes three sub-themes to be able to answer the main question. First, I outline what a good life means for my interlocutors and how they imagine their future. Second, I contextualize the Dutch society my interlocutors are situated in through the idea of a nuclear

family as the cornerstone of society my interlocutors are situated in. Third, I explore different forms of parenthood and family making.

This thesis aims to contribute to the societal and scientific debate by sharing multiple perspectives on a good life and future. Which could contribute to a broader understanding and acceptance of these different aspirations and concerns. As a result, people could reflect on their identity, personhood, and role in society as good citizens, friends, family members, or partners.

Conceptual Debates

The conceptual debates of this thesis are divided into three themes. The first chapter examines the concept of a good life and the anthropology of the future as a field of study. It also dives into how the aspirations and concerns of my interlocutors regarding these concepts relate to individualism and neoliberalism. Second, I contextualize the Dutch saying, “the cornerstone of society.” Moreover, I analyze how it relates to heteronormativity and pronatalism. Thus, how the context in which my interlocutors are situated influences their desire to remain childfree. Third, I explore different forms of parenthood and family making through feminist and queer theory, such as families by choice. Here, I analyze how these different forms challenge heteronormative, and pronatalist approaches. Hence, these theories can contribute to understanding the interlocutors' perspectives on a meaningful life and future.

The Good Life and Future

The good life is a concept embodied in anthropological literature by scholars such as Arjun Appadurai (2013) and Edward F. Fischer (2014). According to Fischer (2014, 2), “the good life” consists of people's perspectives on their aspirations, opportunities, dignity, fairness, and commitments to larger purposes. To analyze the perspectives of my interlocutors on a good life, I split this definition into multiple questions.

The first question is what the aspirations of my interlocutors are. I use this question to explore my interlocutors' desires and imaginations and how they relate to their desire to remain childfree. Through academic and non-academic literature on different approaches to precarious labor, I examine the aspirations of my interlocutors regarding their balance between life and work (Ferriss 2009; Rosenblat 2018). The second question is if my interlocutors have the opportunity to realize their aspirations. I show the individual character of their aspirations in relation to their privileged position by analyzing it through the shift from a welfare state to neoliberalism. Where neoliberalism defines a good life as having the freedom to develop on an

individual scale, as opposed to on collective or societal levels (Harvey 2007, 2). The third question is how my interlocutors perceive dignity and fairness. Here I examine if my interlocutors experience that they can pursue their aspired life without being excluded and discriminate against (Fischer 2014, 7). Therefore, I am able to illustrate the tension my interlocutors experience between living in a privileged and secure environment while also having the aspiration to remain childfree, which is deviant from the Dutch norm, as presented in the second chapter of this thesis. The last question is how my interlocutors commit to larger purposes. Through the work of Donna Haraway (2004) and Anna Tsing (2017), I show how my interlocutors aspire to a less anthropocentric approach where humans and non-humans live together in harmony.

Fischer (2014, 44) explains that these perspectives capture stated preferences. In other words, these are preferences of what my interlocutors say they desire. This stated preference mainly differs from what people do in the end. Nevertheless, according to Fischer (2014, 2), it is essential to collect what my interlocutors say they desire because these imaginations and predictions could contribute to creating different scenarios on social, political, and economic constructs such as freedom, well-being, finances, education, healthcare, and security (Fischer 2014, 2, 44).

In order to analyze how my interlocutors, imagine and establish their future, I use the anthropological study of the future. In *The Anthropology of the Future*, Rebecca Bryant, and Daniel M. Knight (2018, 15) uses the concept of “orientations” as a means to examine how people anticipate, what kind of expectations people have, how they speculate, what the potentiality is of realizing, how people hope and perceive destiny. To be able to grasp the futural imaginations of my interlocutors, I examine how they anticipate the future by not having children. Moreover, I explore if my interlocutors have hope for a prosperous future by outlining the shift from “dark anthropology,” which focuses on the dark aspects of society, such as societal and environmental crises, towards an anthropology of the good (Ortner 2016, 49; Appadurai 2013).

The Dutch Cornerstone of Society

Between 1000 AD (anno Domini) and the fourteenth century, Christianity was the dominant religion in the Netherlands (Eijnatten 2011). The effects of this domination are visible to this day. In the 1960s, depillarization occurred in the Netherlands, which entailed that the Dutch society was no longer segregated according to religious pillars (Eijnatten 2011). However, all kinds of organizations still operate that originate based on a Christian ideology. For instance,

all sorts of media, such as television channels and newspapers, still have a religious foundation, whereas some television channels and newspapers are not connected to Christianity anymore. Similarly, many national holidays and traditions are based on Christian holidays. (Eijnatten 2011).

Another concept derived from this Christian dominance is the idea of a nuclear family as the cornerstone of society (Wilson 2019, 3; Os and Boerma 2015). This idea consists of a married man and -woman having biological children (Murdock 1949, 1, 2, 11). It derived from the fourteenth-century image of the “Holy Family,” which entails the Child Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and Saint Joseph (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia 2019). Then in 1977, when the Dutch political party, the Christian Democratic Appeal, emerged, they immediately embraced this idea of the nuclear family as the cornerstone of society by promoting it as their primary stance (CDA 2022a). For twenty-five years after 1977, Dutch politics was ruled by a CDA prime minister (Parlement 2022). The dominance of the idea of the nuclear family illuminates how the political and societal debate on having children has been formed.

The contextualization of the cornerstone of society proves a helpful way to analyze the stigmatizations my interlocutors must deal with. At least partially, these stigmatizations have roots in a Christian pronatalist approach which could be defined as a set of social and political practices and policies that stimulate procreation (Veevers 1973; Moore 2014; Park 2002). The interlocutors mentioned several stigmas surrounding a childfree life. According to these stigmas, not wanting children is evident to being selfish, irresponsible, immature, indecisive, insensitive, lonely, pitiful, unhappy, and emotional instability (Pohlman 1966; Gotlib 2016, 330). This thesis will touch on how mentioned stigmas are experienced and managed by the interlocutors.

Families we Choose

Some interlocutors experience not wanting children as a choice that could change if perspectives on parenthood and kinship would change or if circumstances regarding personal aspirations and concerns or the prospect of societal and environmental crises would be different. Therefore, I analyze how these perspectives and circumstances should change in order for my interlocutors to reconsider their desire to remain childfree (Kelly 2009, 158).

Through the lens of non-normative kinmaking and “families we choose” studied in queer and feminist theory, I analyze the different aspirations, concerns, and challenges my interlocutors experience (Weston 1991). Families we choose is a concept that Kath Weston introduced (1991) and entails making new kinds of kinship arrangements based on friendship

and shared deviant identities instead of based on blood kin (Wilson 2019, 3; Lewin 2016, 599). Through this notion that kin does not have to be blood-related in order to allocate as kin, I analyze how my interlocutors would adopt this approach in their lives.

Another dominant concern among my interlocutors in their desire to remain childfree is the lonely and high-demanding character of parenthood in the Netherlands that follows the Western idea of being expected to raise children exclusively and individually (Bowlby 1969; Seymour 2013; Roodsaz 2021). Therefore, I use the book *Attachment Reconsidered* by Susan C. Seymour (2013, 115), which uses the proverb: “It takes a village to raise a child.” Through this conception, I analyze how my interlocutors perceive adopting this approach where child-rearing is a shared responsibility of the collective instead of the individual.

In order to analyze how my interlocutors, aspire to their balance between working and living in relation to the use of cheap transnational caregivers when having children, I use anthropological literature on circuits of transnational labor (Parreñas 2000; Sassen 2006; Mills 2003). Many women migrate from poorer countries in the global South to wealthier countries in the global North, such as the Netherlands, to work as nannies and domestic workers (Sassen 2006, 254, 255). In the global North, these caregivers are employed as cheap transnational labor (Parreñas 2000, 564; Sassen 2006). These transnational labor circuits create ambivalence among these women because, on the one hand, these migrant workers feel proud and powerful because they fulfill the economic obligations to the home front. However, on the other hand, these women perceive themselves as bad mothers because they are not directly involved in the child-rearing back home (Parreñas 2001, 66–69, 72–78, 119–131; Mills 2003, 46, 50). In light of these circuits of transnational labor, I analyze how my interlocutors perceive this possibility of outsourcing care in relation to their desire to remain childfree.

The Field

In this paragraph, I discuss the context of my research and with whom I conducted my fieldwork. Moreover, I explain why I chose this particular research location. Furthermore, I elucidate how I met my interlocutors based on the selected criteria.

Location

For this thesis, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Netherlands from the beginning of February till the end of April 2022. Initially, I aimed to predominantly gather my research

population in Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands, because it is a densely mixed populated city.

Ultimately, I chose not to focus on Amsterdam solely but to be guided by my interlocutors and data. That is because I mainly used snowball sampling, where my interlocutors provided me with new interlocutors. Therefore, I started in Amsterdam but soon expanded to other cities within the Netherlands. Moreover, I noticed that in the different accounts of my interlocutors who were situated throughout the whole Netherlands and even in Spain, there was no location-specific data in relation to the desire to remain childfree. Therefore, I decided to conduct a multi-sided ethnography which I elaborate on in the methodology paragraph of this introduction.

Population

The population for this research consisted of Dutch women and men between twenty-five and sixty years old that I encountered in my network and through snowball sampling (O'Reilly 2012, 44). I decided to research with people across different generations because I imagined the added value of perspectives from younger people who were amidst life-changing events such as having children. However, to also collect accounts of older generations who can reflect on their choice to remain childfree. According to Rosemary Gillespie (2003, 125), it is relevant to include different age groups in the study of voluntary childlessness because desires and concerns could change through different life stages and generations; thus, it could contribute to analyzing these potential differentiations and developments.

Within the age group of twenty-five to thirty-five, my research population consisted of fifteen Dutch women and men. For privacy reasons, I anonymized their names. The women are called Karen, Wilma, Diana, Gaia, Guusje, Mikhaila, Danielle, Lisa, Kim, Dana, and Lieve. The men are Peter, Max, Dennis, and Denzel.

The other age groups I encountered were people between forty and sixty. I met three women around the age of forty: Carla, Tirza, and Jana. Furthermore, I encountered one man called Derk, who was almost sixty years old.

Twelve of my interlocutors were living in Amsterdam. Denzel is originally from Amsterdam, but during fieldwork was located in Delft. Dennis and Gaia had a relationship and lived separately in Utrecht. Mikhaila lived in Rotterdam. Moreover, Tirza and Guusje did not reside in a city but in smaller places like Maarn and Waalre. Only Derk was not in the Netherlands but lived in his house in Begur in the North of Spain.

In my search for a relevant research population, I did not specify the location, gender, or age but only asked if people desire to remain childfree. I think this helped me in meeting a lot of interesting people in a short amount of time. However, if I reflect on my position as a white male raised and living in the upper-middle-class in Amsterdam has resulted in a relatively homogenous population in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class.

Furthermore, the open-ended criteria are also why my research focus shifted from anxieties about climate change to individual aspirations and concerns. That is because by letting my interlocutors and data guide me instead of solely continuing with people that confirmed my assumption on climate change anxieties, I discovered that most interlocutors have much more personal desires and anxieties. This experience of letting the fieldwork and data lead the research focus was sometimes challenging but primarily rewarding because this ensured that I was reporting on and respecting what my interlocutors told me. Therefore, I could go beyond my assumptions regarding the aspirations and concerns to remain childfree. It allowed me to observe and analyze my ethnographic data sufficiently and carefully.

Methodology

As mentioned above, for this research, I conducted a “multi-sided ethnography” (Marcus 1995). Multi-sited ethnography entails “an emergent object of study whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known beforehand” (Marcus 1995, 102). Within this thesis, I used this type of ethnography because, during fieldwork, the data my interlocutors provided appeared not bound to a specific place or community. Therefore, I was able to follow and adapt to changes and developments in my research focus, as described earlier in the introduction.

Furthermore, I only used ethnographic fieldwork methods in order to collect my data. I used these qualitative research methods to grasp my interlocutors' insider (emic) perspectives (Madden 2017, 16). By using these methods, I was able to blend into the social environment of the participants of my study so that I could try to explore and understand their emic perspective (Madden 2017, 16).

In order to get my research up and running, I started with one-on-one informal and unstructured interviews. By sharing an appeal on my social media accounts, I gathered dozens of people willing to participate. My first step was to text, call and meet with these people and gather their ideas on the topics I wanted to examine. Most of the people I spoke to first were friends, relatives, or acquaintances. At some point, I gathered a valuable research population, including gatekeepers and key interlocutors. Three interlocutors were too busy to meet for an

interview or perceived the topic as too sensitive to discuss in person. Therefore, I created a questionnaire with open questions that I shared with these interlocutors. With all the other interlocutors, I conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Despite the labor intensity of ethnographic interviewing, I was able to conduct fifteen interviews with sixteen different interlocutors. That is because I conducted one interview with Gaia and Dennis together as a couple (O'Reilly 2012, 127). Simultaneously with other methods, such as walk-along, I conducted unstructured interviews. It was best to start these encounters informally to build up a rapport in order to create opportunities for more in-depth conversations in a later stage (O'Reilly 2012, 116).

The three subsidiary themes presented earlier form the structure of this thesis. Therefore, my empirical data obtained through the above-described methods are naturally alternated with relevant literature throughout each chapter. Hence, I am not chronically discussing all interviews one by one.

Ultimately, all interviews are conducted in Dutch. It means that I am responsible for all the translations of my data that was necessary to be able to interpret and analyze them. I made every effort to minimize losing any relevant data in this process by thoroughly translating my data and, where needed, maintaining the original Dutch excerpt, and clarifying it in English.

Ethics & Positionality

When I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for this thesis with my interlocutors, it was crucial to be aware of my ethics and positionality. This thesis is my first extensive ethnographic research. Therefore, during fieldwork, I aimed to take into account my fundamental values at all costs. These values are sincerity, sharing, and equality. Within this research, I strived to be transparent in my position and opinion regarding topics I discussed with interlocutors. Therefore, I tried to appropriately share personal accounts regarding my desire and concerns to remain childfree. This resulted in a safe and reciprocal environment that allowed them to share their cultural knowledge. However, I am aware that my interlocutors knowing my position, could influence the empirical data. Therefore, I waited to share my perspective till the end of a conversation or after multiple encounters.

During my ethnographic fieldwork, I always followed the American Anthropological Association (AAA) code of ethics (2009). One of the essential elements of this code that I correctly adopted is to always ask for oral informed consent from my interlocutors (DeWalt et al. 2011). The research was over, and participants were always aware that I was conducting research and gathering data for my thesis project. In addition, they were aware that I would use

their data for writing my thesis. Where possible, I always anonymized my ethnographic data and used pseudonyms in my thesis to ensure the privacy and safety of my interlocutors (DeWalt et al. 2011).

Outline

This thesis is divided into three main chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter's title is: "A "Good Life" without Children." Chapter two is named: "The Dutch Cornerstone of Society." Finally, the third chapter is called: "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child."

In the first chapter, I outline how my interlocutors perceive a good life and future and what kind of aspirations and concerns they have regarding this life and future. Through a neoliberal lens, I critically analyze my interlocutors' aspirations and concerns regarding a good life. Furthermore, I explore what kind of imaginations and anxieties my interlocutors have and examine how they anticipate and hope following anthropology of the future as a field of study. The first chapter aims to show the multiple views of what a good life and future means and how one could understand and recognize these different perspectives through my data.

In the second chapter, by contextualizing the Dutch society, my interlocutors are situated through the concept of the nuclear family as the cornerstone of society I aim to explore how stigmatizations of voluntary childlessness emerged and developed. Through concepts such as heteronormativity and pronatalism, I further elaborate on the type of stigmas produced by these concepts. To be able to explain how my interlocutors experience and manage these stigmatizations.

In the last chapter, I relate the stigmatizations my interlocutors experience to exploring different forms of kinship and parenthood to some of my interlocutors aspire.

Lastly, I summarize and reflect on my analyses in the three main chapters of this thesis. This conclusion includes the answer to my main research question, the contribution this research realized, recommendations for future research, and the limitations of this research.

Chapter 1: A “Good Life” without Children

On a Wednesday afternoon, I had a phone call with Derk. During our conversation, he explained to me why he never desired to have children:

“I am always searching for guidance in life or getting a grip on life. I have always been very adventurous. And was unable to relate and conform to a country, study, or professional career. My mind is always floating where far ends are important. My whole life, I have been off the beaten track. This is already the case since primary school; this increased in high school, and while studying, I dropped out and moved to Australia for a couple of years. Back then, in contrast to now, this was a very unusual thing to do. I did not want to be a part of organized civil life. Some people are able to just go with the flow without overthinking it. Accepting life as it comes. I have never been able to accept life as it comes. I do not want to follow the life of the bourgeoisie and laborers. The parents with cargo bikes. Bringing the kid to hockey practice. I always envisioned traveling a lot and residing in a country outside the Netherlands where the climate is warm throughout the year. Unfortunately, my partner does not desire to travel the world together, and that, in combination with mass tourism, made traveling somewhat lonely and unpleasant. Nevertheless, I became financially independent and live in a house in the North of Spain. The only issue is that the winters are still a bit too cold to stay, resulting in the need to travel around for that time of the year. In other words, I am still searching for how I could improve my life and will probably be doing that till the end of my life. Despite this search, I am grateful for this position and situation” (Derk, interview, March 13, 2022).

The excerpt illustrates someone exploring the desired life that emerged from a dissatisfied feeling with his lifestyle at certain stages in life. In this exploration, one can see what aspirations and imaginations could emerge, such as finding direction in life, having the freedom to explore the world, living somewhere warm, and sharing this with a partner. The conversations with interlocutors showed me the different ideas of a good life and how these ideas relate to their desire of wanting children.

Therefore, in this chapter, I look at my interlocutors' different perspectives on the good life, as well as how these perspectives engage in the quest for well-being as they perceive it to be able to answer the question: "What is a good life without children and how does it deviate from other perspectives?" Hence, I critically analyze what these perspectives on a good life and future illustrate regarding their ability and positionality in having such views. First, I illuminate the concept of The Good Life discussed by scholars such as Arjun Appadurai (2013) and Edward F. Fischer (2014). Through this concept, I show how the aspects of "realistic aspirations," "sufficient opportunities," "sense of dignity," "life with a purpose," the "ability to anticipate and imagine," "possibility versus probability," and "potentiality" are comprehended by my interlocutors (Fischer 2014, 2). Moreover, I critically examine these different embodiments in relation to the material conditions of the context my interlocutors are living in. Here I juxtapose global contexts and views of how "The Good Life" is constituted and how this relates to the Dutch context my interlocutors are positioned in. Second, I analyze different ideas on futures and hope through the lens of Bryant and Knight (2018). Here I outline imaginations and concerns my interlocutors have regarding their future, including to what extent these ideas and anxieties match or contradict their ideas of the good life and how they relate to the desire not to want children. Third, I conclude by arguing how the privileged and secure positionality in relation to the individual character of neoliberalism enabled my interlocutors to pursue their aspirations and manage their concerns.

What is The Good Life?

In this paragraph, I explore what the good life entails and how my interlocutors perceive and act upon it. In doing so, I examine whether my interlocutors, in their search for a good life, go beyond the image of self-centered actors solely focusing on individual benefit. In other words, are their desires regarding a good life only related to pursuing a carefree life as possible for themselves, or is there an underlying intention for collective enhancement related to societal and environmental issues such as the unequal distribution of resources in relation to overconsumption and climate change? In order to do this, I first must elucidate the concept of "the good life" to be able to analyze my empirical data. As the introduction mentions, Fischer (2014, 2) focuses on "key non-material qualities that define the good life: aspiration and opportunity, dignity and fairness, and commitments to larger purposes." Based on in-depth conversations with interlocutors, I pose the following questions. What are their aspirations and

opportunities? What do they understand by dignity and fairness? How do they commit to larger purposes? By outlining these different ideas on a good life, I aim to reflect on social, political, and economic constructs such as freedom, well-being, education, healthcare, tourism, finances, security, career, housing, and relationships (Fischer 2014, 2).

Aspirations and Opportunities

The good life is not something that should be understood as a static and linear process achieved at some point in life (Fischer 2014, 2). Instead, it could be explained as aspirations and opportunities that symbolize the ongoing pursuit of a more meaningful life (Fischer 2014, 2). In other words, within the material capabilities of the context someone is situated in, how could someone realize the desired life? By material capabilities, I refer to the accessibility to social, political, and economical services such as networks, education, information provision, and social welfare that influence the feasibility of acquiring a “good” life.

In conversations with interlocutors, I noticed a strong aspiration for having the freedom and flexibility to choose if they want to study, how they would like to divide the balance between leisure and work, where they want to live or travel to, and with whom they want to share this. For instance, some desire to have biological children within a heteronormative monogamous romantic relationship; others may have the desire to have a non-monogamous queer relationship where they do not want children at all. When I asked Lisa, a thirty-year-old woman living in Amsterdam, why she did not experience the desire to have children, she explained that:

“I am someone that has to be able to live my own life and be free in the things I desire. So, I always flutter (*fladderen*). One moment I decide to do this or go here, and the next moment I choose something different. It is just how I work. This freedom and flexibility are what makes me happy. If there is something that makes me unhappy, it is when I am bound to something, someone or somewhere causing restrictions in my freedom and flexibility of desires I want to pursue and the choices I want to make” (Lisa, interview, March 3, 2022).

One can interpret different aspirations Lisa engages with, such as notions of freedom, flexibility, and happiness. Most of the interlocutors share these aspirations that entail being able to live a life one desires. In the conversation I had, the ideas of what the desired life looked

like varied from getting a motor license in order to travel to focusing on a career in order to be financially independent.

Some interlocutors, such as Derk and Max, described themselves as adventurous and exploring. Together with other interlocutors such as Jana, Mikhaila, and Lisa, they expressed their aspiration to be able to pack their bags at any moment to travel to a new place or live in a new place (Jana, questionnaire; Mikhaila, interview, March 11, 2022). As Max puts it: “I would describe myself as an explorer that constantly wants to explore new things. Children are not one of them because it would not be something you would abandon when you have enough of it. A point of no return” (Max, interview, March 17, 2022). Here the frequent change of scenery is crucial for these interlocutors because it offers a way out in case their current life situation becomes too monotonous which can also be read in the excerpt above from the interview with Lisa. Derk describes it as: “I always need a horizon because if I do not have this, I feel trapped and the urge to escape by doing something new” (Derk, interview April 13, 2022). When analyzing these conversations, I noticed a strong feeling of unrest among these interlocutors. It almost feels like lost explorers on a sea constantly gazing for land. Some interlocutors expressed it as an oppressive and uncomfortable feeling caused by predetermined paths such as going to school, having a job, finding a partner, moving in together, getting married, and having children. Hence, they constantly feel the urge to escape or avoid committing to what they experience as expectations. How did these uncomfortable feelings emerge and develop, and is this something new or always have been?

Despite the uneasy feeling of constantly searching, most interlocutors are pleased with their current life and how they imagine their future to develop. From this good starting point, they are mostly satisfied with their education, career, financial situation, housing, friends, family, and mental and physical health. In other words, these interlocutors aim to maintain or improve the status quo. It shows the secure and privileged position most interlocutors have. This position was discussed in some of the encounters I had. When I asked Lisa what she thinks will happen to society and the planet in her remaining lifetime, she said: “If you look at the Northwest of Europe, then everything seems well organized. Therefore, I think that here everything will remain okay. In the Netherlands, I see a future that mainly stays the same. However, I am a white woman, so that is easy to say for me.” In his book, Appadurai (2013, 286) argues that the future as a cultural fact entails the capacity to aspire, anticipate and imagine. The context my accounts are situated shows my interlocutors' capacity to aspire. As outlined above, Appadurai (2013, 295) differentiates between the “ethics of possibility” and “ethics of probability.” Ethics of possibility focuses on “ways of thinking, feeling, and acting”

that stimulates the capacity to aspire and imagine (Appadurai 2013, 295). While the ethics of probability entails “ways of thinking, feeling, and acting” that focus on risks and minimizing these risks in order to gain maximum benefit (Appadurai 2013, 295). On the one hand, most of my interlocutors imagine a good life and future through the ethics of possibility because they experience the opportunity to explore this. However, on the other hand, my interlocutors' aspirations also indicate some ethics of probability because considering whether a child would endanger one's freedom and flexibility is based on risks and maximizing profit for individual well-being.

From this secure and privileged position, some people engage in these considerations of establishing a good life, for instance, the balance between work and free time. However, also the kind of job they would want to perform. In 2009 Timothy Ferriss wrote a book called *The 4-Hour Work Week*. In this book, he proposes the idea of deciding one's actual needs to be able to live one's desired life. In order to do that, one must calculate the minimum amount of money that is required in order to realize this life. To translate this to how many work hours you need to earn this. He argues that if you focus on what you desire, you do not need to work a 40-hour work week to provide this. This desire for having a healthy work-life balance shows a shift in the neoliberal mindset of instead living to work, working to be able to live. Besides the shift in labor, it also brings new perspectives to precarity. Whereas precarity in current labor markets could be perceived and experienced as unfavorable because within cheap transnational labor, marginalized people are exploited and taken advantage of due to their vulnerable starting point (Rosenblat 2018). Among my interlocutors, I observed a desire to embrace this precarity in return for the flexibility and freedom to change their direction in life the moment they feel limited in their development or happiness.

Reflecting on my empirical data, most perspectives from my interlocutors on what a good life means are driven by individual and material benefits. Nevertheless, Fischer (2014, 1) argues that across different cultures, views on a good life are not solely resting on material conditions such as welfare, safety, and economics. Therefore, within the Dutch context where most of my interlocutors are raised and situated, I question whether they only base their well-being on social and financial stimuli and, if so, how this particular view of well-being emerged. Margaret Thatcher (1987, 29, 30) once said:

“I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand “I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!” or “I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!” “I am homeless,

the Government must house me!” and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families, and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.”

This quote represents a shift from the welfare state to the neoliberal state. In the book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey (2007, 10) discusses this neoliberal turn that started after the Second World War when the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) emerged among other global institutions. These global institutions played a crucial role in adopting neoliberalism as a self-regulating system that maintains stability between the “state, market, and democratic” (Harvey 2007, 10). A characteristic of a neoliberal theory is that well-being results from “liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills” (Harvey 2007, 2). Thus, returning to the ethnographic data, it seems that among my interlocutors, the commonly shared idea of a good life of having the autonomous freedom to develop and pursue dreams is related to the neoliberal context they are situated in. This neoliberal narrative, focused on progress and growth, overshadows collective views of the good life that resonate among some of my interlocutors, which I discuss in the following paragraph (Fischer 2014, 10, 13, 216).

Dignity, Fairness, and Committing to Larger Purposes

My interlocutors' aspirations and imaginations, including their opportunities to realize them, seem to focus on individual gain primarily. However, they are also about what the interlocutors of my research understand by dignity and fairness and how they commit to larger purposes (Fischer 2014, 2). On dignity and fairness, Fischer (2014, 7) states that well-being is also depending on the “freedom from discrimination and exclusion.” Moreover, he claims that it is about being respected and “treated fairly” (Fischer 2014, 7). The way my interlocutors perceive what is fair varies from person to person. Nevertheless, they are all raised or living in the Netherlands, which is essential in how their current perspectives on a good life, as described earlier, are constituted, and developed.

For example, many interlocutors argued that they lived in an individualistic society in relation to having children and thus desired a more collective approach. In conversations, I noticed that many interlocutors perceived the idea of a nuclear family as an isolated and, therefore, individual existence. According to them, Dutch society is an individualistic society where having a nuclear family is very lonely and challenging because it is expected that the

biological mother and father must carry out all child-rearing responsibilities, such as nurturing and educating, by themselves. Moreover, it could result in cutting oneself from social circles and losing valuable relationships. It was causing my interlocutors to perceive having children as a highly demanding task containing a lot of pressure and constraints. Something that could reduce the intensity is outsourcing the child-rearing to daycare and au pairs. However, besides the ethical question regarding cheap transnational labor, most of my interlocutors did not see the point of having children and subsequently almost did not being engaged in the caring aspect. Others did not feel comfortable outsourcing child-rearing because they would be afraid of being judged for doing so.

Most of my interlocutors are perceived by others as someone who would be a good parent. They also acknowledge that they would be very engaged, caring, and responsible parents if they became parents. Therefore, the prospect of raising the child with a partner or alone in combination with knowing they would be fully committed to going all in this is plenty of reason for my interlocutors not to have children.

However, they favored living in a community where they would care for the children of others and live together with their friends, acquaintances, and family. Furthermore, they desired a community where people were more loving, accepting, and looking out for each other in the choices or paths they decided to take. In chapter three, I elaborate on these ideas on sharing responsibilities in caring for children. In relation to well-being, this aspiration illustrates that individual decisions could be directed by communal norms. I also discussed this in an interview with Diana, where she shared her experience with some of her family that are from Ghana. She explained:

“The possible downside of a community is that there are guidelines for the collective, and if one does not match these guidelines, one becomes an outsider. When the collective is out of balance, then progress is disturbed. Hence, someone is perceived as an enemy of progress. The collective constructs the norm. Therefore, Diana advocated for a society where the caring and loving part of the collective is connected to the free character of an individualistic society. In other words, a loving and caring community where everyone can be whoever they want to be within that collective” (Diana, interview March 23, 2022).

Within this collective, interlocutors presented their ideas on finding others to share these aspirations with. For some, this means having a heteronormative monogamous relationship.

For others, it means having a queer non-monogamous relationship, which I return to in chapter three. Not all interlocutors perceived it as a requirement for a good life. It could be an excellent addition but not a necessity, some argued. On the other hand, almost all interlocutors shared their love for having pets, such as cats and dogs. They even described it as a light version of having children where they acknowledged the feeling of responsibility and always had to consider when to schedule things. Some also described it as already experiencing the limits of wanting to be responsible or taking into account something. In other words, children would be a multiplication of that experience and, therefore, a confirmation of why they do not want children.

Another discussed aspect regarding a good life is how humans interact with non-humans. Most interlocutors aspire to improve or shift how humans relate to nature. An example is that almost all climate scientists agree that climate change is caused by humans (NASA 2022). That is because some societies follow an anthropocentric approach, where humans are perceived as the center of existence and thus dominant to nature (Haraway 2004; 2016; Tsing 2017; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010). This human-centered approach in relation to the neoliberal individualistic mindset leads to more consumerism (Lee et al. 2010). In conversations, I discussed the idea of consuming less, and interlocutors related this to the human-nature relation by expressing their desire to consume fewer animal products but also consume less in general. The aspirations presented in the first paragraph of this chapter are rooted within these more “Western” ontologies described there. However, these aspirations regarding desires for a collective and equality between humans and non-humans relate more to indigenous cosmologies that use ancestral knowledge to serve the common good (Viveiros de Castro 1998; Latour 1993; Fischer 2014, 10, 13, 181, 216).

A Future without Children

“Every child begins the world again” - Henry David Thoreau (1854) in Walden

In their book, *The Anthropology of the Future*, Rebecca Bryant, and Daniel M. Knight (2019) explore the anthropology of the future. The authors argue that people are constantly imagining and constituting their future. In my conversations, I discovered that my interlocutors are also constantly balancing and considering various aspects of their current life and how it would

affect their future. To be able to connect my interlocutors' imaginations to their perspectives of the future, I use Bryant and Knight's (2019, 15, 16) interpretive framework of “temporal orientations” that determine how people interact with the present and helps with comprehending the past. In order to study the anthropology of the future, the authors focus on six “temporal orientations,” namely: anticipation, expectation, speculation, potentiality, hope, and destiny (Bryant and Knight 2019, 15). Regarding my empirical data, I will focus on anticipation and hope. That is because when questioning the desire to have children, my interlocutors anticipate possible barriers while hoping for a better future.

Therefore, my interlocutors are acting upon imagining their future by anticipating and hoping for things to stay the same, get better, or fear things to get worse. As discussed in the first paragraph, my interlocutors are in an ongoing exploration of a purpose in life. These ongoing orientations are what Bryant and Knight (2019, 9, 201) define as open-ended teleologies. It is open-ended because it is an ongoing process that is subject to change regardless of whether, at some point, someone's desired purpose is realized. Moreover, teleology refers to the exploration of that purpose. Hence, in this paragraph, I critically analyze how the orientations of my interlocutors towards the future allow them to interact with their imaginations and anxieties.

My empirical data is situated in two orientations: anticipation and hope (Bryant and Knight 2019). During my fieldwork, I noticed that in consideration of not wanting children, my interlocutors are anticipating what their choice would mean for their desired life and future. Here they anticipate based on childhood experiences and observations captured in their environment. For instance, some interlocutors did not experience their childhood as very pleasant, influencing their perspective of reliving this through their potential children.

The other orientation is hope. Among my interlocutors, there are different forms of hopes that cause different forms of responses to it. Most of the interlocutors I encountered are not very optimistic regarding improvements and solutions for the societal and environmental crises that occur in contemporary society. Of the nineteen interlocutors I engaged with, only Lieve explicitly mentioned that she was not anxious regarding her future. Regarding the other interlocutors, there was a wide variety in what aspects people were worried about, what the level of anxiety was, and to what extent it influenced their daily choices and behavior. How their daily choices and behavior are affected is related to their notion of hope (Bryant and Knight 2019, 132-134). Namely, they have particular concerns for future generations regarding the habitability of the planet and their potential children. Nevertheless, some interlocutors are

still optimistic about their direct life and future and have hope that there are ideas that could maintain, improve, or realize particular imaginations, which I further discuss in chapter three.

In relation to hope, one could argue that there has been a shift from “dark anthropology” examined by Sherry Ortner (2016) to “anthropology of the good” discussed by Appadurai (2013). In her article Ortner (2016, 49) defines the rise of “dark anthropology” as “anthropology that emphasizes the harsh and brutal dimensions of human experience, and the structural and historical conditions that produce them.” In other words, an overrepresentation in scholarly theory that researches subjects of contemporary society, such as neoliberalism and gender inequalities (Ortner 2016, 49). In this chapter's first paragraph, I discussed the anthropology of the good (life).

In conversations, I observed a strong desire to ignore and move away from the dark side of humanity and society as much as possible. This became visible when many of my interlocutors shared that they did not experience anxieties and concerns from indirect and abstract overarching societal and environmental crises regarding their remaining lifetime. The reasons for this varied from not being afraid that the effects of crises would be noticeable in their environment and lifetime to shutting off from dark futural imaginations such as warfare, environmental hazards, refugee waves, and resource scarcity. Moreover, some explained that they think the news is too depressing, that thinking about the state of contemporary society is unbearable, and that they want to focus on opportunities and solutions instead of constraints and sacrifices. In their perspectives, having children mainly equaled constraints and sacrifices discussed in the first paragraph of this chapter. While a childfree life would contribute to opportunities in their aspirations as discussed above. Coming back to the orientation of anticipation, the paragraph above shows the mechanism my interlocutors use in order to cope with the uncertainty and anxiety regarding their future (Bryant and Knight 2019, 22, 23).

However, during fieldwork, I also engaged with people who confront social and environmental crises and anticipated these concerns. From the nineteenth interlocutors, Dana, Max, Karen, Kim, and Gaia explicitly mentioned in interviews that their aspiration not to have children is primarily derived from the concerns and anxieties they experience regarding the future of their potential children. Some even worry about their own future regarding societal and environmental crises. In two separate interviews with Max and Kim, who were in a relationship, they both explained that they were seriously taking into account possibilities such as Amsterdam being flooded or political and civil turmoil due to resource scarcity and transnational displacement. In the latter's case, they consider migrating to New Zealand as a

way of anticipating because, according to Max, there is social, environmental, and political stability to a certain degree (Max, interview, March 17, 2022).

Regarding hope, if every child begins the world again, as stated in the opening quote of this paragraph, then we would need children to keep the world going and innovating. I can relate to this statement to a certain degree because demographers argue that the current average of one point six children per female is already too low for the current welfare state. This entails not having enough people to employ and finance the Dutch healthcare, education, and pension system. When discussing this with interlocutors, people like Gaia and Dennis, whom I interviewed while in a relationship, shared their views (Gaia and Dennis, interview, March 24, 2022). They jokingly described themselves as isolated people who valued their time together. Therefore, if they would not have children, they would probably end up alone sitting behind the geraniums (*achter de geraniums zitten* is a Dutch saying which is used when people describe the image of an older person living alone in a retirement home doing nothing all day but sitting in front of its window looking outside with geranium flowers standing in the windowsill). In other words, it is a lonely existence with none to few people visiting or caring for the older person. However, I argue that this position is something that people with children could also end up in. Afterward, I realized that I did not specifically ask my interlocutors whether they had any concerns regarding their pension or other components of the welfare state. Neither did one of my interlocutors mention this concern in conversations. Nevertheless, I would argue that solving the welfare state problem is not by increasing the Dutch population but by changing the systems regarding just wages, fair taxes, and basic income grants (Graeber 2018).

* * *

To conclude, I examined my interlocutors' perspectives on a good life and future and how they engage in the quest for individual and collective well-being as they perceive it. According to my interlocutors, a good life consists of having the freedom and flexibility to maintain and realize their aspirations. In the critical analysis, I determined that many of these aspirations are individualistic and, to a certain extent, do not contribute to a collective good. Nevertheless, many interlocutors shared ideas and concerns in relation to challenging normative approaches such as neoliberalism by advocating for more collective and queer approaches. When examining different ideas on futures and hope through the lens of anthropology of the future, I discovered that some interlocutors anticipate futural anxieties by shutting off from all that is

depressing. In comparison, others try to face their concerns and translate them to practical considerations such as migrating.

The first chapter shows that within the context of my research, perspectives on a good life and future mainly derive from individual aspirations and concerns. Moreover, the privileged and secure context my interlocutors are situated in hardly limits them in realizing these aspirations or anticipating their concerns. Nevertheless, this does not mean that my interlocutors do not aspire to and imagine a life and future that involves no societal and environmental issues. On the contrary, almost all the people I encountered were worried and hopeless regarding the future of humanity. It is just that their positionality offers most of them the opportunity to explore ways to cope with these concerns.

Chapter 2: The Cornerstone of Dutch Society

“I have Turkish roots, and in my family, I experience that many women have a suppressed status more than Dutch women. Not per se in the sense that they are obliged to wear a headscarf when they go outside, but they are not as free as men and also not as free as Dutch women. Therefore, I developed an aversion toward everything that could oppress me. That is not something I want to take part in. I am way too feminist for that. I am also unbelieving, so the idea of the cornerstone of society (*hoeksteen van de samenleving*) that we are destined to find a husband and have two kids while living in a *Vinex*-neighborhood¹ disgusts me a bit. I perceive marriage and children as old-fashioned choices” (Mikhaila, interview, March 11, 2022).

In the previous chapter, I outlined different narratives regarding the ideas of what a good life and future mean and critically analyzed them within my interlocutors' individualistic context. Despite the individualistic character of the aspirations and concerns of my interlocutors regarding their life and future, I argue that for my research, it is essential to contextualize further the Dutch society they are situated in. In other words, to what extent does the promoted idea of a nuclear family as “the cornerstone of society” play a role in, according to my interlocutors, the disruptive character of having children and the perspective that having children in Dutch society does not mix well with their aspirations. Furthermore, in this chapter, I again critically analyze how the possible expectations and incomprehension that my interlocutors, to some extent, experienced emerged and developed. Moreover, how they cope with these experiences. The decision of my interlocutors that children do not match their views on a good life and future raises questions from friends, family, and society about selfishness, happiness, and regret. That is because my interlocutors' rejection of what is expected sometimes results in misunderstanding and disbelief from people who desire to have children or grandchildren. Therefore, in this chapter, I explore how these narratives reject the idea of having children. In other words, with those kinds of questions, my interlocutors receive because

¹ *Vinex*-neighborhoods are built in sub-urban areas of larger cities in order to create new housing but are popularly used as a way to negatively describe a very homogenous new build neighborhood, for starters.

they reject the expected idea of having children and how they respond to them. Namely, living in a heteronormative society where it is common to settle with the opposite sex and have a biological child at some point. As mentioned above, the expected idea of having children does not match the concept of my interlocutors of living a good life. First, I illustrate the Dutch context my interlocutors are situated in by explaining the saying “the cornerstone of society” (In Dutch: *hoeksteen van de samenleving*, Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) 2022b; 2022c). In order to outline the origin of this expression, I combined Dutch literature, which I translated into English, with English literature (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia 2019; Os and Boerma 2015). Second, I analyze how stigmas in the Dutch context around childlessness relate to questions and responses that my interlocutors experience for not having the desire to have children. Here I use academic literature on childlessness to explore how people interact with the stigmas of voluntary childlessness (Veevers 1973; Mollen 2006). Third, I explore how my interlocutors manage and respond to the questions and comments they receive regarding stigmas of childlessness (Park 2002; Blackstone and Stewart 2012; Mueller and Yoder 1999; Kelly 2009).

The Holy Family

The opening excerpt of this chapter is from one of the first interviews I conducted. I talked with Mikhaila, a twenty-nine-year-old woman living in Rotterdam. This was the first time one of the interlocutors introduced the “cornerstone of society.” The expression was not entirely new to me; however, I did not know precisely what the saying entailed nor the context I had encountered it before. Moreover, it did not occur to me that it could be something that came to light in this research. That is because I did not foresee the shift in research focus from reproductive choices in relation to climate change anxieties to approaches to individualism and kinmaking.

The last interview I conducted was with a forty-year-old woman called Tirza. Tirza also mentioned the cornerstone of society in order to contextualize why and how she experienced being an exception by not having children (Tirza, interview, April 22, 2022). When she shared a summary of the phrase's origin, I realized how essential this perspective is to understand the Dutch context my interlocutors are situated in. It can tell us a lot about how they interact in a certain way with this context regarding not wanting children and how people in their environment respond to their interaction.

As discussed in the introduction, since 1000 AD, the Netherlands has been dominated by the Christian religion (Eijnatten 2011). In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this religion produced the imagery of the cornerstone of society as a way to symbolize that in rapidly urbanizing regions, the nuclear family was the foundation of society (Os and Boerma 2015). This idea of a family consisting of a married cisman and -woman having a biological child derived from the “Holy Family,” which entails the Child Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and Saint Joseph (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia 2019). The imaging became a favored representation as a means to warn people from “unholy families” such as adulterous spouses (Os and Boerma 2015). Hence, there was no room for the idea that gay people could form a nuclear family because they were unable to bear biological children together (Os and Boerma 2015).

The Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA 2022a) is a Dutch political party composed in 1977. The CDA argued that a building needs cornerstones in order to be stable. The Dutch society is the metaphorical building, and the cornerstones represent the nuclear family consisting of a father, mother, and children. Without these cornerstones society is unstable, CDA (2022b; 2022c) argues. Even though CDA nowadays uses a somewhat more inclusive communication by stating that a nuclear family is not merely a man together with a woman having a son and daughter, it is a position they still promote and defend. Moreover, when browsing the pages on their website that discuss statements involving the cornerstone of society, the supporting imagery shows a white woman and man with two white sons. In their copywriting on these pages, they do not specifically mention whether there are different family compositions, for instance, nuclear families, gay parenthood, foster homes, and blended families. However, CDA (2022b; 2022c) does mention that families are under increasing pressure because of developments within families. To exemplify, they state that the balance between caring for the children while working is a high demanding responsibility. Therefore, they argue that this must give parents a preferential status regarding increasing social welfare. According to Tirza, this is a thorny issue, she argues in an interview I had with her. Due to the perspective on the cornerstone of society where children are the center and the most valued members, Tirza always feels like an exception or excluded. Therefore, she argues that if the government would stop financially stimulating parents (in the making) to have children, it could contribute to a less child-centered society (Tirza, interview, April 22, 2022). Furthermore, CDA (2022c) states that not all parents are able to stay together. They argue that despite it obviously would affect the two parents that are separating, and it would also have major consequences for the children. Namely, children who undergo the divorce of their

parents often underachieve in school. Moreover, in some municipalities, half of all demand for youth care is related to divorces, according to CDA (2022c). In the following chapter of this thesis, I examine different perspectives on non-normative kinmaking and families by choice.

As mentioned, the CDA (2022a) was founded in 1977. In the same year, they ruled the government for the first time, with Dries van Agt as prime minister (Parlement 2022). In the Netherlands, there is a four-year term, but there is no maximum of recurring terms to being prime minister. This thesis is written in 2022, which means that in the last forty-five years, the Netherlands has been ruled by a CDA prime minister for twenty-five years (Parlement 2022). In other words, for more than fifty percent of the last four and a half decades, the reigning party was a party that viewed the nuclear family as the cornerstone of society. In those forty-five years, the Labor Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA) ruled for eight years, and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (*Volkspartij Voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, VVD) has continuously been ruling from 2010 to this day (Parlement 2022). More importantly, the Netherlands is a multiparty democracy, meaning many parties compete for office. To put things in perspective, since 1977, there have been fourteen elections in the Netherlands, with an average of twenty-four political parties attending per election that were electable for the premiership. Which shows the dominance of the CDA in the Dutch government in the last forty-five years.

From 2010 to 2019, Dutch politician Sybrand van Haersma Buma was the leader of the CDA. In 2016 he argued that individualism is out of control and that the government should do something about it by appointing a Minister of Family responsible for revaluing the nuclear family as the cornerstone of society. So far, this idea has not been adopted. However, I think it illustrates the contemporary tension I analyzed in chapter one that not wanting children to be able to realize aspirations could be perceived or allocated as individualistic, which I further examine in the following paragraphs of this chapter (NOS 2016).

Stigmas of Childlessness

The previous paragraph showed how the idea of the cornerstone of society emerged and became embedded in Dutch political consciousness. This consciousness is accompanied by stigmas concerning the expectation of having children such as selfish, irresponsible, immature, indecisive, insensitive, lonely, and pitiful (Gotlib 2016). Therefore, in this paragraph, I analyze how my interlocutors experience these stigmas in their exploration of voluntary childlessness

(Veevers 1973; Mollen 2006; Park 2002; Blackstone and Stewart 2012; Mueller and Yoder 1999; Kelly 2009; Moore 2014).

The exposure to popular media, teaching material, and role models like my parents shaped my frame of reference, which consisted of studying after high school, finding a full-time job, having a heteronormative monogamous relationship, buying a house, and someday starting a nuclear family. George P. Murdock (1949, 1, 2, 11) defines the nuclear family as having two parents with their dependent children. Moreover, he argues that within anthropology, the “nuclear family” emerged as a universal concept as having four purposes: “sexual, economic, reproductive, and educational” (Murdock 1949, 1, 2, 11).

Despite the necessary struggles I encountered with dropping out of high school and climbing my way up to university, I always took the above-mentioned predetermined stages in my life for granted and never really fantasized about alternative ways to bypass the system, even though it was not always working in my favor. Also, because I felt peer and societal pressure to succeed in those four purposes Murdock (1949, 1, 2, 11). This reflection is not meant to gain sympathy because I am aware of my position, privilege, and, therefore, the luxury characteristic of these concerns. However, it is to show that based on what assumptions and imagined pressures, choices regarding following predetermined stages could be made in the Dutch context my interlocutors were situated. In retrospect, what I have learned during this master's and within this research, is that I was naive and foolish to assume and accept that realizing aspirations for a good life is a linear process and universal desire equally feasible for everyone.

The conversations with many interlocutors thus made me realize that perceptions of parenthood and other normative expectations within the Dutch context can vary immensely. More importantly, further elaborating on my interlocutors' pronatalist context is crucial to grasping the designated stigmas of not wanting children. Pronatalism could be defined as a set of social and political practices and policies that stimulate childbearing and therefore influences procreative attitudes and assumptions (Veevers 1973; Moore 2014; Park 2002). In turn, these attitudes and assumptions constitute different stigmas around childless people, such as unhappiness, emotional instability, immaturity, and selfishness (Pohlman, 1966; Gotlib 2016, 330). By discussing this with interlocutors, I discovered that their family, friends, and acquaintances projected such stigmas around childlessness on them. One of the stigmas discussed with Carla, Peter, Wilma, Lisa, Gaia, and Danielle was taking into account their emotional stability in consideration of not having children. In an interview, Danielle said the following:

“In times I am down or struggling mentally, I sometimes think, I did not choose to be here on this planet at this point in life. I did not choose to have a hard time. Therefore, I think having children is selfish, and I do not want to make this decision for my child. However, if I did, I would ensure I have all the time to raise them. This means that I would not be able to work full time. Because it does not make sense to me to want children in order to put them in daycare the whole business week” (Danielle, interview, March 10, 2022).

In contrast to what has been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Danielle argues that having children is selfish instead of the other way around, that people who do not want children are selfish. In conversations, emotional instability was combined with stigmas such as irrationality, indecisiveness, and pettiness. In an interview with Gaia and Dennis, we discussed the relationship between these stigmas. Gaia shared that she suffered from depression, which made her realize how vulnerable people could be even if they lived in a secure and privileged environment. This vulnerability was the main reason for her not to have children, as she could not see this combined with raising children. As a response to that, people sometimes told her that her worldview was too dark and not realistic. Therefore, those people thought it was a pity that this worldview prevented her from being happy. They asked why she would make such a sacrifice, arguing it was unnecessary (Gaia and Dennis, interview, March 24, 2022).

In a phone call I had with Derk, he explained how the people in his social circle interact with him regarding the stigmas of not having children. He explains:

“How people react to my childfree choice or childless existence is a mix of people that feel sorry for you because you are lonely and have an empty life with no purpose. The other response is jealousy. In other words, they envy my life. When we are drinking together or on holiday, they could say that they wish for the life that I have where they could focus on shaping their own life and identity instead of serving their children” (Derk, interview, 10 April 2022).

As can be seen in the excerpts of the interviews I had with Derk and Danielle, many of the interlocutors I encountered are dealing with questions, responses, and assumptions that they receive for the aspiration not to want children.

Something important to highlight is what kind of stigmas my interlocutors had on parenthood because this gives relevant insights into how these stigmas influenced their process of not wanting children. For instance, in conversation with Mikhaila, she explained that from a young age, she had certain stigmas about her parents. For instance, she perceived her parents were incredibly dull people - to such an extent that she was unable to grasp why someone would aspire to become a parent. At some point, Mikhaila said: "Parents have no life; they are so boring. You fulfilled your biological purpose, and now your life is over; you can die peacefully" (Mikhaila, interview, March 11, 2022). Whereas this was a childhood perception that Mikhaila admitted having been nuanced over time, interlocutor Tirza shared her experiences and perspectives on being the exception among friends and family of not having children. Tirza mentioned that there is no incentive to want your friends to have children for someone who is voluntarily childless. It becomes less fun when friends have children. Suddenly kinship ties are tightened again, while in the past, these ties were not tight. So, you will see them less often, and your importance moves to the background (Tirza, interview, April 22, 2022).

These friends who now desire to have children were once born and raised in their families. Therefore, these people have strong ties with both families, the family they grew up in and the one they are establishing themselves (Ebrahim 1982, 68). Interaction and shared needs create and reinforce these connections (Ebrahim 1982, 68). After child-rearing, the child becomes independent; this can influence the needs and interaction among family members (Ebrahim 1982, 68). Family members tend to adapt their ties and structure according to what is needed to maintain the family manageable (Ebrahim 1982, 68). Tirza's experience regarding friends tightening up the family ties again after having children shows how these structures change when for example, their friends could benefit from their family in the sense of babysitting to be able to keep working full time or have some quality time with each other.

Not only do family ties change, but friendship structures as well. They are affected by other friends having children or becoming the only one that has not. In conversation with a twenty-five-year-old woman named Danielle, she shared her prediction and experience on how friendship relationships could change. Danielle explains that the most challenging part of not having children is that everyone around you has children, resulting in you becoming an exception. Her mother's partner has no children because she was unable to, and she told Danielle that almost every conversation she has with people who have children is about children, even if they are already adults. It is almost always about how the children are doing. In those cases, it is not possible to tag along in the conversation because you do not have the

experience of having children (Danielle, interview, March 10, 2022). Park (2002, 30) discusses that when childless people have pronatalist friends, these friends have a hard time grasping the desire to remain childfree because it is perceived as a taboo and alternative choice. According to Goffman (1963, 4, 37), this phenomenon occurs when people who desire to be voluntarily childfree are “stigmatized by their blemished characters,” which entails that these stigmatized interlocutors are sidelined and excluded.

This is something I also experience when I am at the house of my father and his girlfriend during family meetings. In those moments, when we are together with my sister and all four children of my father’s girlfriend and the grandchild of one of the children of my father’s girlfriend. Then, all the attention is focused on the grandchild. It feels almost that the child has some kind of sacred status that we are supposed to protect and encourage by making them the center of attention. Is it because they are the future and our hope? Or is it because children are sensitive and vulnerable; thus, people feel the urge to flood them with attention in love?

In the book, *The Anthropology of Childhood*, David F. Lancy (2015) introduces the dualism between cultures that could be categorized as gerontocracies and neontocracies. Gerontocratic cultures have a top-down hierarchy, where the eldest are the most valued members of society (Lancy 2015, 3). On the contrary, in neontocratic societies, children are perceived as the most valuable members (Lancy 2015, 3). In his book, Lancy (2015; 2017) argues that Western, educated, industrialized, rich democracies (WEIRD) are predominantly neontocracies. In neontocratic cultures, children are the center of attention and therefore protected from anything that could harm them (Lancy 2017). According to Lancy (2017), this overprotective approach could lead to children not being prepared for the complicated world and increase mental illnesses. Almost none of my interlocutors had a solid aversion to children in particular. Nevertheless, most did not favor the child-centeredness they regularly experienced in Dutch society.

Three other interlocutors, Derk, Carla, and Tirza, who are above forty, confirmed these experiences. Tirza even experienced people she knew, taking into account when to attend someone's birthday. One could choose to come at the end of the day when the chances are more significant than the parents with children already left or even visit a whole other day when there are no parents with children except for the possible children of the friend you visit. The same applies to your own birthday, she argued. “Do you want your friends to bring their children, and if not, how do you communicate this without insulting people? When people say that pets are not allowed, no one objects or is offended, so why could someone not desire the same

regarding children” (Tirza, interview, April 22, 2022)? My interlocutors receive numerous questions and responses when they share their desire to remain childfree in an environment where children are indispensable. As illustrated above, all interlocutors were raised or lived in the Dutch pronatal context. Therefore, it is insurmountable not to experience any of the stigmas mentioned above. Hence, the following paragraph examines how my interlocutors manage and respond to these stigmatizations.

Stigmatization Management

From time to time, my interlocutors encounter situations where having children is the topic of discussion. That is, in conversations with family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances at birthdays, work, the pub, and dinners. All interlocutors at least once received understanding or judgmental questions and comments on their desire to remain childfree. Although many interlocutors did not experience unpleasant encounters on a daily basis and had already developed coping mechanisms, it is still relevant to mention how they managed stigmatizations of voluntary childlessness (Veevers 1973; Mollen 2006; Blackstone and Stewart 2012; Mueller and Yoder 1999; Kelly 2009). Park 2002, 21) describes them as “techniques used by voluntarily childless women and men to validate and manage their deviant identity in a pronatalist social context.”

As mentioned earlier, the deviant identity of my interlocutors results in being “stigmatized by their blemished characters” (Goffman 1963, 4, 37). Thus, Goffman (1963, 4, 37) argues that people who own an “immediately visible or known about” stigma must deal with responses to their deviancy. The main challenge for my interlocutors in managing stigmatizations is how to control the information that they share and is accessible to others (Park 2002, 32). In order to control information, scholars adopted different techniques used by stigmatized actors to manage their “deviant status” (Goffman 1963; Veevers 1975). The different techniques which I analyze here are “passing,” “identity substitution,” engaging in “symbolic gestures,” proclaiming contradicting “moral views,” and “redefining childlessness” (Goffman 1963; Veevers 1975; Park 2002, 33; Blackstone and Stewart 2012, 5).

In the case of the “passing” technique, stigmatized actors try to circumvent the topic and tend to answer with vague and procrastinating answers (Goffman 1963). In the case of twenty-five-year-old woman Diana, she explained the difference between discussing this topic with her family in Ghana and her friends in Amsterdam. For instance, when I asked her how

she managed the expectations from her Ghanaian family, she replied: “I do not. They only allow the desired answer. Sometimes, I tell them not to get their hopes up. However, I never explicitly mention that I do not want children” (Diana, interview, March 23, 2022). Here it is clear how Diana tries to bypass and ignore the questions regarding this topic with these people.

Goffman (1963) presents another technique: “identity substitution.” That is by adopting another identity that could be advantageous in specific contexts where one does not feel like justifying and defending its position. This technique is not something that one of my interlocutors specifically mentioned using. Nevertheless, in an interview, Karen shared that a year ago, she discovered that she has polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), which means that you have infrequent, irregular, or prolonged menstrual periods (Mayo Clinic 2020). She illustrated how she experienced it by stating: “Everyone around me was like, I feel so sorry for you. And I was like; it does not bother me much. The emotional responses of people around me made me feel insensitive. However, it was also a realization that reflected if I want children when this does not bother me” (Karen, interview, April 20, 2022). In other words, it could be something Karen might use one day in order to apply an identity substitution. Even though she does not have to renounce her true identity in order to use this position because it is, in fact, the case.

Another strategy is engaging “in symbolic gestures that suggest conformity” (Veevers 1975). This strategy overlaps with the techniques above because when substituting an identity, one could also conform to the desired answer. Moreover, it is also a way to circumvent the question by focusing on something else that pleases the questioner. Among my interlocutors, it was widely shared that people responded conformingly by using constructions such as: 'maybe one day,' 'I do not know yet,' 'maybe I would want to adopt children,' 'be a surrogate mother,' 'caring for the children of loved ones,' or 'I would like to work with children. In conversations, most of these responses did not seem like a mechanism to manage external expectations but more like internal aspirations and alternatives for including children in their lives.

A widely adopted strategy among my interlocutors was proclaiming “moral views that were explicitly at odds with” parenthood (Veevers 1975). The personal reasons outlined in chapter one are why my interlocutors do not want children to illustrate these moral views. However, as with the previous strategy, this is more an internal mechanism to order their aspirations than a way to manage the stigmatizations externally.

The last technique I want to discuss is to redefine “childlessness in a positive way” (Blackstone and Stewart 2012, 5). The symbolic gesture that suggests conformity and moral

views that are explicitly at odds with parenthood are ways for my interlocutors to inform their social circle and society about childlessness in a positive way. Most interlocutors did not need to proactively advocate or promote their perspectives on having children. That is because, on the one hand, they do not want to bother people who, for example, have a strong desire but are physically unable to have children. On the other hand, there is the desire not to have a deviant status but to be treated like people who desire to have children.

* * *

To summarize, by contextualizing the cornerstone of Dutch society, I aimed to create a better understanding of the context my interlocutors are situated in. The societal and political context entails the Netherlands as predominantly Christian, where a nuclear family as the cornerstone of society has been the norm. Subsequently, I analyzed what kind of stigmatization my interlocutors experienced for not wanting children. Here it became visible that emotional instability, selfishness, and pettiness are stigmas my interlocutors must deal with. Therefore, in the last paragraph, I examined what kind of management techniques and strategies my interlocutors use to respond to stigmatization and internally figure out their aspirations externally. The techniques they used were “passing,” “identity substitution,” engaging in “symbolic gestures,” proclaiming contradicting “moral views,” and “redefining childlessness.”

In the next chapter, I further explore the difference between choices and circumstances (Kelly 2009, 158). For some, remaining childless is perceived as a voluntary choice. While others “might have had children had circumstances had been different” (Kelly 2009, 158). During my fieldwork, some participants perceived their consideration of not wanting children as a choice. However, many interlocutors stated that they would wish for children if circumstances were different. These circumstances consisted of being financially independent, sharing the raising and caring of children more collectively, having a prosperous future regarding climate change and other societal issues, and physical and mental stability.

Chapter 3: It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

“I think that my perception of queerness and my aversion to heteronormativity is well connected to the general feeling why I do not want children at this point because then I will only conform more to that heteronormative image which I am not. So that feels uncomfortable. For me, queer means to move away from normative patterns such as monogamous heterosexual relationships with two children. Instead, I would like to see more room for fluidity within gender identities and sexual orientation” (Mikhaila, interview, March 11, 2022).

In the title song of the BNNVARA documentary, *Ryan is Pregnant (Ryan is Zwanger)*, the sentence that repeatedly is being sung is: “There is more space outside the box” (*buiten de lijntjes is meer ruimte* from the song *Swaying on the waves (Denis op de golven)* by Ageeth de Haan 2022). This conception that there is more space outside the box is also something interlocutors such as Mikhaila and Tirza advocate for to be more widely explored. The BNNVARA documentary, *Ryan is Pregnant (Ryan is Zwanger)*, aims to explore the space outside the box by following a non-binary queer and trans person called Ryan who, together with their partner David, tries to fulfill their desire to have children by getting Ryan pregnant (Canel 2022).

The documentary shows the bumpy process of a non-binary, trans person in getting pregnant, bearing a baby, raising a non-binary child, and trying to be acknowledged as a non-binary biological parent. The illustration of this adventure provokes thinking about how inclusive and progressive our society is because the documentary shows how normative expectations and legislations complicate the above-outlined processes. For instance, Ryan is, biologically speaking, born as a female. At some point before the documentary, Ryan decided to physically transition to a male while keeping their uterus and therefore stay fertile. In this process, Ryan also changed their passport's civil registration from female to male. In the documentary, Ryan receives an update from their governmental employer regarding maternity leave. Because Ryan is registered as a male, they have no right to leave because men cannot get pregnant and thus have no right to maternity leave. Later on in the documentary, Ryan was able to change their registration to non-binary (X). However, the parents encountered two other challenges when the child was born. First, Ryan wants to be registered as the biological parent

instead of the mother because Ryan does not identify with a woman. Again, this is impossible because Ryan is not a woman according to the system and therefore cannot be the biological parent, but only the biological mother. Second, Ryan wants to register their child as non-binary (X) because they do not want to raise their child with preassumed gender roles. So that when the child is older, it can choose for itself what kind of gender role it identifies with. The documentary shows that this desire is bureaucratically also not possible (Canel 2022).

The examples above in relation to the first and second chapters show aspirations that could contribute to a broader exploration of different perspectives. At the same time, it illustrates this exploration's systematic constraints and challenges. Therefore, in this chapter, I aim to analyze different approaches to kinship through concepts such as non-normative kinmaking and “families we choose” studied in queer and feminist theory in order to outline different accounts from interlocutors on parenthood (Bailey 2013; Lewin 2009; Weston 1997; Wilson 2019). That is because many interlocutors have ideas on different forms of family, parenthood, and relationships that allow them to establish a family or raise children without bearing them and being accountable. I critically analyze how my interlocutors perceive this biological commitment differs from a social or cultural commitment within the Dutch context.

First, in continuation of chapter two, I examine how stigmatizations around childlessness gave way to anthropological studies on kinship and queer theory. I briefly discuss concerns such as time and financial investment, feeling of responsibility, and loneliness. Second, I present different perspectives of kinship, parenthood, friendship, and relationships shared by interlocutors and analyze these through queer theory around families by choice and non-normative kinmaking. Examples of these ideas are perspectives on queer theory, gay parenthood, being that cool pibling (*gender-neutral and non-binary word for aunt and uncle*), collectively raising children in a community-based society or together with friends and family, adopting or fostering a child, being a surrogated parent for someone unable to biologically have children, blended families, new forms in work/life balance, and alternative ways to raise children outside of the predetermined, normative beaten tracks (Bailey 2013; Lewin 2009; Weston 1997; Wilson 2019).

Different Perspectives on Parenthood and Kinship

In the second chapter, I briefly introduced the idea of a nuclear family. To further elaborate on how this idea of the family emerged and developed within anthropology, I draw on scholars

such as Kate Weston (1991; 1998), Ellen Lewin (2016), and Ara Wilson (2019). In the first wave of anthropology, the discipline followed a Darwinian approach - human evolution through natural selection (Wilson 2019, 3). In the nineteenth century, anthropologists agreed “that different forms of marriage, kinship, and sexual behaviour must reflect different stages in the evolution of human society” (Wilson 2019, 3). In other words, they argued that humans evolved from primitive individuals to family-making actors. Back then, the most advanced stage was that of civilization that equaled a “paternally-led nuclear family” (Wilson 2019, 3). However, this development in the perception of family is not universally approached. In relation to strained relationships with blood kin and having deviant identities such as identifying as LGBTQIA+ contributed to new kinship arrangements based on friendship and shared deviant identities (Wilson 2019, 3; 2016, 599). This phenomenon is something that Kate Weston (1991) calls “families we choose.” In an encounter with Diana, we talked about these different ways of family formation. She said:

“I find it hard to picture myself as someone who is the first educator. For me, it is much easier to picture myself as a second caregiver within a collective. For instance, the children of my cousins, siblings, or friends. Someone that a child can fall back on outside of the safe zone of its parents. I find myself as a person much more suited to that role, to serve as a sort of backstop almost for my loved ones. I do not know if I would want to or be able to do that for a child of my own. It is tough to raise a child here in the West, in the part of the world where you rely very much on yourself. From what I know from my family who lives in Ghana, it is very normal that if you have just given birth and your mother is still alive that she comes to live with you, she can help so that you can get stronger. That you can also fall back on some people afterward. So that is where the collective relieves some of the care. However, you also must take for granted when things happen within the collective you disagree with. Still, I think there is more to be said for a collective life than an individualistic one. Because here you must do much more on your own. This, in turn, contributes to the financial aspect, which is one of the things that keeps me from having a child. Regarding the money I cannot earn when caring for my child for free or when I must spend money on daycare and babysitting” (Diana, interview, March 23, 2022).

As can be seen in the vignette above, as well as in the previous chapters, is that my interlocutors have all kinds of perspectives that they take into account when considering whether to have children or not. Most interlocutors argued that many of these reasons are almost impossible for them to change regardless of possible changes in internal and external factors such as emotional stability or solving societal and environmental crises because the benefits still do not outweigh the downsides. For instance, for some female interlocutors I encountered, regardless of all the improvements, changes, or adjustments that could simplify the child-rearing part, such as collectively caring and outsourcing care, they still must bear the child, which is something these women do not desire. Alternatively, supposing that all the world crises would disappear, many interlocutors still argue that they do not see the surplus-value of having a child in their aspired good life discussed in chapter one. These examples show that the reasons are so fundamental in many cases that they prevail over the possible benefits.

Nonetheless, for most interlocutors, the most dominant reasons for not wanting children entail concerns and insecurities regarding their individual life and future, as discussed in chapter one. For example, they were dealing with mental and physical health and being stressed by pressures on education, career, and housing. In other words, they are concerned that the choice of having children would affect their current lifestyle, including the aspirations and goals they envision in that life. These concerns regarding how this could directly affect their individual lives are related to more significant social issues such as inflation, school and career systems, healthcare, the housing markets, politics, and economics. Through fieldwork and in-depth interviews, I discovered the different perspectives on aspirations and goals to pursue for a good and meaningful life and future, as discussed in the first chapter.

As described by Diana, as well as by other interlocutors, some interlocutors have the desire to explore other forms of parenthood and family making. The prejudice that “exclusive motherhood” is preferred in successful child-rearing has been the central perspective within Western psychology (Bowlby 1969; Seymour 2013, 115). However, among my interlocutors, I discovered the concerns about being on their own in child-rearing within the context of parenthood in the Netherlands. Therefore, Diana advocated for a more collective approach that she experienced among her family in Ghana. In a chapter of the book *Attachment Reconsidered*, Susan C. Seymour (2013, 115) uses the proverb: “It takes a village to raise a child” (Seymour 2013, 115). In 2016, the National Public Radio (NPR) tried to discover where the proverb originated but was unable to designate it to a specific person or community (Goldberg 2016). In academics, scholars argue that it could be traced back to specific African communities like “Kijita (Wajita)” and “Swahili” (Goldberg 2016). All sayings could be translated to a more

general perspective that argues that children are not merely raised by their biological parents but that the whole community or even the world is responsible for the child-rearing (Goldberg 2016). In contrast to these African communities, the Dutch context relates more to the exclusive parenting approach studied in Western psychology, which I discussed in chapter two (Bowlby 1969; Seymour 2013; Roodsaz 2021).

In conversation with Carla, she explained how she experienced this exclusive parenting approach. She said that having children would be too disruptive in her life. She said that it took her a while to find emotional stability in life, and now that she finally found it, she was happy with it and did not want to disrupt it again by having children. The core message of this account is a shared perspective among all my interlocutors. Having children would be too disruptive to how they envision their life. This perspective on parenthood is based on the idea that a cisgender woman enters into a monogamous romantic relationship with a cisgender man, pursuing the goal of making the cisgender woman pregnant in order to produce cisgender blood kin. Who then are raised by their biological mother and father.

Depending on the financial capacity, it could be possible that this biological mother and father use external paid or unpaid help in care work. One could think of a babysitter, daycare, au pair, grandparents, and siblings. With this kind of consideration in mind, my interlocutors explained the disruptive elements in terms of time and financial investment, limitations of your flexibility, and is primarily responsible and therefore having to deal with the concerns that come with it. This feeling of responsibility refers back to the first chapter, where I use the quote of Thatcher (1987) to symbolize the shift from a more welfarist to a neoliberal approach. In conversations with interlocutors, I noticed the pressure from their environment and society to become autonomous and unique individuals. Someone that focuses on self-development and excelling in the things they do. That is to succeed in the competitive market and meet the image of a perfect life shared on social media.

Regarding the financial investment, some interlocutors such as Lisa and Derk were insecure about whether they had the resources to offer a child a carefree life in the sense of good education, healthcare, sports and leisure time, holidays, and other materialistic and servicing needs such as food, clothing, and transport. Other interlocutors like Diana, Peter, Mikhaila, and Denzel expressed their concerns more in the sense that they prefer to save and use their financial resources for traveling, their pets, housing, licenses, and doing things with friends. As can be seen in earlier ethnographic studies, having more minor financial concerns is a dominant motive for people not to have children (Park 2005; Hansen 2012, 33).

Concerning the investment of time and the constraints, interlocutors such as Tirza and Danielle shared their preference to spend their time on their careers and adventurous activities. Furthermore, being the primary educator involves feeling highly responsible for the child's well-being. This could entail the direct well-being of mental and physical health, providing all the resources to secure that, and concerns regarding a prosperous future. In a conversation with Peter, he shared this concern. For him, it relates to his obsessiveness and paranoia regarding locking and leaving his house correctly. He even explained that now with a cat, he must think of even more things before going, such as closing the windows and locking the gas stove. Hence, he argued that he would never feel comfortable letting them on their own if he had children (Peter, interview, March 8, 2022). In both cases, they connect the concerns to the possible distress it could cause.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier, some female interlocutors are not in favor of physically having to carry and give birth to a child. Following how gender norms are constructed in the past and developed over time, one could argue that womanhood is inextricably linked to childbearing and motherhood (Gimenez 2018). In other words, in the pronatalist context, women are expected to commit themselves to child-rearing in order to secure procreation (Venkatesan and Murali 2019; Ortner 1974). Hence, most anthropological literature on voluntary childlessness examines how women who choose to remain childfree experience their womanhood without biological motherhood (Moore 2014; Gimenez 2018). Some scholars argue that this supposed dualism of womanhood and motherhood could result in a state of ambivalence because the individual desires do not mix well with the pronatalist imposed expectation (Wilson 2014; Aumann and Galinsky 2012). As discussed above, this state of ambivalence was relatively absent in the case of my female interlocutors. They did not feel less as women due to the fact that they did not reproduce. The only ambivalence that occurred among some interlocutors was the fear of having regret afterward. However, this regret mainly appeared when people around them questioned the aspiration of my interlocutors to remain childfree.

These concerns, challenges, and motives for people not to want children show the limitations of the Dutch approach to exclusive parenthood. Therefore, in conversations with interlocutors, we discussed different approaches that could contribute to restructuring ideas on parenthood, kinship, and relationships. I discuss these different approaches in the following paragraph.

Queer Up

In most cases, the aspirations, concerns, and challenges my interlocutors experience and deal with regarding being childfree are related to all kinds of variable factors, as described in the first paragraph of this chapter. Many interlocutors argued that it is not a choice they make but rather a desire they do not seek to fulfill. In other words, for these interlocutors, as described earlier, if circumstances were different, then this would not change much in their aspirations (Kelly 2009, 158). Nevertheless, some interlocutors perceive being childfree as a choice or sacrifice that could change if circumstances were different. For instance, if there would appear a more hopeful perspective on the future regarding climate change (Kelly 2009, 158). For example, Gaia experiences her choice to remain childfree as a sacrifice because, as described in chapter two, her experience with depression, combined with the concerns about climate change, made her not have children. The mental health aspect is challenging because she argued that this would always be a thing she would be concerned about. So, if science would share more hopeful messages regarding climate change, this could influence her choice.

However, not all interlocutors that perceive their childlessness as a choice would desire a biological child if circumstances were different. These interlocutors are mainly interested in further exploring and normalizing other forms of parenthood and family making that differ from blood kinmaking, which is currently still the dominant perspective in the Dutch heteronormative context they are situated in. So, if these forms are widely acknowledged and adopted, then my interlocutors would be interested in implementing these in their lives. For example, as described earlier, parenthood is perceived by most of my interlocutors as a lonely and high-demanding individual responsibility. If the perception of child-rearing would shift from an individual to a more collective one, as illustrated in some African communities, then some interlocutors would aspire to contribute to the child-rearing part of the children of a particular community.

Jean E. Veevers (1973, 202) writes that “in a pluralistic society, it is of interest to examine and compare a variety of lifestyles including deviant and minority preferences as well as conforming and majority ones.” In my conversations, we discussed different forms of child-rearing, parenthood, and family making that gave different substances to what is a good life. These different forms that I discuss in this paragraph are queer parenthood, kinship structures, being that cool pibling (*gender-neutral and nonbinary word for aunt and uncle*), collectively raising children in a community-based society or together with friends and family, working with children, adopting or foster a child, being a surrogate parent for someone unable to have

children biologically, blended families, new forms in work/life balance, alternative ways to raise children outside of the predetermined, normative beaten tracks, unpaid care work, transnational labor.

(Un)paid Work

I aim to show throughout this thesis that the desire to remain childfree often has nothing to do with an aversion toward children. On the contrary, many interlocutors are exploring ways to interact with children. One of the topics discussed regarding these interactions is working in relation to children. On the one hand, we discussed the aspiration and experience to work with children, which has been practiced by interlocutors like Guusje, Jana, and Karen. On the other hand, we discussed the balance between working full-time and organizing your leisure time. All interlocutors argued that they would not be able to work full-time while rearing a child. Therefore, they do not desire to have children because they would want to focus on their careers and become financially independent. But because child-rearing your own child is an unpaid job, they would have to choose between earning less with the chance of having a stagnating career or outsourcing child-rearing to daycare and babysitting with the drawback that they are less involved in the child-rearing process.

There were a couple of interlocutors that preferred to fill in an open-question questionnaire regarding busyness and sensitivity. One of these interlocutors was Jana, a forty-four-year-old woman from Zwolle living in Amsterdam. She finished a bachelor's in pedagogy and worked as a pro deo administrator. She shared with me what her ideal future would look like, namely continuing with her current job where she contributes to the development of children (Jana, questionnaire). In an interview with Karen, she also shared her affinity for working with children. She explained: "I like children a lot, I think they are fascinating, and you can learn a lot from them. That is why I study orthopedagogics, and I work with children" (Karen, interview, April 20, 2022). For these interlocutors working with children is a way to contribute to what they perceive as the collective responsibility for child-rearing. They argue that child-rearing is not something that only takes place at home and is the responsibility of the mother and father but also on schools, after-school activities, and thus the responsibility of everyone within the social circle of the parents (Seymour 2013).

Another aspect of this shared responsibility of taking care of children is a balance between working and living in relation to how this could or should not be supported by internal and external care provision by, for example, relatives and hired cheap transnational labor (Parreñas 2000; Sassen 2006; Mills 2003). Regarding the help of paid and unpaid caretakers,

Danielle and Tirza, in separate interviews, both agree that they do not see the point of having children when you aspire to focus on your career full-time, thus bringing your children to daycare and relatives the whole week. Danielle explains that if she had children, she would invest all the time needed in raising her children. Therefore, this could not be combined with working full-time, and she believes that outsourcing is not the way she prefers (Danielle, interview, March 10, 2022). In an interview with Tirza, she stated that in the Netherlands, it is still not entirely acceptable to drop your kid at daycare every day (Tirza, interview, April 22, 2022). More importantly, that is financially not feasible for many people working in the Netherlands.

Nonetheless, many women migrate from poorer countries in the global South to wealthier countries in the global North, such as the Netherlands, to work as nannies and domestic workers (Sassen 2006, 254, 255). In the global North, these caregivers are employed as cheap transnational labor (Parreñas 2000, 564; Sassen 2006). Moreover, they fulfill jobs practiced by people who are practical educated, which formerly in the Netherlands was described as lower educated. In the same conversation with Tirza, she confirms this perception of caregivers. Namely, she argues that highly educated people (read: theoretical educated) have the urge or desire to do something with their brain instead of changing diapers which works for lower educated people. Here she means that the caring part of having children entails practical responsibilities such as changing the diapers is not something she aspires to do. This statement of Tirza contains an interesting conception. That is because, from the position of the migrated women in the case of, for instance, the Philippines, most of them have a middle-class education and see it as an opportunity to have a higher income than they would earn in the Philippines (Parreñas 2000; Parreñas 2001). These circuits of transnational labor influence the reproduction and contestation of gendered conditions and inequalities because, on the one hand, these migrant workers feel proud and powerful because they fulfill the economic obligations to the home front. On the other hand, these women could also be perceived as bad mothers because they are not directly involved in the child-rearing back home (Parreñas 2001, 66–69, 72–78, 119–131; Mills 2003, 46, 50). In some cases, the Philippine migrant workers even earn enough money to hire caregivers for their children in the Philippines (Parreñas 2000). This chain of care shows the complex system of transnational labor. In conversations with interlocutors, some suggested other forms of collective child-rearing that could serve as an alternative for this circuit of cheap transnational labor.

Shared Responsibility

In the Dutch heteronormative context, parenthood is perceived as something exclusive for the mother and father and is something that many interlocutors found limiting. That is because, as mentioned earlier, many of my interlocutors, to some extent, aspired to be involved in caring for children, just not in the biological and primary accountable sense. These interlocutors argued that if different forms of child-rearing, parenthood, and family making were more widely adopted, they would be interested in trying out these forms. The forms discussed in encounters I had are being that cool pibling (*gender-neutral and nonbinary word for aunt and uncle*), collectively raising children in a community-based society, or together with friends and family.

In contrast to the Dutch context, many communities worldwide do not perceive parenting as an exclusive responsibility for the biological father and mother (Seymour 2013, 115). Therefore, the saying “it takes a village to raise a child” is embraced in these societies (Seymour 2013, 115). Conversations with interlocutors often discussed this desire to contribute to the caregiving and raising aspect of children within a community. Most of these interlocutors shared the desire to be part of the child-rearing of their cousins or children of their best friends. In this way, they could relieve some of the pressure and expectations from their loved ones, still interacting with children they care for while not carrying the burden of bearing and being primarily accountable. Wilson (2014) argues that people who aspire to be involved in nurturing activities and perceive themselves as people with parental qualities could serve as godparents. Allocating the concept of godparents to these roles as being an aunt or uncle also re-evaluates the notion of parenting because parenthood is not something that has to be exclusively exercised by the biological parents (Letherby 2002). This different perspective of parenthood has recently emerged as a social media trend on the platform TikTok (Hoffower 2022). Here women that aspire to embody the “cool aunt” instead of having children by themselves create TikTok video clips (Hoffower 2022). These clips mockingly illustrate why being the cool aunt is the best of both worlds because they are only involved in the bright side of childcaring, such as pampering and doing fun things together (Hoffower 2022).

This social media trend is consistent with the individual aspiration my interlocutors shared with me about freedom and flexibility, as analyzed in the first chapter. Nevertheless, some interlocutors shared imaginations even more closely connected to different perspectives on parenthood. Therefore, in the following paragraph, I outline these forms and imaginations.

Kinship Structures

In exploration with my interlocutors in relation to anthropology on queer theory, I discovered that there are other ways to form kinship structures. As mentioned earlier, kinship forms do not have to be based on bloodlines but can also be formed through particular identities and friendships (Weston 1991; Lewin 2016, 599). Donna Haraway (2018, 104) famously adopted this perspective by advocating for “making kin, not babies.” Her main argument is that humans should widen their scope in kinmaking by not solely focusing on biogenetical ways of reproduction. It is the “response-ability” of humans to embody this scope because it contributes to how humans perceive themselves in relation to nature and therefore interact with nature (Haraway 2015, 162; Haraway 2018, 104; Latour 2017).

Some of my interlocutors share the perspective that kinmaking should not be perceived as something solely biological or blood related. Moreover, a mother and father should not be the dominant image of parenthood. Therefore, when I ask Tirza in an interview how we could change the norm, she reacts by saying:

“If there were more role models in one's social circle and the public. For example, peers with different relationship structures or kinship structures like gay couples, gay fatherhood, co-parenthood, or not living together. Then this could invite people to explore and imagine different forms of kinmaking” (Tirza, interview, April 22, 2022).

More interlocutors advocated for different perspectives on parenthood and kinmaking. For instance, parenthood, where the responsibility of rearing and caring is evenly shared among friends, family, or a collective. However, in the Netherlands, it is almost impossible to formally arrange this because marrying more than one person is prohibited (Roodsaz 2021, 7, 8). Even though it is possible for more than two people to have a cohabitation contract, it does not “provide the same parental rights as marriage” (State Commission Recalibration Parenthood 2016; Roodsaz 2021, 8). Therefore, multi-parenthood must be constituted based on informal agreements (Roodsaz 2021, 8).

Despite the possible legislative limitations, Mikhaila advocates for a more queer approach that, for her, entails wider acknowledgment of fluidity within gender identities and sexual orientation (Mikhaila, interview, March 11, 2022). This wider acknowledgment is relevant because people who did not identify with the heteronormative context were excluded

“from full inclusion into kinship” for a long time (Bailey 2013; Lewin 2009; Weston 1997). Therefore, “queer people established their own bonds of kinship, such as chosen families or houses (Bailey 2013; Lewin 2009; Weston 1997; Wilson 2019, 11). Interlocutors such as Mikhaila and Tirza aim to “reformulate, heterosexual customs of family, weddings, marriage, child-rearing” (Wilson 2019, 11). So that diversity can be encouraged and celebrated in this Dutch pronatalist heteronormative society.

* * *

In summary, this chapter analyzed different approaches to kinship through concepts such as non-normative kinmaking and families we choose. These different approaches to kinmaking and parenthood contribute to a safe space for my interlocutors to explore other ways of family-making. Moreover, these approaches serve as an alternative and solution for some of the challenges and concerns my interlocutors share regarding having children. Concerns related to time and financial investment, feeling of responsibility, and loneliness are re-evaluated in relation to forms of family making and parenthood that do not affect these concerns. That is because being the cool pibbling or raising children collectively relieves the high-demanding responsibility of exclusive parenting. Even though, legally, multi-parenthood is not supported, most of my interlocutors acknowledge that these different forms appear more in social circles and the public.

Conclusion

Before setting up this research, I could already relate to the consideration of remaining childfree because it was something I struggled with. Therefore, this research was socially, scientifically, and personally relevant. Thus, after my rites de passage (read: fieldwork) ended, I had difficulties critically analyzing the emic perspectives of my interlocutors because I internalized them along the way. However, to translate my empirical data into this piece, I had to find a way to get together my outsider (etic) perspective as an observer.

When I started writing, I noticed that these difficulties resulted in a perspective where I victimized and marginalized my interlocutors for the challenges and judgments, they experienced by their environment for desiring to remain childfree. Although all interlocutors shared experiences that contained comments, judgments, pressures, and expectations, I soon realized that in order to reflect on these perspectives, I had to critically analyze them through the context my interlocutors were situated in. Important to note here is that by critically analyzing, in no way is my purpose to downplay or not take the perspectives of my interlocutors seriously. On the contrary, by analyzing my empirical data through anthropological literature, I was able to reflect and understand how the perspectives of my interlocutors relate to the context they are situated in.

In this thesis, I answer the question of how Dutch people who desire to remain childfree aspire and realize a good life and future. My main finding while analyzing this question is that it is crucial to explain the context my interlocutors are situated in. Since 1000 AD, Christianity has been the most dominant religion in the Netherlands. Derived from Christianity and the Holy Family was the idea that the heteronormative nuclear family was the cornerstone of society. This pronatalist approach was adopted by the CDA, which ruled for twenty-five years in its last forty-five years. However, there was also a shift from the welfare state to neoliberalism after the Second World War. Which followed the idea of free-market economies and focused on the individual instead of the collective.

The Dutch people that desired to remain childfree that I encountered shared individual aspirations and concerns regarding a good life and future. For instance, having the freedom and flexibility to develop and pursue the dreams they envision personally. Most interlocutors did not experience any restraints in realizing these aspirations. In encounters, I had this privileged and secure position acknowledged and valued by my interlocutors. It offered most of them the ability to anticipate their anxieties about the future of society and the planet regarding societal

and environmental crises. Even though almost none of them had hope that these crises would be solved.

Based on the heteronormative and pronatalist context my interlocutors were situated while conducting my fieldwork, they experienced all sorts of stigmatizations from their environment for having the desire to remain childfree. One could argue that stigmas such as selfishness, insensitivity, and loneliness could be allocated to the individual aspirations of my interlocutors as described above. Although I understand why some would agree with this argument. I think it is more important to reflect on these stigmas through the normative expectations and desires that are a product of the neoliberal, heteronormative, prenatal perspectives on what a good life is and how parenthood and kinship structures are constructed.

In order to challenge these perspectives together with my interlocutors, I explored different forms of family making and parenthood, exceeding the normative idea of blood kin and exclusive parenthood. For my interlocutors, this exploration was a way to discover how they could be included in their desires for a good life regarding collective parenthood and families they choose, not solely based on blood relatives.

Important to emphasize is that I am aware that this research was solely situated in the Dutch context and conducted by a Dutch anthropologist who is positioned in this same context. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, I was unable to meet non-binary people to discuss this topic. Nevertheless, I tried to avoid gender biases such as motherhood and fatherhood as much as possible. Ultimately, I recognize that there are far more different forms than I discussed in this thesis, such as involuntary childlessness and gay parenthood. However, the ones I shared here are the ones that were collected through my empirical data, which I collected during my fieldwork.

I want to conclude with a reflection that could inspire future research on this topic. Due to my privileged and secure position, I feel responsible for committing myself to improve and solving societal and environmental issues. Furthermore, I feel anxious regarding the habitability of this planet, due to climate change, for my remaining life but especially for future generations. Even though I would not have to worry about my children if I did not have them, I still would feel responsible for future generations of my loved ones. Hence, I feel responsible for sharing my time, resources, and knowledge in contributing to a fair and habitable planet for all species. Which is something I would love to pass along to my potential children. However, I also consider these reflections when thinking about having children. Whether I desire to expose them to this societal and environmental mess. Does this mean I am avoiding my responsibilities and giving up hope for a habitable and fairer society and the planet by not having children? I

am not sure. However, I would be thrilled to see a continuation of this reflection in further research.

References

- American Anthropological Association. 2009. "Code of Ethics." Accessed June 12, 2022. <https://www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1656>.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 2013. *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*. London: Verso.
- Aumann, Kerstin, and Ellen Galinsky. 2012. The Real "Opt-out" Revolution" and a New Model of Flexible Careers. In B. D. Jones (Ed.), *Women Who Opt Out* (pg 57-86) New York, NY: New York University.
- Bailey, Marlon M. 2013. *Butch Queens up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Blackstone, Amy, and Mahala Dyer Stewart. 2012. "Choosing to Be Childfree: Research on the Decision Not to Parent." *Sociology Compass* 6 (9): 718–727.
- Bowlby, John. 1969. *Attachment and Loss Vol. 1: Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. 2019. "Holy Family." Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/art/Holy-Family>.
- Bryant, Rebecca, and Daniel M. Knight. 2019. *The Anthropology of the Future. New Departures in Anthropology*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Canel, Ozgur. 2022. "Ryan is Zwanger." BNNVARA. May 26, 2022. <https://www.2doc.nl/documentaires/series/3doc/2022/ryan-is-zwanger.html>

- CDA. 2022a. “CDA Gedachtegoed: Geschiedenis.” Accessed June 26, 2022.
<https://www.cda.nl/bestuurdersvereniging/politiek-bestuur/cda-gedachtegoed/geschiedenis>.
- . 2022b. “Familie en Gezin.” Accessed June 20, 2022.
<https://www.cda.nl/standpunten/familie>.
- . 2022c. “Tholen: Standpunten.” Accessed June 20, 2022.
<https://www.cda.nl/zeeland/tholen/cda-programma/het-gezin>.
- DeWalt, Kathleen M., Billie R. DeWalt, and Coral B. Wayland. 2011. “Participant Observation.” *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* 1 (1): 259-300.
- Dexter, Lewis Anthony. 1958. “A Note on Selective Inattention in Social Science.” *Social Problems* 6 (1): 176-182.
- Ebrahim, Gulamabbas J. 1982. The Family as a Child-rearing Unit of Society. In *Child Health in a Changing Environment*. Palgrave, London.
- Eijnatten, Joris van. 2011. “Christianity in the Netherlands.” *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization* 1 (1): 1–3.
- Ferriss, Timothy. 2009. *The 4-hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Fischer, Edward F. 2014. *The Good Life: Aspiration, Dignity, and the Anthropology of Wellbeing*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Gimenez, Martha E. 2018. *Feminist Theory*. Brill.
- Gillespie, Rosemary. 2003. “Childfree and Feminine: Understanding the Gender Identity of Voluntary Childless Women.” *Gender and Society* 17 (1): 122-136.
- Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

- Goldberg, Joel. 2016. "It Takes A Village To Determine The Origins Of An African Proverb." National Public Radio. Accessed June 21, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/07/30/487925796/it-takes-a-village-to-determine-the-origins-of-an-african-proverb>.
- Gotlib, Anna. 2016. "“But You Would Be the Best Mother: Unwomen, Counterstories, and the Motherhood Mandate.” *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 13 (2): 327–347.
- Graeber, David. 2018. *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Haan, Ageeth de. 2022. "Deins op de Golven." YouTube. May 25, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLqCsljluuU>
- Haraway, Donna. 2004. *The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2015. "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin." *Environmental Humanities* 6 (1): 159–165.
- . 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2018. "Staying with the Trouble for Multispecies Environmental Justice." *Dialogues in Human Geography* 8 (1): 102–105.
- Harvey, David. 2007. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hoffower, Hillary. 2022. "More and More Women Just Want to be 'The Cool Aunt' Instead of Having Their own Kids." Business Insider. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://www.businessinsider.nl/more-and-more-women-just-want-to-be-the-cool-aunt-instead-of-having-their-own-kids/>.
- Hunt, Elle. 2019. "BirthStrikers: Meet the Women who Refuse to Have Children until Climate Change Ends." The Guardian. Accessed on June 30, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/mar/12/birthstrikers-meet-the-women-who-refuse-to-have-children-until-climate-change-ends>.

- Kelly, Maura. 2009. "Women's Voluntary Childlessness: A Radical Rejection of Motherhood?" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 37 (3/4): 157–172.
- Kirksey, S. Eben, and Stefan Helmreich. 2010. "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography." *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (4): 545–576.
- Lampen, Claire. 2018. "Why Are All Pregnancy Test Commercials So Damn Cheerful?" Refinery29. Accessed Jun 23, 2022. <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/04/190568/why-are-pregnancy-test-commericals-all-happy>.
- Lancy, David F. 2015. *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2017. *Raising Children: Surprising Insights from Other Cultures*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- . 2017. "Anthropology at the Time of the Anthropocene: A Personal View of What Is to Be Studied." *The Anthropology of Sustainability* 1 (1): 35–49.
- Lee, Monle, Anurag Pant, and Abbas Ali. 2010. "Does the Individualist Consume More? The Interplay of Ethics and Beliefs That Governs Consumerism Across Cultures." *Journal of Business Ethics* 93 (4): 567–581.
- Letherby, Gayle. 2002. "Childless and Bereft?: Stereotypes and Realities in Relation to 'Voluntary' and 'Involuntary' Childlessness and Womanhood." *Sociological Inquiry* 72 (1): 7-20.
- Lewin, Ellen. 2009. *Gay Fatherhood: Narratives of Family and Citizenship in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2016. "Who's Queer? What's Queer? Queer Anthropology through the Lens of Ethnography." *Cultural Anthropology* 31 (4): 598–606.

- Madden, Raymond. 2017. *Being Ethnographic. A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Ethnography*. Second Edition. London: SAGE.
- Marcus, George E. 1995 “Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1): 95–117.
- Mayo Clinic. 2020. “Polycystic Ovary Syndrome.” Accessed May 1, 2022. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pcos/symptoms-causes/syc20353439#:~:text=Polycystic%20ovary%20syndrome%20is%20a,fail%20to%20regularly%20release%20eggs>.
- Mills, Mary Beth. 2003. “Gender and Inequality in the Global Labor Force.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32 (1): 41–62.
- Mollen, Debra. 2006. “Voluntarily Childfree Women: Experiences and Counseling Considerations.” *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 28 (1): 269–284.
- Moore, Julia. 2014. “Reconsidering Childfreedom: A Feminist Exploration of Discursive Identity Construction in Childfree LiveJournal Communities.” *Women's Studies in Communication* 37 (2): 159-180.
- Mueller, Karla A., and Janice D. Yoder. 1999. “Stigmatization of Non-Normative Family Size Status.” *Sex Roles* 41 (1): 901–919.
- Murdock, George P. 1949. *Social Structure*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- NASA. 2022. “Scientific Consensus: Earth's Climate is Warming.” Accessed June 15, 2022, <https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>.
- NOS. 2022. “CDA wil een 'Beter Nederland', Gebouwd op Waarden en Tradities.” Accessed June 19, 2022. <https://nos.nl/artikel/2137329-cda-wil-een-beter-nederland-gebouwd-op-waarden-en-tradities>.

- O'Reilly, Karen. 2012. *Ethnographic Methods*. New York: Routledge.
- Ortner, Sherry B. 1974. "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" In *Woman, Culture, and Society*, edited by Louise Lamphere and Michelle Rosaldo, 68-87. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- . 2016. "Dark Anthropology and its Others: Theory Since the Eighties" *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (1): 47-73.
- Os, Henk W. van, and Nico Boerma. 2015. *Heilige En Onheilige Families*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans.
- Park, Kristin. 2002. "Stigma Management among the Voluntarily Childless." *Sociological Perspectives* 45 (1): 21-45.
- . 2005. "Choosing Childlessness: Weber's Typology of Action and Motives of the Voluntarily Childless." *Sociological Inquiry* 75 (3): 372-402.
- Parlement. 2022. "Kabinetten 1945-heden." Accessed June 26, 2022. https://www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhrp1x03/kabinetten_1945_heden.
- Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. 2000. "Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor." *Gender & Society* 14 (4): 560-580.
- . 2001. *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Pohlman, Edward. 1966. "Mobilizing Social Pressures Toward Small Families." *Eugenics Quarterly* 13 (1): 122-127.
- Poyard, Émilie. 2022. "Waarom Deze Vrouwen voor Sterilisatie Kozen." Marie Claire. Accessed July 2, 2022. <https://marieclaire.be/nl/waarom-deze-vrouwen-voor-sterilisatie-kozen/>.
- Rosenblat, Alex. 2018. *Uberland: How Algorithms are Rewriting the Rules of Work*. University of California Press.

- Roodsaz, Rahil. 2021. "Queering Potentials: Negotiations of Gender, Parenthood, and Family in Polyamorous Relationships in the Netherlands." *Sexualities* 1 (1): 1-18.
- Sassen, Saskia. 2006. "Global Cities and Survival Circuits." In *Globalization: The Transformation of Social Worlds*, edited by Stanley D. Eitzen and Maxine Baca Zinn. 196–215. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Seymour, Susan C. 2013. "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child: Attachment Theory and Multiple Child Care in Alor, Indonesia, and in North India." In: *Attachment Reconsidered: Cultural Perspectives on a Western Theory*, Quinn, N., Mageo, J.M. (eds). Culture, Mind, and Society. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- State Commission Recalibration Parenthood. 2016. *Kind en Ouders in de 21ste eeuw. Rapport van de Staatscommissie Herijking ouderschap. (Child and Parents in the 21st Century* Den Haag: State Commission's Report on Recalibration Parenthood.
- Thatcher, Margaret. 1987. 'Interview for "Woman's Own" ("No Such Thing as Society").' in *Margaret Thatcher Foundation: Speeches, Interviews and Other Statements*. London.
- Thoreau, Henry D. 1854. *Walden*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 2017. "A Threat to Holocene Resurgence Is a Threat to Livability." In *The Anthropology of Sustainability*, edited by Marc Brightman and Jerome Lewis, 51–65. University College London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Veevers, Jean E. 1973. "Voluntary Childlessness: A Neglected Area of Family Study." *The Family Coordinator* 22 (2): 199–205.
- . 1975. "The Moral Careers of Voluntarily Childless Wives: Notes on the Defense of a Variant World View." *Family Coordinator* 24 (1): 473–487.
- Venkatesan, Sathyaraj and Chinmay Murali. 2019. "Childless? Childfree? Neither, Just ME": Pronatalism and (M)otherhood." In Paula Knight's *The Facts of Life*, Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 1998. "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism."

The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 4 (3): 469–488.

Weston, Kath. 1991. *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 1997. *Families we Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 1998. *Long Slow Burn: Sexuality and Social Science*. Routledge: New York.

Wilson, Ara. 2019. "Queer anthropology." *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology* 1 (1): 1-20.

Wilson, Kristin. J. 2014. *Not Trying Infertility, Childlessness, and Ambivalence*. Nashville, Tenn.; Nashville: Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press.