

Going Green in the Red

Theorizing and Contesting Sustainable Urban Transitions
Through a Gendered Lens.



Utrecht University

Rebecca Nolan [2939991]

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In November 2020, the national newspaper NRC published an article about Arnoud Offerhaus, consultant and project manager, visiting a school in Bospolder-Tussendijken located in Rotterdam in the Netherlands (König 2020). The visit took place during a parent-teacher consultation evening. Offerhaus was in attendance to promote an innovative cooperative project started by the Delfshaven Energy Corporation (Delfshaven Energy Cooperatie). The project was a cooperative solar power initiative. Parents could invest ten euros a month to co-own multiple solar panels with a larger group of parents. The solar panels were located on the school roof and would generate electricity for the surrounding residential homes. If the solar panels produced more energy than consumed, the energy could be re-sold elsewhere (König 2020). This provided a small financial incentive for potential investors. However, as the article explains, it soon became clear to Offerhaus that many in the audience could not understand the Dutch language. Bospolder-Tussendijken is a culturally diverse neighborhood with many nationalities. When commenting on the reaction of parents to the plan, Headteacher Marja Damen explains, “[t]heir parents are not at all concerned with green energy . . . many come to the Netherlands just to get a roof over their head” (König 2020).

This is a striking example of how sustainable adaptations can create “elitist visions of sustainability” which conflict with the everyday realities of the place-based socio-economic conditions of residents (Hagerman 2007; Parr 2009; Anguelovski et al. 2016). This is one of many initiatives started in Bospolder-Tussendijken, as a part of the sustainable urban transition project, “Resilient BoTu 2028.” The transition, which I ethnographically explore in more detail in the coming chapters, looks to tackle the environmental change, moving residential homes to renewable energy, and the socio-economic transition, improving high poverty levels. In this dissertation, I ethnographically explore and criticize the extent to which the “win-win” discourse of sustainable urban transitions manifests itself within the “historical, social and political contexts of communities” (Davenport and Mishtal 2019, 56).

Sustainable urban transitions like “Resilient BoTu 2028” are seen across many post-industrial port cities, such as New York. In the “Resilient BoTu 2028” guide plan, issued by the local government, Mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb wrote a foreword highlighting global similarities of such sustainable urban transitions. It states, “this is a foundation for the future of Bospolder-Tussendijken. . . the start of the “Resilient BoTu 2028” program was in Brownsville, New York, in 2018. There we saw what is possible when residents and

organizations work together to raise the neighborhood to a new level” (Resilient BoTu 2028). Aboutaleb draws here on a seemingly apolitical discourse of “leveling up the neighborhood” and “working together,” which Checker (2011) notes is characteristic of these sustainable urban transition projects such as “Resilient BoTu 2028”.

Bospolder-Tussendijken is a culturally diverse neighborhood, unemployment and welfare dependency are high, as I found in my fieldwork, especially amongst women. Academics have long discussed the fundamental link between gender inequality, access to resources, limited social mobility, and income poverty (Massey 2012; Hall 2016). As suggested by Anguelovski et al. (2016), technocratic social and environmental adaptations, like “Resilient BoTu 2028,” require a “devolution of responsibility to individual households” (335). And as argued by Petrova and Simmock (2017), the household remains “one of the most gendered spheres of society” (850). Treating households as homogenized units overlooks potential inequalities within households and, to some extent, increases the possibilities to (re)produce gender inequalities (Petrova and Simmock, 2017). Therefore, it is fundamental to understand how gender relations mediate the everyday experiences of sustainable urban transitions.

This thesis will consist of three ethnographic chapters, all exploring different facets and forms of interaction that influence how a sustainable urban transition project, such as “Resilient BoTu,” is lived and given shape and meaning in the everyday lives of residents. The first ethnographic chapter will focus on interactions between the state and the individual and how the “Resilient BoTu 2028” plan draws on dominant discourses surrounding citizenship. The plan sets specific societal goals focused on improving the socio-economic status of residents. Examples of this are increasing labor participation, improving language skills, and reducing welfare dependency, all of which can be considered interactions between the individual and the state. The current academic debate surrounding citizenship suggests a paradox where on the one hand, the state universalizes citizenship. However, on the other hand, it creates hierarchies of “deservedness” amongst individuals who fulfill these interactions (Ong 1996; Lazar 2013). It is essential to explore how gender affects these interactions, as it has long been suggested that dominant ideas about gender (re)produces inequalities in what “people can do, the resources and services they can access, and their opportunities for self-development” (Petrova and Simmock 2017, 851). This discussion cannot be seen apart from dominant political discourses surrounding (mainly Turkish and Moroccan) communities in Dutch society, as this thesis will highlight.

The second ethnographic chapter pays particular attention to gendered citizen-to-citizen interactions in the context of “Resilient BoTu 2028” and how the plan is lived and perceived in the everyday lives of women in Bospolder-Tussendijken. As mentioned above, women in Bospolder-Tussendijken are a particularly influential group, as the “Resilient BoTu 2028” looks address to limitations of language skills and employment, which are overwhelmingly present in the female population of the neighborhood. As I will show, “Resilient BoTu 2028” aims to elevate the position of women in Bospolder-Tussendijken through neoliberal conceptions of citizenship. Still, neoliberal ideas at the same time have caused precarity and a shrinking welfare state that significantly burdens the position of women and which subsequently reinforces gender inequalities.

In my final ethnographic chapter, I will explore the “Resilient BoTu 2028” and the energy transition by focusing on gendered domestic interactions, or in other words, the conflicting roles of women as “domestic leaders” in their volunteering capacity while simultaneously disproportionately carrying the burden of energy poverty. I will provide examples from my fieldwork to explain the contestations of dominant visions of “livability” globally and how these conflict with the lived experiences of local poverty in Bospolder-Tussendijken.

1.1 Research Question

How are sustainable urban transformations, planned, initiated, and realized within the project “Resilient BoTu 2028” in Rotterdam and how is this plan lived and perceived in the everyday lives of women in Bospolder-Tussendijken in Rotterdam?

1.2 Research Goal

The goal of my research is twofold. Firstly, ethnographic research allows for localities and place-based specificities to be explored. McDonough et al. (2011) suggested that sustainable urban transformations can create autonomous spaces and possibilities for self-determination (115). However, place-based specificities such as high illiteracy, poverty, and multiculturalism can shape the extent to which the possibilities of self-determination are fulfilled. It is, therefore, crucial to research how “Resilient BoTu 2028” is initiated, planned, and realized in Bospolder-Tussendijken. Secondly, my goal in this research is to explore how the societal goals of the “Resilient BoTu 2028” plan are lived and experienced in the

everyday lives of women in Bospolder-Tussendijken. Anguelovski et al. (2019) suggest resident perception of risk of social or environmental deprivation, especially amongst marginalized communities, “tend to clash with dominant visions, discourses, and practices of municipal greening and resilience” (26142) therefore limiting the possibilities of self-determination. Anguelovski et al. (2019) call for specific community-based research to uncover the conflicting experiences of sustainable urban transitions at a local level. My research aims to incorporate community-based research from a gendered lens, focusing primarily on the experiences of women in Bospolder-Tussendijken.

1.3 Case Study “Resilient BoTu 2028”

This research will focus on a particular sustainable urban transition in Bospolder-Tussendijken, located in the West of Rotterdam in the Netherlands. In 2018 the local council in Rotterdam announced that Bospolder-Tussendijken would be the “first resilient district of Rotterdam in 10 years” (Resilient Rotterdam). The project began when the local government allocated funds for specific community-based projects and negotiated with Havensteder, the housing corporation that owns much of the social housing in the neighborhood, to begin renovations for the energy transition. The plan comprises three main objectives. I will provide a brief overview of each of these objectives.

The first objective of “Resilient BoTu 2028” includes healthcare, young people, and parenting. The second objective is to focus on work, language, and debt. As stated in the information booklet, this objective directly wants to help residents find employment. The booklet notes, “many residents have problems with the language, their health and/or their finances, all of which impede their access to the labor market” (Resilient BoTu 2028). Thirdly, energy, housing, and outdoor space is crucial objective in the plan. This objective looks to “start a district approach in BoTu to eliminate the dependence and use of natural gas” (Resilient BoTu 2028). The third objective also incorporates housing, which the booklet notes as “very dated . . . many people live in tiny apartments that not properly insulated or heated” (Resilient BoTu 2028). These three objectives make up the specific goals planned, initiated, and realized by the local government in Bospolder-Tussendijken.

Bospolder-Tussendijken is considered as a “trial neighborhood” as it is the first transition of this kind in Rotterdam. The information booklet claims a new form of cooperation between business, society, and public institutions (Resilient BoTu 2028). The plan calls social entrepreneurs to begin charities and organizations to help the residents to

realize these societal goals. During my fieldwork, I interacted with two of these organizations, which provided an excellent opportunity to get to know residents, volunteers, and community leaders.

1.4 Map and Demography of Area

Bospolder-Tussendijken is in the west of Rotterdam, shown below in Figures 1 and 2. Currently, Bospolder-Tussendijken comprises 64% social housing and is an extremely culturally diverse community, with up to 80% of residents being first- or second-generation



Figure 1.

with a Moroccan background. Relative to the national average, Bospolder-Tussendijken has high poverty and social deprivation levels, with an average income per resident at 14,000 euros per year, 14% lower income per resident compared to the average neighboring areas in Rotterdam (Centraal Bureau of Statistiek).

migrants (Projecten Vakoefening Connect BoTu). First- and second-generation migrants with a Turkish background are the largest minority group in the neighborhood, at 18% (Centraal Bureau of Statistiek). Closely followed by 17% of first- and second-generation migrants

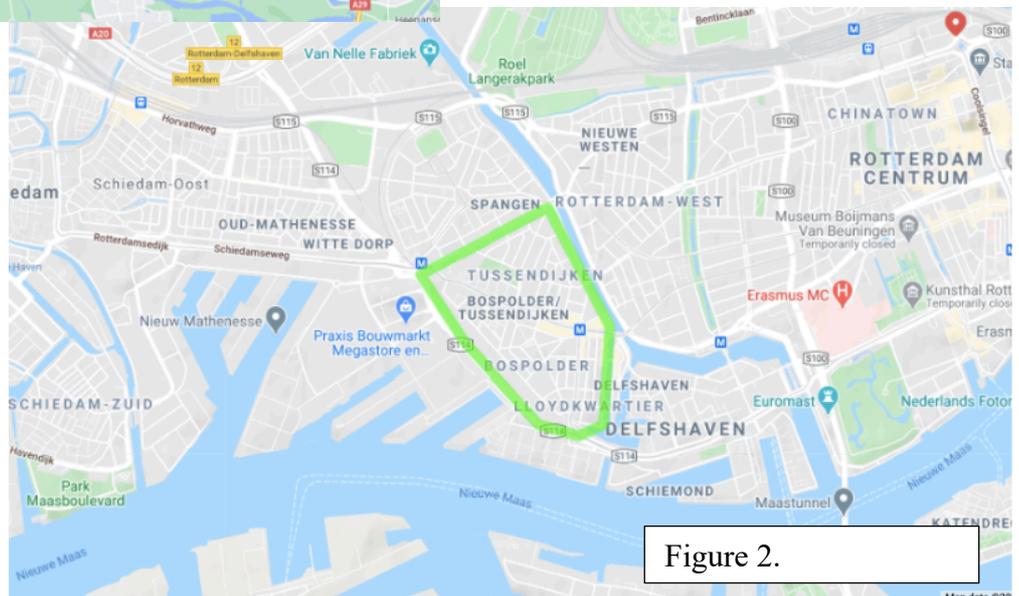


Figure 2.

Education levels, including qualifications and literacy levels, are relatively low in the neighborhood. Residents without basic qualifications stand at 30%, compared to the 20% average across Rotterdam, already considerably higher than the national average (Projecten

Vakoefening Connect BoTu). Low education level provides one explanation for the low employment levels in the neighborhood, with only 44% of residents in employment between the ages of 23-65, compared to the 60% average across Rotterdam (Projecten Vakoefening Connect BoTu). Again, this low employment level reflects the high social housing and welfare dependency. Although these statistics are essential to grasp, this dissertation will ethnographically explore how “Resilient BoTu 2028” seeks to overcome these socio-economic hurdles. “Resilient BoTu 2028” looks to plan, initiate, and realize societal goals, such as increasing employment in the neighborhood. In providing ethnographic data, through participant observation and interviews, I will illustrate the lived and everyday experience of women in Bospolder-Tussendijken during this transition.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

2.1 Sustainable Urban Transitions

Starting in the 1990s, post-industrial port cities saw an increasing redevelopment of urban districts looking to transform a history of “containing [the] urban poor” to “dispersing them in favor of destination-oriented retail. . . residential areas imagined as post-industrial or ‘creative’ economic spaces” (Hagerman 2007, 288). Kokot et al. (2008) published a book consisting of ethnographic perspectives of port cities in transition. The central focus of these perspectives is on researching urban residents and stakeholders who are directly affected by such changes (18). As Kokot et al. (2008) point out, research needs to be complemented by ethnographic research studies of port cities in transition and their stakeholders, affected populations, and their “involvement in ever-changing balances of power” (8).

Globally, as also in the case of Bospolder-Tussendijken in Rotterdam, the local and national governments generally occupy the leading roles in the decision-making process for city planning, not only with financial means but through constructing dominant ideas of sustainability. The local government commissioned the “Resilient BoTu 2028,” which was supported by the Delfshaven Corporation, consisting of neighborhood residents, along with Havensteder, the largest housing corporation in the neighborhood, and Rebel, a consultancy firm. Therefore, the “Resilient BoTu 2028” plan can be considered a state-led and funded transition supported by market parties. Research on urban governance regimes has shown a movement towards constructing ideas of “livability,” which look to “fix anxieties about the environmental damage and social fragmentation,” which are a consequence of industrial modernism (Hagerman 2007, 288). This research aims to ethnographically explore a particular example of an urban transition, “Resilient BoTu 2028”. Academic literature that has guided this research focuses on the increasing role of the state in constructing contested ideas of sustainability, livability, and greening initiatives in urban transitions (Pearsall and Pierce 2010; Hagerman 2007; Isenhour 2011; Anguelovski et al. 2016, 2018).

Swyngedouw (2010) suggests that sustainability policies and adaptations are built on the ideas of “techno-natural and socio-metabolic interventions” and environmental concerns are generally “accepted as aproblematic” which “need to be dealt with through compromise, managerial and technical arrangement” (Swyngedouw 2010, 17). Similarly, Balan and Immerglck (2017) suggest that state-led sustainable urban development is dominated by the discourse of urban planning, government, and policymaking (4). Sustainable urban transitions

and state-sponsored gentrification have long faced criticism for their seemingly apolitical nature and assumptions of a one-size-fits-all idea of “livability” (Hagerman 2007; Harvey 1989). This is a “post-political tendency” to have an optimistic vision about the future of sustainable and greening cities, ultimately undermining possibilities to challenge the contestations arising from urban planning policies (Swyngedouw 2010; Anguelovski et al. 2018). Checker (2011) explores the intersection between social and environmental equity in the context of state-sponsored sustainable urban development and expresses the need for more academic and ethnographic research to challenge the “consequences of rapid urban development, consensual politics and the seemingly apolitical language of sustainability” (211). Doing so creates a space to explore “conundrums facing contemporary urban residents” as they negotiate their right to economic and ecological equality in an urban environment (Checker 2011, 211; Anguelovski 2016; 2018). As Abram and Weszkalnys (2013) suggest, state planning practices significantly influence our everyday lives, especially local councils, where most of us encounter the state every day. It is, therefore, crucial to research the construction of ideas of “livability” and “sustainability” within these spaces.

Along with becoming a part of the normative discourse around urban and future planning, sustainability has simultaneously become ambiguous and often contested (Isenhour 2011; McDonough 2011). Isenhour (2011) suggests that urban inhabitants have very little knowledge of which practices and products make the concept of “sustainability.” As touched upon previously, the state plays an essential role in this. However, markets and corporate interests also play an equally significant role (Baker and Eckerberg 2008; Parr 2009; Anguelovski et al. 2016; 2018). State intervention into sustainable urban transitions is necessary because the market fails to create more sustainable futures (Baker and Eckerberg 2008). Markets can create “elitist visions of sustainability,” along with an idea of “livability” and “win-win” adaptations (Hagerman 2007; Parr 2009; Anguelovski et al. 2016). As Baker and Eckerberg (2008) illustrate, this in itself is a contradiction. Markets favor looking at transitions in short-term horizons and mainly deals with profits and individual enhancements. To achieve long-lasting, sustainable development, plans and policy should focus on promoting equity, the common good, and arguably most important, looking at the variable costs and benefits by groups in society, whether it be women, people of color, or vulnerable groups (Anguelovski et al. 2016, 2018; Baker and Eckerberg 2008; Balan and Immergluck 2017).

With this insight in mind, this dissertation will aim to explore how women experience the uneven cost benefits of sustainable urban transitions, as shown through the case of

“Resilient BoTu2028” in Bospolder-Tussendijken, the Netherlands. As suggested by Anguelovski et al. (2016), technocratic social and environmental adaptations, like “Resilient BoTu 2028,” require a “devolution of responsibility to individual households” (335). To take this further, Anguelovski et al. (2016) suggest that while transitions promote “win-win” results, it simultaneously deemphasizes the “asymmetric power dynamics and conflict over resources” (334). Exploring the link between dominant notions of gender, the household, and the state will address the gap noted above and uncover the gendered vulnerabilities of sustainable urban transitions (Petrova and Simmock 2017, 851).

In a much-discussed academic article, Anguelovski et al. (2016) ask, “[a]daptation for whom? By whom? and how?”. Hence, this thesis draws from these questions to examine the contradictory relationship between sustainable policies and inequitable development (Warner 2002; Krueger and Gibbs 2007). Gould and Lewis (2018) suggest that such transitions are directly engaging and accessible to the “sustainability class.” This group within society is “well-educated, holds overt sustainability-oriented values, can afford sustainability-themed consumption to brand their lifestyle” (Gould and Lewis 2018, 12). Sustainable urban transitions also run the risk of creating neighborhoods that reproduce urban marginality and groups of the working poor (Wacquant 2008; Harvey 1989). Drawing on these insights, this thesis aims to highlight the contestations that arise from sustainable urban transitions and challenge the normative assumptions of a “post-political tendency” to assume such plans are a “win-win” and positive by researching marginalized communities in Bospolder-Tussendijken.

2.2 Social and Environmental Justice

As stated above, sustainable urban transitions, although seemingly apolitical, tend to (re)construct racial and economic injustices (Alkon 2014; Cheker 2011; Davenport and Mishtal 2019, 56). The “win-win” nature of sustainable urban transitions overlooks the “historical, social and political contexts of communities” (Davenport and Mishtal 2019, 56). This thesis will follow the claims made by Davenport and Mistal (2019) that suggest anthropological and ethnographic research can be a valuable tool to offer a critical analysis of sustainable transitions and initiatives on the overall effects of marginalized communities (56). Such a critical analysis will have to engage with the concepts of environmental justice and social justice.

To begin with, the concept of environmental justice looks to interrogate the relationship between marginalized groups and communities in an urban environment and ecological issues (Rasch and Köhne 2017, 607). In recent decades more research has been conducted on the various ways that social dimensions such as gender, class, and ethnicity are intrinsically linked to the way people experience the environment and environmental justice (Schlosberg 2013; Rasch and Köhne 2017, 608). Schlosberg (2013) provides a concise overview of academic literature on environmental justice and suggests that the earliest academic reflection of environmental justice “originally focused on the existence of inequity in the distribution of environmental bads” (39). Contemporary urban society is becoming more separate from the biophysical and ecological realm, according to Dooling (2009). To a large extent, this is maintained by economic logic, which seeks to value financial gains through production and consumption above environmental or social justice (Dooling 2009; Schlosberg 2013). In the past decade, more attention has been and should be paid to understanding the environmental injustices in which people are immersed in their everyday urban lives (Schlosberg 2013, 39). Chu et al. (2015) take this further to suggest that although the climate crisis is global in scale, adaptive policies such as energy transitions are often started and most effective locally. By researching the localities of such transitions and policies, they can better understand the place-based specificities of risk and vulnerabilities of groups (373).

Academic literature suggests that urban inequalities, from inadequate housing, lack of access to resources in the urban environment, and unequal power relations, can worsen social injustice (Davenport and Mishtal 2019, 59; Checker 2011; Pastor and Morello-Frosch 2021; Maurer 2020). Within anthropology, social justice is a complex and multifaceted concept, which is not only a method but discourse and critique (Kerrigan 2006). As a method within this research paper, it looks to analyze power relationships in everyday life practices (Bourdieu 1984; Gaudio 2003). In doing so, this thesis will practice engaged anthropology, which beneficially affects the promotion of social justice (Low and Merry 2010, 204). As a discourse, social justice looks to challenge and confront the oppression of certain groups (Young 1990). As a critique, social justice looks to interrogate the oppressive and exclusionary system which affects marginalized groups, such as women and communities of color, therefore providing an intersectional lens on power structures (Kerrigan 2006).

Environmental and social inequalities are often inextricable. Anthropologist Meghan Maurer (2020) illustrates in an ethnographic account of urban residents in Michigan, USA, how underinvestment in public services contributes to the increasing “interrelated

experiences of socio-economic and ecological precarity” (717). Additionally, Maurer (2020) looks at sustainability projects, such as gardening and green initiatives as a form of social reproduction, and how some urban residents perform greening tasks as “neighborhood upkeep” compared to “ecological sustainability.” Maurer’s (2020) ethnographic account concludes that to some extent, the social reproduction of greening tasks is “shaped by experiences of race and class inequality” (718). I will draw upon these conclusions in my thesis to show how the interaction of residents with such state-led sustainability initiatives is similarly shaped by inequalities experienced by residents, especially concerning gender.

As mentioned above, concerning mostly state-led sustainable urban transitions, the inattention to the origins, functioning, and consequences of social injustice only reproduces and intensifies pre-existing inequalities in the urban context (Pearsall 2012). As Shi et al. (2016) suggest, the more local and national governments plan for sustainable urban transitions, the more focus should be on enhancing vulnerable communities and their access to services, infrastructure, and employment to sustain or improve their well-being (131). Social justice is by design intersectional. It encompasses power relations, wealth, and the (dis)function of market forces and how they influence various identity dimensions, such as gender, class, and race. Many low-income residents have little freedom and choice to decide where they live, especially in cases of public housing, few have the resources to cope or recover from the stresses of place-based specificities, such as energy poverty or high levels of crime, which, as Shi et al. (2016) suggests “compound individual characteristics (such as age, gender, and disability), as well as forms of social marginalization (such as ethnic and racial exclusion, and cultural, religious and linguistic isolation)” (132).

The entrenched social, economic, and institutional patterns that facilitate social immobility, poverty, and precariousness, often characterized by unequal power relations, cause and reinforce social and environmental injustice (Davenport and Mishtal 2019, 59; Checker 2011; Pastor and Morello-Frosch 2021). When applying this concept of environmental justice, it becomes clear how urban development often places undesirable facilities in poor, minority neighborhoods or relegates disadvantaged groups to low-quality housing, neighborhoods, and energy supplies where land is cheap (Shi et al., 132). Shi et al. (2016) suggest that there is limited research examining the actual experiences of the distributive outcomes of ongoing adaptation interventions, such as “Resilient BoTu 2028”. Shi et al. (2016) argue that the unequal distribution of urban resources, such as housing or land, is an inherent feature of modern contemporary society (132).

Hence, this thesis will aim to contribute to this limited area of research by looking at how marginalized communities, particularly women, experience such redistribution attempts by focusing on the example of Bospolder-Tussendijken in Rotterdam. Shi et al. (2016) suggest social marginalization is “ethnic and racial exclusion, and cultural, religious and linguistic isolation” (132). This thesis will demonstrate how gender inequality, and its intersection with other aspects of social marginalization such as poverty and the retreating welfare state, results in greater exposure of marginalized women to the negative impacts of social and environmental injustice (Robinson 2011, 224).

2.3 Citizenship

This thesis also engages with the relationship between sustainable urban transformations and their reliance on dominant neoliberal discourses surrounding citizenship, which stress the individual’s role in enhancing claims on citizenship, but this coincides with an increasing culturalization of citizenship, making citizenship claims for immigrant communities increasingly difficult. T.H Marshall’s much-discussed 1949 essay *Citizenship and Social Class* sets out the basic tenets of what was coined ‘social citizenship.’ In the essay, T.H Marshall (1992) sets out the responsibility of the state to its citizens or as stated in the essay “from [granting] the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society”. However, in recent decades many feminist scholars have questioned Marshall’s account for centering too much on the “male breadwinner model” and to some extent ignored the gendered element of citizenship (Lister 2005, 486, 471; Knijn and Kremer 1997, 331). In a much-discussed article Ong (1996) argues that citizenship has developed into a “process of self-making and being self-made” (737). Ong (1996) suggests that although the state universalizes citizenship, it paradoxically creates hierarchies of ‘deservingness’ when it constructs individuals through specific ways as “taxpayers, workers, consumers and welfare-dependents” (738). As women overwhelmingly perform unpaid caregiving tasks, they cannot fulfill such conditions of “deservingness.” As I will explore in more detail in the coming chapters, creating a “citizen worker model” under Third Way regimes has gendered implications for women who perform reproductive labor (Lewis 2010, 339).

Buffington (2003) uses Foucauldian analysis, suggesting institutions and entities make citizens under “citizenship regimes” (Qtd. in Lazar 2013). Lazar (2013) explores the

debate of the state of neoliberalism, work, welfare, and development and points to “contemporary attempts to construct particular kind of citizens ... with enacting values entrepreneurship and self-reliance” (10). Hence this thesis will explore how this concept of citizenship as being made by the individual is given meaning in “Resilient BoTu 2028”. Although this has been predominantly approached in literature to migrant communities in general, I will contribute to the debate but providing a gendered lens on this construction of citizenship.

As Meadowcroft (2009) suggested, sustainable transitions are concerned with political decisions that set specific societal goals and reflect on societal change processes. For example, as noted previously, under Third Way citizenship regimes, the emphasis of citizenship has long focused on activating citizens to pursue productive forms of labor while dismantling the welfare state. Meadowcroft (2009) implies that transitions concentrate on the evolution of societal values that spread into the everyday lives of individuals and define group identities and, most importantly, hegemonic notions of citizenship. In other words, transitions that set specific societal goals can reflect the evolution of expectations of particular group identities and citizenship. Examples of this are labor market participation programs or language programs, which residents can follow to increase their social capital and enhance their claims on ‘full’ citizenship.

Lister (2005) also argues that along with gender, T.H Marshal’s account is also blind to ethnicity (474). Knijn and Kremer (1997) argue that Marshal’s approach to social citizenship which emphasizes the role of the state in the social emancipation of its citizens includes many human rights, such as housing, education, social welfare, income, and employment but that one main human right that is left out is the right to receive or give care which is often at the detriment of rights for women as citizens (Knijn and Kremer 1997, 331). This research focuses not only on looking at how sustainable urban transformations are lived and experienced through a gendered lens but also on its intersection with race and ethnicity. Knijn and Kremer (1997) suggest that citizenship in contemporary society is constructed in two forms (331). Firstly, they argue that citizenship is constructed through the market economy. For example, citizens obtain citizenship rights through being actual or potential workers in the market economy (Kirk and Suvarierol 2014, 243; Knijn and Kremer 1997). To receive certain rights of citizenship, states also look to regulate the behavior of citizenship. Jane Jenson (2000) refers to this as a “citizenship regime,” which includes “institutional arrangements, rules, and understanding that guide and shape concurrent policy decisions and expenditures of state” (232). In this way, under current neoliberal conditions, these regimes

ensure that citizenship meets the needs of the market (Jenson 2000). Under Third Way regimes, as Bjornson (2007) argues, states are more interested in “activating” citizens to participate in the workforce (67). Those who are unable to conform to such “citizenship regimes” and to participate in the labor force are deemed to be “responsibilized” (Bjornson 2007, 67), which include “interventions aimed at forced integration, such as workfare programs, parenting skills training” (Bjornson 2007, 67). This thesis aims to ethnographically explore how transitions that require such interactions with the state, or in other words, being “responsibilized” burden women (Bjornson 2007, 67).

Extending on such integration programs, the second way citizenship is constructed is through language (Knijn and Kremer 1997; Goldberg 2006; Bjornson 2007). Goldberg (2006) argues that the debate about failed integration of migrants coupled with the pursuit of European countries having integration programs promoting “stringent language and cultural testing” contributes to the “steadily eroding rights of citizens...and ‘thin’ to the ‘empty’ or absent rights of foreigners and immigrants” (354). Bjornson (2007) suggests that social policy inflated the “exchange value of, or fetishizing, Dutch language skills” (74). In the case of the Netherlands, Bjornson (2007) argues that the contemporary debate of the “immigrant problem” is that the Dutch language has emerged as the “key technology” of the Dutch Integration program.

My fieldwork occurred in an area with high levels of first and second-generation migrants in Bospolder-Tussendijken in Rotterdam. I will look specifically at two of the largest ethnic minority and migrant group in the Netherlands, Turkish and Moroccan communities. Kirk and Suvarierol (2014) suggest that gender has played a crucial role in recent debates around failed integration of these two particular communities (242). This is exuberated because of their often-low proficiency in the Dutch language (Kirk and Suvarierol 2014) coupled with the perceptions of oppressive gender relations within the dominant religion of Islam, with the respect of fundamental European gender values (Akkerman and Hagelund 2007). Ultimately the emphasis on “stringent language and cultural testing” creates power inequalities between the state and citizens. Verkaaik (2012) argues that The Third Way approach to integration programs has contributed to the “culturalization” of citizenship. He goes on to suggest; “the ‘culturalization’ of citizenship”, meaning that full Dutch citizenship is not merely a legal status and does not simply enable political and economic participation but also comes with a certain acceptance of “Dutch norms and values and a certain level of integration into Dutch culture” (69). Hence this dissertation will highlight how Dutch norms

and values, under conditions of the state, encourage citizens to participate in productive forms of labor while at the same time making welfare more punitive.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Positionality

3.1 Research Methods

The data for this research project is collected mainly through participant observation and are supported by semi-structured interviews, structured interviews, and desk research.

Throughout my fieldwork experience, I kept field notes and a diary. The combination of my data collection methods and my reflections ensured that I intuitively analyzed my data.

O'Reily (2012) suggested that this allows researchers to “stand-back, avoid over-involvement.” I used data triangulation to control and balance different sources of information.

It should be made clear that all interviews were conducted in Dutch. Therefore, any translations of quotes are my own translations. When conducting my research, all participants that were involved were aware of my role as a researcher. All interview participants gave verbal consent before the interview taking place. For the anonymity of all research participants, I have pseudonymized all the names of those included in this dissertation. The names of the organization I was involved in and included in this dissertation have been translated into English. All research and analysis were conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Dutch Anthropological Association.

3.1.1 Participant Observation

During my fieldwork in Bospolder-Tussendijken in Rotterdam, I conducted participant observation while working as a volunteer in two organizations, The Language Company and the Give-Away store. However, as a resident, I took advantage of gaining a lived experience of my research location. As my accommodation is put forward to commence with renovations for the energy transitions, I had the first-hand experience of the complaints, information booklets, and information evenings that many residents experienced.

Volunteering at both organizations allowed me to build rapport and trust with many research participants successfully. As Bernard (2005) suggests, to successfully conduct and collect data through participant observation, a researcher must “spend lots of time in studying culture, learn the language, hang out, do all the everyday things that everyone else does” (345). As a non-native Dutch speaker and immigrant, I had unique insight and a shared experience with some of my research participants. At times, I found that this provided

comical and friendly rapport-building situations between myself and the research participants.

At The Language Company, I attend weekly meetings and further sporadic meetings and appointments throughout the week. Secondly, I volunteered for three months, every weekday morning, at the Give-Away Store. During this time, I performed volunteering tasks such as helping package food and making breakfast for vulnerable school children. Along with volunteering, I “hung out” at the location for approximately three to four hours a day across six weeks. In other words, I was attempting to do what O’Reilly (2012) suggests “[t]o participate includes getting involved, joining in, being subjective and immersing yourself” (106). This gave me an excellent opportunity to get to know other residents and volunteers and provide an ideal space to conduct participant observation.

3.1.2 Semi-structured Interviews

As O’Reilly et al. (2012) and Bernard (2005) explain, a semi-structured interview allows the researcher to explore new ideas with participants. The discussion proceeded while maintaining some structure from a pre-prepared question. I conducted 20 interviews during my fieldwork, 7 of which were semi-structured, and the remaining 13 were open interviews. I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with community organizers and leaders. The reason for this was twofold. Firstly, given that Dutch is not my native language, I believe having some limited structure helped guide the conversation if I was unable to express myself. Secondly, as Bernard (2005) suggests, semi-structured interviews can be valuable and helpful when talking to people accustomed to using efficient time. Therefore when I conducted interviews with community leaders, I allowed for this. All apart from one, semi-structured interviews were conducted online.

3.1.3 Open Interviews

As suggested by Bernard (2005), open interviews are an effective form of interviewing during the initial stages of the research. This was to find out more general information or fact-finding questions (350). Out of the 20 interviews conducted, I was able to organize 13 open interviews. Most were with fellow volunteers from both The Language Company and the Give-Away Store. Through my experience of working with fellow volunteers, I built up an excellent bond with my research participants, which helped during interviews. Bernard

(2005) illustrates how sensitive topics relating to the body, moral behavior, and mental health are best suited to open interviews as the interviewee can respond quickly (351). I was able to touch upon previous conversations during my informal conversation while volunteering and implement certain circumstances I had been informed about. Examples of this were specifically important when discussing poverty, suicidal thoughts, and family relationships which, as this dissertation will show, I have ethnographically explored in the coming chapters.

3.2 Positionality

It is essential to reflect on my positionality during my fieldwork and research experience. As I highlighted above, my own experience of being a non-native Dutch speaker gave me an excellent opportunity to build rapport with research participants. I noted how, especially research participants from Turkey and Morocco, we would share anecdotes and express similar feelings about being foreign in the Dutch context. However, it was also essential to keep in mind my background. Being white-British and highly educated gave me a very different experience of being a migrant in the Netherlands. Therefore I was aware not to homogenize our experiences.

3.3 Structure of Ethnographic Chapters

The first ethnographic chapter, titled “Chapter 4: Women, Citizenship, and Language,” will focus on the interactions between the state, individuals and how these are informed by ideas surrounding citizenship. As drawn upon previously, “Resilient BoTu 2028” sets specific societal goals in the form of increased labor participation and language, which are considered essential characteristics of “citizen-making” under Third Way regimes. I will attempt to highlight how gender and ethnicity interact with such conditions of “deservedness” amongst citizens.

My second ethnographic chapter, titled “Chapter 5: Women as Volunteers,” will pay particular attention to the gendered citizen-to-citizen interactions in the context of “Resilient BoTu 2028”. The role of this chapter will be to explore how “Resilient BoTu 2028” is lived and perceived in the everyday lives of women. Touching upon the previous chapter, I will highlight the role of neoliberalism in constructing a sense of “deservedness” through

requiring specific interactions from citizens while simultaneously dismantling the welfare state, leading to precarious positions for residents, especially in the case of women.

My final ethnographic chapter, titled “Chapter 6: The Language Company: Women as Domestic Leaders,” will look to explore the intersection between the “Resilient BoTu 2028”, the energy transition, and the female volunteers of The Language Company. I will highlight their role as “domestic leaders” and question the extent of their empowerment and agency. I will illustrate ethnographic contours of gender inequalities concerning energy poverty and show how global interpretations of the energy transition are experienced in the everyday lives of women in Bospolder-Tussendijken.

Chapter 4: Women, Citizenship, and Language.

4.1 “Busy with Surviving”: Accessing the Community

On my first day of fieldwork, I had an appointment with Simon, the community leader managing the Give-Away Store. When I arrived for our meeting, he began explaining that he had received funding from the local government to start the organization as a part of the "Resilient BoTu 2028" plan. We walked up the steps to a large empty room with a few chairs, a table, and shelves full of children's books, toys, and second-hand clothes. Simon explained, "I set this place up last year, the original idea was a kind of supermarket, but free. You pick what you want or grab a cup of coffee for a chat". I interpreted, "...I suppose this is a kind of foodbank, I guess?". He replied, "no, this is no foodbank, with a foodbank you need to go to the local council, you need paperwork to prove what you have or don't have, you need a BSN (Burger Service Nummer), a lot of people here...they don't want to go to local council, and they don't want all that paperwork and they can't speak the language". He continued "they feel left behind". He went on, "some work in the black market because they have little choice, meaning they have no tax records, and because of corona they have no work, but where can they go if you have no paperwork, qualification or Dutch skills?". I was surprised, having lived in the Netherlands for 10 years I knew all too well how vital "having paperwork" is in accessing government websites, and to participate in civil administration. At this point I thought my research would be focused on the impeding energy transition in the neighborhood, I asked "what about this energy transition, then?". To my surprise he laughed and said, "people are busy with surviving day-to-day, first we need to understand that, rather than focusing on the energy transition".

This is an illustration of my first encounter with Simon. In the initial stages of my research, I focused on the neighborhood's energy transition and green initiatives. After this encounter, I realized that this was a contested transition. "Resilient BoTu 2028" markets itself as "apolitical" and "win-win" for many stakeholders; however, I found the everyday reality and response of residents regarding the transition were conflicting. It highlighted the importance of what Hein and Schubert (2021) label as "micro and macro" detailed case studies of transitions (414). In doing so, researchers can complicate supposedly "apolitical" language and "win-win" promotion of sustainable transitions, therefore, showing the contested nature of transitions in the everyday lives of individuals. The term "busy with surviving day-to-day" is something I heard on multiple occasions from stakeholders in the

community following this initial encounter. I soon realized that reaching climate goals was not at the forefront of issues for residents I interacted with in Bospolder-Tussendijken. This was confirmed in the weeks that followed, where I saw that climate change or sustainability were only very abstractly touched upon, if at all, by the residents. After my initial meeting with Simon, he offered me a daily volunteering position. As I got to know the volunteers, I learned they lived predominately in Bospolder-Tussendijken or the surrounding neighborhood of Spangen in the west of Rotterdam. The Give-Away Store acted as my first gateway and understanding how "Resilient BoTu 2028" was planned, initiated, and realized in the local area and enabled me to get to know fellow residents and volunteers. In other words, it was a first step in shifting my research focus to a rather abstract notion of an energy transition to the everyday lives of residents.

As I got to know the team at the Give-Away Store, I noted that only three out of thirty of the volunteers considered Dutch as their native language. One wall of the main distribution area at the Give-Away Store was full of colored stickers and coding on a whiteboard, red for meat, yellow for halal, and so on. The system indicated where and how much produce had come in and out the weekend before. Simon explained that the system was most efficient and effective for volunteers, as some struggled with the Dutch language or literacy skills. During my initial encounter there, I noted how the vast majority of volunteers were women. I soon became familiar with my tasks; volunteers would distribute food to approximately forty to sixty households every day from a small window.

During participant observation, I was able to sit with volunteers and residents in the meeting room at the Give-Away Store. During this period of participant observation, residents were invited to sign up for a "food card." During my first weeks, I was particularly interested in the "food card" system, as many other volunteers complained it would be too complicated, as I will illustrate below. It was often a topic of conversation with fellow volunteers. With this card, people could pick up groceries once per week and bread once per day. Again, the cards had a simple color-coded system to indicate your dietary preferences. When signing up for a "food card," residents would be required to write their details on a form, such as an address, email address, and the number of house members. All of the information was then collected and typed onto a database for the Give-Away Store. This system was relatively new when I started my volunteering work at the Give-Away Store. After my first week, requiring residents to note the information down was scrapped. Instead, one volunteer informed me, other volunteers would write down the information as many had issues with Dutch and literacy skills. This was my first real insight into the daily struggles of

illiteracy that many residents faced. To add to this, on many occasions during my time at the Give-Away Store, I saw residents come into the store with young children acting as the translator, illustrating that many migrants did not speak Dutch, along with illiteracy. Digital literacy was also a problem for some residents. On one occasion, I asked a volunteer what the database was used for. The volunteer said that the initial idea was to use the email addresses to send out reminders and updates about when food was arriving. The arrival of food was often irregular as the Give-Away Store would largely depend on donations from supermarkets. However, out of two hundred and three forms processed, only three residents gave an email address simply because they did not have an email address or did not know how to work in digital environments. This is striking because, in the past decade, the Dutch government has increased its dependency on digital civil administration through the DigID (Digital Identification) system. Obtaining an email address and having access to these facilities is crucial for civil administration, from healthcare to welfare benefits.

In addition, I noted how many volunteers used their experience of the Give-Away store to learn and practice their Dutch. During my first day, I apologized for my many mistakes in Dutch to my fellow volunteers, something I would continually do throughout my fieldwork, as I will illustrate. Lisa, originally from Curaçao, explained, "no worries, I have been in the Netherlands for 13 years, I am still no good, we will find a way to understand each other". Lisa explained that although she has been in the Netherlands for a considerable amount of time, she only interacted with people from Curaçao. Lisa wanted to learn Dutch to the level where she could complete a food and cooking education in becoming a chef. These initial encounters helped me understand the inherent link between dominant neoliberal conceptions of citizenship and the societal goals set out in the "Resilient BoTu 2028" plan. Through this lens, the Give-Away store effectively provides individuals with skills and resources for which residents can use and reproduce these normative conceptions of citizenship. However, as I will illustrate, language, gender, and ethnicity complicate the attainability of normative forms of citizenship because of cultural conceptions of citizenship in broader society. This highlights what Verkaaik (2012) refers to as "the 'culturalization' of citizenship" (69). In other words, having Dutch citizenship does not simply entail legal status granted under Dutch law. To fulfill the role and be recognized as a citizen and fully participate in the Dutch polity, one needs access to and a significant understanding of civil procedures, social life, language, and bureaucratic processes (Verkaaik 2021). Central tenets to this access and participation are understanding the Dutch language and participating in the labor market.

Ong (1996) refers to this concept of "governmentality" in an ethnographic approach to understanding the subjectification of citizenship in the context of Western democracies. Ong (1996) suggests that this is a too restrictive interpretation, as it ignores the role of civil institutions and social groups in the cultural formulation of citizenship (738). Ong (1996) proposes that in liberal democracies, it is primarily the state. Still, with the state receding under neoliberal ideology, it is to an increasing extent also civil institutions (for example, the Give-Away Store) that take on the role of "instilling normative proper normative behavior and identity" for citizens (738). When citizens do not conform to dominant neoliberal conceptions of citizenship, they potentially experience a level of exclusion in conditions of "deservedness".

4.2 Voices from the Community: Language and Women

The “culturalization of citizenship” as suggested by Verkaaik (2012), plays a significant role in how citizens can be excluded and their rights eroded when “stringent language and cultural testing” is not fulfilled, and as Goldberg (2006) suggests this approach, often used by European countries, can disproportionality affect immigrants, perpetuating the sense of “otherness.” During the first week of my fieldwork, I set up an appointment with the head of an organization called the House of the Future. The purpose of this organization was to inform residents about the energy transition and provide a communal gathering space for residents, another initiative to “bring residents out of their homes.” The House of the Future, financed by the local government through funds allocated for the “Resilient BoTu 2028” plan, was essentially a community building located in a residential home in the center of the Bospolder-Tussendijken. When I arrived, I nervously went into the community building. I noted how the building looked like one of many post-war-style residential homes. I proceeded to the garden at the rear of the property, the garden backed onto a large communal courtyard to which approximately thirty houses had access. Many homes had big washing lines hanging from wall to wall. Many curtains were closed, and there was very little activity besides a few cats and the rustling of plastic bags, cans, and other bits of waste blown over in the wind. We walked in and sat around the communal bread oven in the center of the courtyard. The bread oven was used every Wednesday afternoon by volunteers and residents. I began to introduce myself, and once again, I apologized in advance for my Dutch and explained my research. The organizer looked frustrated, “please stop apologizing. I just had this from Ayaan – she said the same thing, stop apologizing for your Dutch”. Ayaan was a

middle-aged mother and volunteered once a week at the community center. Originally from Turkey, she had been in the Netherlands for 25 years but still struggled with her Dutch. She piped up, “we’re sorry, Jan, we people just feel dumb because we can’t get our words out...”

This illustration above shows one of many times where non-native speaking residents cited how they felt “inferior” or “as if they could not express themselves” when talking about their Dutch language level, as two research participants explained during an interview. Ayaan had three adult children and wanted to find employment, and this was often a topic of conversation during our weekly meetings around the bread oven. Every week Ayaan would make bread along with three other Turkish women in the courtyard. Two of the women spoke no Dutch, and Ayaan would serve as a translator. Ayaan had lived in Bospolder-Tussendijken for many years but missed Turkey very much. She explained to me that she brought her children up here and never went to work. Ayaan stayed within a largely isolated Turkish community and did very little to improve her language level. However, now Ayaan turned fifty and no longer had demanding domestic and childcaring tasks, she wanted to find employment. On one occasion, she complained about her lack of skills and qualifications and claimed, “I feel useless,” but swore it was all worth it because “whenever my children came home from school or elsewhere, I would always be there to answer the door and they would always have a home-cooked dinner waiting for them.”

The goal of “Resilient BoTu 2028” was to address issues of language skills and labor participation. During my conversations with residents like Ayaan, it was clear that limited Dutch language skills led to difficulties finding employment. Female research participants often claimed they feel “inferior” or “useless.” Still, they stated their limited language skills and labor participation mainly derived from them being the prime caregivers to their children, or in other words, providing reproductive forms of labor. These women voiced a desire to enter the labor market once childcare tasks are less demanding and seemed to recognize the importance of language skills within the labor market. As Bjornson (2007) explains, the “fetishizing” of Dutch language skills comes from a “post-Fordist” citizenship system. This system encourages people not to think of themselves as recipients of social rights within a nation. Instead, they are individuals who must have language lessons, qualifications and can ultimately participate in the labor market (67). In other words, there is an “emergence of the marketized view of the citizen-subject” into how we regard the relationship of language, citizenship, and labor participation (Bjornson 2007 67). Simultaneously, there is an undervaluation of the role of caregiving and reproductive labor under a post-Fordist citizenship regime (Bjornson 2007; Knijn and Kremer 1997). Knijn and Kremer (1997)

provide a concise comparison of the role of care and the welfare state in Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Knijn and Kremer define care as “the provision of daily social psychological, emotional, and physical attention for people” (330). Under Third Way regimes, caregivers, such as Ayaan, can only fulfill childcare demands at the cost of a fundamental element of social citizenship and the ultimate societal goal set out by “Resilient BoTu 2028,” which is labor participation. The value inflation of Dutch language skills and labor participation, combined with the undervaluation of caregiving, has a detrimental effect on women performing reproductive forms of labor (Bjornson 2007, 74).

Going back to my initial introduction with Jan and Ayaan, I explained my research and my role in the community initiative. Jan and Ayaan suggested I help them every week making bread at the bread oven. Ayaan also introduced to me The Language Company, which became the third and final community project I interacted with during my fieldwork. Ayaan was a member of The Language Company, financed by the allocated funding of “Resilient BoTu 2028” to help residents and women learn Dutch. The organization was specifically for women born outside of the Netherlands. Our weekly meetings would consist of language classes. At the same time, the women acted as a social support network, often using the first half of our weekly meetings to vent about their experiences. In addition, the women from The Language Company were crucial in the energy transition. On suggestion from a representative from the local government, they trained as environment coaches, a position and idea I will go into in more detail in the coming chapters. In their role as environment coaches, and as most of the women were originally from Turkey and Morocco, they would help translate documentation and inform the local community about the energy transition in their native languages.

4.3 “You’re Not an ‘Allochtoon’ . . .We Are”

Besides gender, there is also a specific ethnic or racial experience of the “culturalization of citizenship” (Verkaaik 2012). Under the dominant neoliberal conceptions of citizenship, realized by “Resilient BoTu 2028”, Turkish and Moroccan communities are equally subjected to conditions of “deservedness” through their interactions with the state. As I found in my fieldwork, language skills limited individuals’ access to labor participation, increasing the need for welfare support. As I will illustrate in the following subchapter, under traditional conceptions of citizenship, ethnic minorities are already subjected to “otherness”

and heightened scrutiny in current popular debate, which is perpetuated further by dependency on the welfare state.

On invitation from Ayaan the following Friday, I attended the first meeting with The Language Company. Over several weeks, I joined meetings and activities organized by the group. On one memorable meeting, the women of The Language Company took part in a “dialogue table.” The idea of this session was to work on expression, participation, and sharing experiences. As women with a migrant background, we were all invited to express issues we came across, both positive and negative. The session took approximately two hours and consisted of six women originally from Morocco or Turkey, excluding myself. We sat in a traditional Moroccan living room with Arabic writing on the walls and a bench covered in dark green velvet cushions that lined the perimeter of the walls. In the middle was a traditional Moroccan-style table in the shape of an octagon. The organizer started the dialogue table by stating, “we all have different experiences of being here in the Netherlands. Some have been here a lot longer...some lived here their whole lives, but we will always be ‘allochtonen’”. I apologized for cutting in and asked, “Sorry, what do you mean by ‘allochtonen’?” This word was new for me. She replied, “good question, we are ‘allochtonen,’ you aren’t. It means people with an immigrant background”. I look confused, “huh? but I’m also an immigrant, right?” “yes,” she said, “but it’s a different kind of immigrant, we aren’t Western. We wear a headscarf, we’re Muslim and have a different culture”. I still look a little confused at her distinction. She could see I felt uncomfortable. She ended the conversation with, “...anyway the government no longer use this to refer to us, but it means we migrant who is not Western and it’s a bit controversial to use...”

In the everyday discourses in the Netherlands, there is a clear distinction between ethnicity, citizenship, and nationality. With no direct translation into the English language, the word “allochtoon” is a somewhat difficult to convey. The word comes from the Greek meaning of “emerging from another soil.” In the context of the Netherlands, the term “allochtoon” is used to racialize postcolonial Dutch migrants and guest workers from Turkey and Morocco in Dutch popular conscious and discourse (Çankaya and Mepschen 2019, 627). As described by Goldberg (2006), the term “allochtonen” implies a distinction between the majority white population

Van Dale Dictionary Definition (2021)

Allochtoon: al-loch-toon (opposite: “autochtoon”) (plural: “allochtonen”)

[1] Originating from somewhere outside the Netherlands.

[2] Someone with at least one parent born outside of the Netherlands.

and other marginalized communities (29-30). Çankaya and Mepschen (2019) suggest that the term “allochtonen” is used as a tool to construct an alleged kinship and shared identity among the majority white population based on “genealogical attachments to Dutch soil” (627).

Çankaya and Mepschen (2019) illustrate how the term “allochtoon” has become to embodied “common-sensical way” to refer to non-white people, regardless of nationality or formal citizenship, and this racialized discourse has become a derogatory term (627). Anthropologist Robert L. Young (1996) suggests that race, from its outset, is to be understood as conforming to cultural competencies, such as religion or norms. This, coupled with the normalization of anti-Muslim racism and sentiment in political discourse, has only reinforced the distinction between ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship (Çankaya and Mepschen 2019, 627).

The example above shows the contested nature of citizenship in the Netherlands for predominately non-white marginalized communities. It also shows how the term “allochtonen” deeply affects their everyday experiences of being culturally “othered” and how it constructs their identity within society. Despite having lived longer in the Netherlands than me and arguably having a higher level of Dutch language skill than me, they still found themselves “other,” purely based on skin color and religion. For example, the right to social citizenship, having the right to income, is restricted mainly to Dutch law. On the other hand, discourse and anti-Muslim sentiments create a sense of exclusion from society's membership. “Resilient BoTu 2028” was planned, initiated, and realized with the intention to active citizens into labor participation. However, ethnic minorities, notably Turkish and Moroccan communities, live under heightened scrutiny and “deservedness” due to their inherent condition of being “othered” within dominant societal and discursive practices specific to the Netherlands. In the context of Bospolder-Tussendijken is essential to highlight the level of “deservedness” in the context of welfare dependency. Among ethnic minorities, language skills were a crucial factor in their inability to participate in the labor force.

As I witnessed during my fieldwork, one of the main interactions between citizens from ethnic minorities and migrants and the state was welfare dependency. Due to their role as primary caregivers, coupled with limited language skills, those receiving social welfare benefits are primarily women from ethnic minorities. After many conversations about their motivation to become volunteers or environment coaches, it became clear to me that volunteering and welfare payments were intrinsically linked. Although many women cited the enjoyment and social benefits of volunteering, they were required to participate in volunteering as a part of their social welfare payments. On one occasion, Ayaan told me that she felt forced to conduct these “activities.” By “activities,” Ayaan meant either conducting

four employment activities a month, for example, applying for a job, or up to twenty hours of volunteering per week to receive her welfare payments, and this would at times cause a lot of pressure, especially in combination with other day-to-day tasks.

The women I interacted with, predominately from ethnic minorities, often inexplicitly referred to the feeling of “deservedness” during our many interactions and encounters. It is, therefore, important here to highlight T.H Marshall conceptualized social citizenship, which includes human rights, for example, the right to find adequate housing, education, employment, and income (Knijn and Kremer 1997, 331). However, the lived experience of social citizenship, defined in these terms, manifested itself differently amongst women from ethnic minorities. Many of my research participants complained about their experience of the welfare system in the Netherlands. During volunteering, I met Sara, a 45-year-old single mother who grew up in Morocco but came to the Netherlands when she married her husband. She had her first child at the age of sixteen and left school soon after. Therefore, she had few qualifications. She went on to have three more children. She was unemployed and receiving welfare payments. On one occasion, she complained her benefit payments were too low to feed three growing children. Sara complained about the number of check-ups and hurdles she had to go through, for example filling in paperwork or physically attending the benefits office on the other side of Rotterdam. She felt that the local welfare office was particularly stringent because she had never worked in the Netherlands. As for many people, most interactions would occur over the phone. However, she was required to physically attend the welfare office. Although some research participants complained welfare payments were insufficient, they would nevertheless comply with the hurdles, as there was little choice.

During an interview with Sara, she noted how when she was a young mother, caregiving tasks were shared, “doors were open for people, every day my children would hang out with a group of children, one would be from Morocco, the other from Suriname [etc.] and during the summer holiday my children would alternate going to each other’s houses per day.” Knijn and Kremer (1997) suggest that before the formation of the modern welfare state, care was primarily provided by older family members and social networks (331). Now, caregiving can only be done when individuals do not participate in productive forms of labor. As argued by Knijn and Kremer (1997), labor participation is a fundamental aspect of citizenship. Not being able to perform this then excludes women from full social citizenship status. Sustainable urban transformations, such as this one, aims to increase funding for social programs and allows urban residents to create autonomous spaces and possibilities for self-determination (McDonough et al. 2011, 115). However, the extent of

urban residents creating space and opportunities for self-determination is place-specific (Peterson 2015, 210). The reach and capability of self-determination fall unevenly, depending on levels of wealth, power, and human capital, such as language skills, qualifications, and childcare, for example (Szasz and Meuser 1997). Aspects of sustainable urban transformations, whether social, environmental, or economic, have differing and unequal impacts on marginalized groups, such as the Turkish and Moroccan communities I interacted with during my fieldwork, especially women.

Chapter 5: Women as Volunteers

Moving from focusing on how female residents negotiate dominant constructions of citizenship, as shaped by the state, I will now focus on the citizen-to-citizen interactions. This chapter will focus on the various ways women discursively construct their role in volunteer work and how conditions of neoliberalism and the welfare state limit the opportunities of self-determination, as seen through the goals set in “Resilient BoTu 2028”. On one occasion, I was volunteering at the Give-Away store, along with four female volunteers. I sat together making packages for school children over the half-term Easter break. The packages consisted of a coloring book, some chocolate eggs and other small gifts, and puzzle books. I looked around and noticed the overwhelming number of women working. I asked Nora, a young 18-year-old intern studying community work at the local vocational college, why she thought there were so many women instead of men here. She replied, “children, of course.” At that point, the store was busy. Nora had opened the store earlier than expected, so residents were already queuing outside. Melanie came storming up the stairs. She was a 34-year-old mother of two children, one being 17 years old and the other four years old. Melanie had volunteered at the Give-Away store the longest and was the unofficial supervisor. Melanie started screaming at Nora, shouting, “you’ve opened too early, listen to me!”. This kind of altercation was somewhat common between the younger interns and volunteers. A few hours later, I joined Melanie outside while she smoked a cigarette. I asked, “what happened earlier?”. Melanie responded, “I just can’t take it. When these young and new girls come along and do it differently, they don’t listen to me, maybe because I’m not here for study or work”. A few moments later, we began talking about her employment or education prospects. She laughed, “I can’t go to school. I have children. I either get benefits or a job and why would anyone hire me? I’m old, they give the jobs to people of Nora’s age or younger....”

This illustrates what I found to be one of the most harmful elements in successfully finding employment for women, the staggered wage payment in the Netherlands. Due to the nature of the staggered minimum wage in the Netherlands, many employers find employing younger people between the ages of 15-20 more financially beneficial for low-skilled jobs. Between the ages of 15-20, employees receive a percentage of statutory minimum wage. As a result, low-skilled jobs, for example, working in café, restaurants, or cashiers, are often given to younger people (Gyes and Schulten 2015). Due to the nature of the staggered minimum wage, working-class low skilled women are often forced towards welfare benefits to support their families. As a condition of welfare benefits, women must perform volunteer work. From

the ten women I interacted with daily at the Give-Away store, seven cited that they did voluntary work for this reason. For doing volunteer work, “credit” is given to the volunteers for every hour worked. This could be used to pay for courses and other forms of skills building, such as further education or driving lessons.

In the sections below, I will first look at how female volunteers engaged with their work. On the one hand, they performed caregiving acts and tasks of domesticity, something inherent to the private sphere. However, through engaging with residents, helping one another, and acts of solidarity, these caregiving tasks are flowing over beyond the realm of the household and take on an (implicit) political nature. Secondly, when engaging with my research participants, I recognized how the positions of precarity, and poverty shaped their visions of the future. Thirdly, I will look at how neoliberalism and its influence on government, policymakers and welfare policy has undervalued the role of caregiver, which disproportionately burdens women. The societal goals as set out by “Resilient BoTu 2028”, such as increasing employment and language level, presents itself as a win-win solution. However, this overlooks the complex everyday experiences of women in Bospolder-Tussendijken. In the following chapter, I will look to analyze these experiences to understand how “Resilient BoTu 2028” is lived and perceived in the lives of women.

5.1 Women as Volunteers: The Give Away Store

The Give-Away Store is an organization started for and by the neighborhood residents. This was made clear not only in my observations but throughout my interactions with my research participants. In the initial weeks of my fieldwork, I approached the community organizer Simon. Simon was a local pastor. However, he didn’t have a church in the community. I noticed from the offset that this was more than a place for residents to collect bread and groceries for the week. It was also a meeting place and a place where residents had access to free educational courses, social activities, and a place to share necessary household goods, for example, second-hand mattresses or children’s toys.

However, many women were stuck in a position where they were limited to a modality of engagement by performing domestic acts within the Give-Away store, such as providing food for people, sharing children’s toys, and nurturing others in the community. This was the first modality of engagement I noted amongst the female volunteers. The second modality of engagement I noted was the sense of solidarity amongst volunteers, which I will explore in more detail in the coming paragraphs. I noticed how Simon was not a “boss” in

the traditional sense. This was clear not only the informal way he interacted with volunteers but also his approach to helping volunteers in the long run. He worked extremely hard for the organization and had a friendly relationship with volunteers. I would often see him smoking cigarettes outside the building with residents and volunteers, talking about their social lives. He is a middle-aged man who had dedicated his professional life to set up similar organizations in other cities, such as Amsterdam. Simon stressed the need for long-term change to help get people from “just surviving” to people who would be role models for their children, independent from the state support, and socially mobile. Lisa from Curaçao, discussed in Chapter 4, was an example of one of these women. She had recently obtained her driver’s license and was soon to follow vocational training in food and cooking, obtained through the credit system.

Simon saw the importance socio-economic status had on limiting social mobility. In an interview with Simon, he told me about the importance of “influencers” in the neighborhood. He explained, “you need to find people here in the neighborhood who have experienced motherhood at a young age and have a later stage found a career, built skills, and they can help others do the same in the neighborhood.” I believe Simon was trying to suggest the importance of showing other women who had children at a young age that social mobility was possible.

One example of an “influencer,” as Simon referred to it, was Hannah. Hannah lived in the neighborhood for her whole life. She was 43 years old. Hannah told me in an interview that she wasn’t “white” enough to be Dutch when she was younger, although her mum was Dutch. But she also wasn’t “foreign” enough to get the extra support, in the form of educational support or cycling lessons, that many Moroccan or Turkish families would receive as part of the government’s integration program. She had her first child at 17-years-old. In an interview with Hannah, she told me that she was more interested in going in smoking marijuana rather than carrying on with school when she was younger. After years of government support, she realized that perhaps a future in human resources would be of interest to her. Simon recognized this and gave her a role in the organization to do tasks that would help her gain this experience. Hannah oversaw the roster, helped to recruit new volunteers, and made volunteering contracts for them.

The second modality of engagement was sense of solidarity amongst the volunteers and women in the community. In my many conversations with volunteers, they wanted to create a sense of community and a safe space where no one felt shame. There was a real sense of solidarity with residents and volunteers. Volunteers were relatable, approachable,

and local to the neighborhood. They didn't ask for paperwork, documentation, and income declarations. Anyone who came by could get something. Hannah explained to me in an interview;

“This is not a food bank, it's. . . well I don't know the word, but there was a gap before we started this store. People struggled to afford food but didn't want to go to the formal and suspicious food bank with paperwork. People feel ashamed. If you see the queues of people here, you see that it was needed. . . are from a certain background you feel a level of pride gone. So, we want to overcome that by making this a place with a sense of community. We talk to people ask them how their day was. This helped overcome these feelings....”

In this interview, Hannah illustrated the sense of solidarity that other female volunteers felt not only towards fellow volunteers but residents too. What this quote shows is the importance of community and making sure no one felt alone. And although many women did not regard what they were doing as “political” by nature, they were at the forefront of helping people in poverty. Douzina-Bakalaki (2017) pays ethnographic attention to modalities of engagement between female volunteers in the context of a soup kitchen in Greece. In the case of the female volunteers at the Give-Away Store, they did not regard their role as overtly political. If anything, they protested against this idea. An example of this is the anecdote above. It was not the aim to create a bureaucratic foodbank-style store. The female volunteers performed acts such as providing food or sharing children's toys through engagement with the community and shared experiences. Douzina-Bakalaki (2017) suggests that in the case of the female volunteers in the soup kitchen, one modality of engagement for the women was based on the domesticity of acts they were performing and their interrelated identities as women and housemistresses (6). In many ways, this is similar to the case of the women at the Give-Away Store. As Douzina-Bakalaki (2017) suggests, although this modality of engagement is symbolically distant to significant political resistance, they are inherently no less political (6). The Give-Away Store is a space within the public realm. Still, for many female volunteers, it was a place of solidarity where seemingly domestic acts, such as altruism and caregiving, could be performed. This suggests that in two different conditions of neoliberalism, Greece in times of austerity and a wealthy country like the Netherlands, seemingly altruistic and domestic acts can simultaneously be considered political.

5.2 Visions of the Future: Precarity, Poverty and Women

The political and domestic acts were in large part shaped by notions of precarity and poverty. While these women found themselves being directed by neoliberal notions of citizenship, as initiated by “Resilient BoTu 2028,” they are simultaneously burdened by precarity, poverty, and the dismantling of the welfare state, inherent in neoliberal ideology. As illustrated at the start of this chapter, I witnessed many occasions where arguments between volunteers would occur. There were arguments between volunteers due to stress at home, volunteers turning up late because of situations with their children. One morning during my fieldwork, I was taking a break with a group of volunteers, it was a Monday, and as usual, the delivery of new food had arrived on Saturday. As one of the job’s perks, volunteers had “first picks” on the weekly shipment of fresh food items. On this occasion, a few volunteers shouted at another volunteer because they had taken too much food for that week. The volunteer in question, Cecile, broke down and explained the complexities of having three generations under one roof with little income. Every month the volunteers and residents would receive a monthly gift card of 20 euros for the supermarket. One day during my work there, a volunteer shouted, “she has already had hers – why is she getting another one.” The volunteer in question started to cry and explained how a family member had taken the card to buy alcohol, and she had nothing left of it. These types of arguments would often be heated and emotional. However, at the end of the argument, the volunteers found a solution and supported each other regardless of what happened. Millar (2014) discusses the “everyday emergencies” that arise when people are in precarious positions. Millar (2014) suggests that the regularity and stability of informal employment can conflict with the conditions of urban poverty (34). Although Millar (2014) looks at this in the context of urban poverty in Rio de Janeiro, similarities are made in the context of urban poverty in Bospolder-Tussendijken. Situations such as alcoholism, poverty, and social deprivation show the multiple forms of insecurity in the everyday lives of residents in the neighborhood. Although not to homogenize people in conditions of poverty and the “voices of the poor” in Rio de Janeiro and Bospolder-Tussendijken, it is essential to highlight how finding employment under neoliberal conditions is central to social mobility and limiting precarious positions.

Visions of the future came up in conversations during my participation observations at the Give-Away store. On one occasion, I was talking to Cecile, a 50-year-old woman with two children. She cared very much about her appearance and wore elaborate earrings. Every day she came into the Give-Away store and showed me the different earrings she had on. She made them herself along with other clothes. Her role was to make coffee and tea for other volunteers and residents standing in line for food. Simon decided to give her this role because

she had trouble walking. She explained that at a young age, when she was living in Turkey, she broke her hip, and no one noticed. Only until she stopped growing did she realize that one leg had grown shorter than the other due to the accident. She told me how much pain she was in daily, which made it difficult for her to find employment. She had a special shoe made a kind of platform that would make the legs the same length. However, the shoes would cost 700 euros, so it was only possible to buy one pair every year. She told me about her 14-year-old son. She often felt bad she couldn't provide fancy clothes that he wanted and saw on social media. One day, she told me about her worries for the future of her son. Often the precarious positions of women in volunteering roles and relying on welfare support would cause difficulties for planning for the future and visions of the future for the female volunteer's conception of what their children would become or do. She explained the limited job opportunities as he had no interest in school. She told me that he had been approached twice by slightly older boys on mopeds to sell marijuana on the street. She was concerned about this, along with the influence of social media, she explained her son wanted to buy designer shoes and clothes, and he could be susceptible to this type of work.

Throughout my fieldwork experiencing at the Give-Away store, I came across a large proportion of female volunteers who worried about the precarious position for the children, how to pay for healthcare, and finding employment. Even fundamental experiences such as attending meetings at the welfare office or parent-teacher consultations at school would be a physical struggle for some like Cecile.

Cecile felt anxiety and anomie about the future of her children but also her health and access to adequate health care. Cecile would suggest that if her health insurance would cover more for physiotherapy and special assistance shoes were cheaper. She could perhaps gain more confidence and find employment. These conditions witnessed during my fieldwork from volunteers such as Cecile can be related to Standing's (2011) definition of the "precariat." Within the context of the European North, the "precariat" is a "class-in-the-making" of people characterized by a lack of secure and formal unemployment within a labor system, like in the Netherlands, which once valued a strong sense of work-based identity. These conditions of the precariat are precarious and lead to displaying feelings of "anomie, anger, anxiety, and alienation" in contemporary society (Lazar and Sanchez 2019, 5). This increasing instability of waged labor leading to precariousness amongst the precariat is a concept that anthropologist Allison (2013) discusses in the context of Japan. Cecile would often refer to moving back to Turkey to be with family. Currently, she lived with her daughter and grandchild, along with her son. She often cited this as a reason for concern regarding her

financial struggles and inability to watch over her younger child. Allison (2013) refers to this as a “relationless society” where people cannot rely on traditional family support networks, therefore making her situation more precarious. Allison (2013) suggests that the conditions of insecurity, uncertainty, and failures of everyday life are an effect of neoliberal globalism.

5.3 Neoliberalism, the Welfare State and Women

The precarity and poverty experienced by the women I interacted with were in large part a result of the changing notions of “deservedness” under conditions of neoliberalism and the dismantling of the welfare state. During one quiet morning at the Give-Away store, I sat and drank coffee with Marloes in the common area. Marloes was a volunteer at the Give-Away store, she was open about her struggles with suicidal, depression, and alcoholism. She was 52 years old and was originally from Indonesia but had come to the Netherlands after marrying a Dutchman in the 1980s. She was now divorced and had no family besides her daughters in the Netherlands and felt lonely. She claimed that this made her depression worse. She suggested that not did she enjoy the social aspect of volunteering but also because of the mandatory requirements for social welfare payments. Previously she had been a cleaner but often complained that all the cleaning jobs had gone, because of coronavirus or cheaper labor elsewhere. Additionally, not only did she cite her mental health but also her physical health as to why she had difficulty finding formal employment, she had a bad knee and cleaning jobs only made this worse.

One day Marloes was packaging up boxes of food for the residents waiting outside. On this occasion, Marloes was also handing out boxes from the big window to give to the line of residents waiting. One resident complained about the food quality because the bread was dry, the meat was not halal, and the food was nearly out of date. Later, I sat with Marloes to discuss the encounter. I explained I was a little surprised by the woman’s reaction to the food, after all, it was free, and this was the best they could get given the circumstance. I quickly realized this was a stupid and perhaps a thoughtless remark. Marloes quickly interpreted me and said “they have every right to complain about the food, please do complain I always tell them... but not to us! To the local council, maybe if we complained they would listen, they would give us more money, they should complain, they have every right!” This interaction with Marloes illustrated to me how dismantling social welfare services do not get rid of the problem of poverty but rather shifts the burden of the problem elsewhere to an organization such as the Give-Away store or individuals.

Academics have long discussed the role of neoliberalism in the dismantling of the welfare state (Hall, Massey, and Rustin 2013; Havery 2005; Peck 2001). However, I argue that neoliberalism coupled with its limited value of non-productive forms of labor, such as caregiving, has not only led to the dismantling of the welfare state but made welfare programs and benefits more punitive. By doing so welfare programs and benefits are there to push individuals into more productive forms of labor, and subsequently limiting the size of welfare programs and benefits (Dickinson 271, 2016). This experience in the food bank shows how although the female volunteers were not overtly political, they did cite how limiting welfare support and social welfare spending in neighborhoods like Bospolder-Tussendijken affected the everyday lives of residents.

As Dickinson (2016) suggests in this post-industrial landscape, ideas about job security and strong welfare support are declining (272). However, since the introduction of Third Way Regimes, this is coupled with the nature of the welfare program and support in the Netherlands, which values labor participation and places conditions, such as volunteering or searching for employment, on having access to welfare support. Dickson (2016) illustrates how those who fall outside of the formal labor market, such as primary caregivers, and “cannot establish their identity as workers” are forced to perform tasks in exchange for welfare support (271). Not only was this limited to formal transactions as set out by the Dutch government welfare policy, but informally within the Give-Away store itself. Food was effectively exchanged for the labor of volunteers. In Bospolder-Tussendijken social welfare, dependency is 22% which stands in contrast to the average of 12% across Rotterdam (Centraal Bureau Voor Statstiek).

Welfare programs in the Netherlands, as with many Western European countries, have shifted from safety-net to incentives to enhance employee participation whilst simultaneously adding many conditions to welfare programs and rights (Arts and Van Den Berg 2018, 73). In the Netherlands, welfare programs are enacted through the Participation Act of 2015, which ensures that all adults should receive 75% of the minimum wage (Arts and Van Den Berg 2018, 71). As Simon explained how welfare support policy only engages with those temporarily out of work. Many of the female volunteers I interviewed had few qualifications, experience, and primary tasks as caregivers, there is little incentive to search for paid employment as their part-time wages would not be more than their welfare payments. Additionally, many volunteers receiving welfare payments would potentially run the risk of losing their social housing benefits and health benefits if their income went over a certain threshold. As Arts and Van Den Berg (2018) suggest that the welfare system in the

Netherlands is primarily focused on labor market participation and your ability to earn over minimum wage in a medium to a high skilled job (71). In conclusion, the nature of the welfare system in the Netherlands is largely shaped by a neoliberal dogma, which values labor participation and in recent decades has dismantled a secure “safety net” for individuals. In turn, this increases precarity amongst already marginalized groups, for example, those with limited language skills or education levels (Arts and Van Den Berg 2018, 72).

The welfare state in the Netherlands focuses on finding employment, rather than providing a safety net. For women such as Cecile, unemployment, and precariousness leads to further anxiety about finance, health, and criminality. All of which affect the everyday lives of not only herself but her immediate family. Although “Resilient BoTu 2028” sets out goals to increase employment and language skill, it overlooks the complexities of the lived experiences of women in a situation of precarity in Bospolder-Tussendijken.

Chapter 6: The Language Company: Women as Domestic Leaders

6.1 The Language Company, The Energy Transition and “Resilient BoTu 2028”

The environmental aspect of the “Resilient BoTu 2028” is twofold. The first part is the energy transition that requires all households to move from gas to electricity. Many homes in Bospolder-Tussendijken are either privately rented or owned by housing corporations and used as social housing. As a result, communication with tenants is essential. For example, housing corporations had to communicate with tenants about building and maintenance work, when this would occur, and if tenants were required to leave their properties. Given the proportion of non-native speaking residents, the women from The Language Company helped the housing corporation, local council, and tenants gain more information by translating from Turkish or Arabic to Dutch. The second environmental aspect of the “Resilient BoTu 2028” was to reduce energy poverty and improve the energy efficiency of housing.

As suggested by Clancy et al. (2017), the definition of energy poverty has proved an elusive and contested term. There is no official government definition of energy poverty in the Netherlands (Clancy et al. 2017, 13). In this chapter, I will refer to the term energy poverty (shown in the text box on the left), sometimes used interchangeably with fuel poverty, as conceptualized by the British Government. Despite no governmental definition of energy poverty In the Netherlands, it is nevertheless a problem. After Denmark, the Netherlands has the highest total household debt globally (Clancy et al. 2017, 84). As of 2014, 5.7% of households had debts to energy suppliers or debt collectors, resulting from the failure of energy bill payments (Clancy et al. 2017, 84). In three cities in the Netherlands, Rotterdam being one of them, the Energy Bank (Energie Bank) was founded to combat energy poverty. The Energy Bank aimed to reach out to households “to assist them in relieving energy debt and in improving their energy services” (EnergieBank Nederland). The Energy Bank also set up a branch in Bospolder-Tussendijken. The foundation hires and trains local volunteers from Bospolder-Tussendijken as “environment coaches.” The role of the environment coach is to consult households and help make energy-saving changes. They also act to negotiate with energy suppliers to decrease debt (Energiebank Nederland).

“Fuel/ Energy poverty: A household
i) income is below the poverty line
(taking into account energy costs);
and ii) their energy costs are higher
than is typical for their household
type” (Clancy et al. 2017, 15).

The aim of “Resilient BoTu 2028” was to combat energy poverty. The Energy Bank in Bospolder-Tussendijken, along with the local Government, suggested that the volunteers from the Language Company become environmental coaches to help reduce energy poverty and inform residents of changes and decisions during the energy transition.

Energy poverty is intrinsically linked to environmental justice. Demographic factors or having low income and household size increase the burden of the energy payments, and social support may not be adequate to pay for your energy bill. Furthermore, the market system itself has a direct effect on the cost of energy bills. As stated previously, despite innovation in renewable energy in recent years, the price of energy consumption remains high. Finally, socio-political drivers such as building stock, age, and design have a massive impact on building efficiency and energy bills (Clancy et al. 27).

Before analyzing the cause and effects of energy poverty in the context of Bospolder-Tussendijken, I will define the conceptual meaning of environmental justice. Harper (2012) conducted ethnographic research on the experiences of environmental injustice in the Roma community in Hungary. In this research, Harper (2012) defines environmental justice as; “every community [having] access to . . . possibilities for heating, livable and energy-efficient housing, green spaces . . . [t]hese services are the birthright of all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or socioeconomic status, as is the right to participate in policy decisions related to the environment and living conditions” (25). This definition provides an understanding of environmental justice and the importance of housing quality, especially in residents with a low socio-economic status living in social housing, for example. Additionally, it also highlights the role of communities being able to participate in policy decisions and informing residents of changes. My initial experiences in the field showed how community organizations, like The Language Company, served as a critical gateway for residents to be informed and participate in policy decisions.

After my initial meeting with Ayaan at the bread oven, she invited me to meet with the women at The Language Company. The following day I attended the first meeting where I met the other volunteers. There I was first introduced to Marie, the organizer, and Fathia, a volunteer. Fathia, originally from Morocco but had attended school in the Netherlands, helped the other women learn Dutch writing, reading, and speaking. As previously stated, the idea of The Language Company was to teach Dutch to female migrants in a way they felt comfortable. Marie oversaw The Language Company. She was an elderly Dutch woman and founded The Language Company with the larger aim of helping people in marginalized communities improve their Dutch and eventually find employment or participate in further

education. On this morning, I arrived ten minutes early for the meeting. Unknown to me, the women met thirty minutes before every appointment to read the Quran. As they did so, I sat patiently waiting.

During the meeting, I was introduced to the others. They were very warm and kind people. We spent the first half of the meeting sharing experiences of the Netherlands, making jokes about the differences between our cultures. The average age of the group was approximately forty-five. Many of the women received social welfare benefits and used their volunteering as their mandatory requirement quota. Out of twelve women, only one had formal employment. Many had primarily focused on bringing up children for most of their adult lives. Soon after the introduction, I was informed that as a volunteer at The Language Company, I would attend the environmental coach course along with four other “new” women to the group, two of which came from Morocco and the other from Turkey. The remaining women had already attended the 4-week course earlier in the year. Marie explained the instructions during the meeting, “the course will be a group of ten people from across Rotterdam, and you need to attend via zoom, unfortunately.” One of the women, Zelda, claimed slightly anxiously, “but I don’t have a computer” the other women quickly responded by informing Zelda that this wouldn’t be an issue, as most had attended using their telephone. Marie then explained that after Ramadan was over and the course was complete, we would begin the “intake” conversations with households living in Bospolder-Tussendijken. The women had already compiled a list of eighty addresses in the neighborhood, mainly consisting of neighbors, friends, and the family of the volunteers.

Later, in an interview with Marie, she would refer to this “social infiltration program” throughout our conversations, with the aim of “reaching people behind the closed front door,” especially in cases where Dutch was the second language. As the meeting went on, we were told about our goal and task of the intake conversations. Marie explained that this helped to reduce energy bills for residents. Marie then went on to explain the tasks. During intake conversations with residents, we would find out what kind of materials were needed. Additionally, it was the task of my “partner-coach,” a more experienced environmental coach, to make sure that during the in-take conversation, we asked if there were any social or financial problems. The environmental changes were simple tasks, such as changing light bulbs to LED lights or fitting water-saving caps on the end of the taps. The job of the “partner-coach” was to follow up on any questions residents had about social services, such as participating in a Dutch course, financial help to buy a computer, and help with energy bill payments. After this, Maire explained that the group would share the eighty household

addresses collected by the women equally between all the volunteers. Marie assigned this at random. Immediately, many of the women contested this idea, “I would like to do the ones I collected, it needs to be in Turkish, and they won’t like it if someone they do not know comes into their house.” All the women agreed this would be better. This showed the importance of having a trusted face in the social infiltration program. For the energy transitions, the women served as gatekeepers to the rest of the community. The number of household addresses that the women had already been able to collect was impressive and showed the success of the social infiltration program. The list was growing as more people felt assured that it was a free service and that people they knew of were involved in helping. However, it highlighted how the women became caregivers within their household and caregivers for the community. After the meeting, I discussed the energy transition with the women. Fathia was particularly vocal on what the women were concerned with. Fathia explained, “when we were told we’re getting induction plates and electric ovens instead of our gas plates, I thought “oh god – we foreigners need a proper cooking plate. We need a whole new oven, new pans! Pans are important in our culture; we cook a lot. I have very clearly asked the housing association “what does it look like? Do the residents need to pay for it? That’s 700 euros for a new oven and pans. People can’t just pay for that. We need money for induction pans”. This showed how exercised the women felt when the policies would affect the women in the domestic sphere. Because of their role in The Language Company, the women could pass on concerns, such as the cost of new appliances, to the fortnightly meeting with policymakers at the housing associations. The women in effect became “domestic leaders,” which, although seemingly empowering, as Fathia claimed in an interview, could also be argued to remain restricted to the adequate reproduction of the household.

Petrova and Simock (2019) researched gender inequalities and energy in Eastern, Central, and Southern Europe. Petrova and Simock (2019) conceptualize gender as a “social structure that labels and legitimizes particular behaviors, roles, and responsibilities as ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’” (3). They claim that this term “works to ‘script’ and bound social action in various ways” and ultimately reinforces “legitimate’ gender roles” and the “structures are remade” (3). Although seemingly beneficial for the societal goals set out in the “Resilient BoTu 2028” plan, the role of the women as energy coaches runs the possibility of “constraining human action” and eventually limiting opportunities for self-development. (Petrova and Simock 2019, 3). From the data collected, Petrova and Simcock (2019) suggest that within the household, it was the “female partner who undertook many of the “everyday alterations to routines or behaviors in an attempt to reduce energy consumption” (8).

This appears to be similarly true in the case of the women from The Language Company in Bospolder-Tussendijken. At first glance, the “Resilient BoTu 2028” looked to overcome energy poverty and inform residents of the energy transition through social infiltration. Arguably this was beneficial for energy justice, as residents were engaged and informed about policy changes and their specific issues relating to high energy bills. However, its approach simultaneously reinforced gender inequalities and divisions by extending the everyday experiences of caregiving, as shown by the importance of providing a trusted and caring face to energy saving. At the same time, the women’s role at The Language Company was regarded by many women involved as empowering.

6.2 Gender, the Welfare State and Energy Poverty

Every Friday, I would attend the weekly meeting with the women from The Language Company to discuss the upcoming plans for the week. I arrived with Najat and Sita on this occasion as I had agreed to help them practice their English language skills before our weekly meeting. We finished with our English lesson and sat waiting for the others to arrive. Every week, it was normal that one of the women would buy a pack of biscuits for the group, Marie the community organizer, would reimburse them. This time it was Najat’s turn to buy the biscuits. Sita asked, “Najat, where are the biscuits?”. Najat responded by explaining that she would buy them from the night shop next door once Marie arrived. Sita complained, “I want one now, just go get them.” Najat looked uncomfortable, “I’m normally able to save 30 at the end of every month, but this month my water bill came out, and it was 29 euros, I only have one euro left, and I have three days before my money comes in...”. On this occasion Najat waited for Marie to arrive to buy the biscuits. What this illustrated was the everyday difficulties for women in poverty in paying household bills. Najat complained that her welfare payments did not stretch enough for her and her three children. In single-parent households, women on welfare benefits were pushed into a position of energy poverty.

As illustrated in a report commissioned by the local council Bospolder-Tussendijken, over half of the residents receiving welfare support are single mothers (Wijk Agenda 2019). It has been suggested that single-mother households are often worse off financially because they effectively lack the “breadwinning” partner, yet, have relatively more dependencies, such as children or caregiving for older family members than men (Chant 2004, 20). Robinson (2019) explored the intersection between gender and energy poverty in England and the energy vulnerability of individuals. Robinson (2019) suggests that under material

conditions, such as energy poverty, traditional gender divisions are intensified (9). This reflects the “male-breadwinner” approach to welfare that is found in the Netherlands.

In 1996 Sainsbury conducted a study into the varying types of welfare systems and their effects on gender inequalities in the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden, and the Netherlands. Sainsbury (1996) delineated two types of welfare systems, the first being the male-breadwinner approach, which includes “policies that uphold a strict division of labor within couples, receipt of benefits by the male breadwinner, and private unpaid care labor” (Cancian 2002, 114). The other being an individual model, where the state plays an essential role in helping women find paid work and paid care, making them more financially independent from men. Sainsbury (1996) concluded that in the Netherlands, the welfare system was closely resemblant to the male breadwinner approach. Welfare payments for single mothers with multiple children were not enough to live and ultimately caused households to fall into poverty.

During my initial training at The Language Company, Marie informed the group that along with energy-saving changes we could offer to residents, there were also other initiatives residents should be aware of. For example, the local GP service ran a “winter clothing bank”. People struggling with payments could reduce the amount of energy they used, regardless of looking at more structural energy efficiency problems in the housing quality. Robinson (2019) explores a specific case in the United Kingdom that looked at women who participated in a similar clothing bank project. Robinson (2019) described how women sacrificed and donated their clothing to put their families first (9). Robinson (2019) suggests that “coping is disproportionately associated with several gender-sensitive indicators, namely, lone parents . . . those looking after the family and home” (9). Here it becomes clear that programs such as the “Resilient BoTu 2028” seek to overcome energy poverty with social infiltration, but the everyday experiences of welfare dependency, unemployment, and low incomes are still the driving force of energy poverty. The proposition by the “Resilient BoTu 2028” plan seemingly only scratches the surface. Exclusion from what is regarded as productive forms of economic work, such as caregiving, is often punished and not encouraged, as I have argued in the previous chapters. As a result, the welfare stated gives limited support, and this disproportionality affects single-parent households, which are primarily headed by the female as the primary caregiver.

6.3 Global Transitions and Local Poverty

The climate crisis is global in scale, however as Chu et al. (2015) suggest, adaptive policies start most effectively locally. As I will explore in the coming paragraphs, policies like the energy transition are reproduced globally. However, local initiatives, like incorporating the volunteers from The Language Company to help reduce energy bills, are specific to local poverty in Bospolder-Tussendijken. As I will explore, this creates conflicts between the global and arguably “elitist visions of sustainability” and local experiences (Hagerman 2007, 287).

In a European network of post-industrial cities, similar “urban resilience” transitions occur, particularly in port cities like Belfast, Glasgow, and Bristol. Vulnerable communities are directly engaged in overcoming twenty-first-century problems, such as poverty, unemployment, and the environmental and climate crisis (Resilient Cities Network 2019). The global nature of “Resilient BoTu 2028” is not just a theoretical or abstract idea in academia. The program’s name, “Resilient BoTu 2028,” is written in English as official documentation states. In Dutch, it is translated as “weerkraft.” The decision of the local government to use the English translation was highlighted many times during my fieldwork. People were often confused as to why the local government used the English word. Muehlebach (2013) explores the concept and term of “resilience” and how it’s become a transnational form of engagement and label for people experiencing poverty (301). Muehlebach (2013) argues that policymakers use the transnational term or form of engagement because it comes from a position of privilege. In other words, policymakers effectively assume they can detect “resilience” in others (Muehlebach 2013, 301). Muehlebach (2013) implies that those in positions of power, policymakers, for example, impose a narrative on working-class communities. Muehlebach suggests this narrative is “a soothing story” that assumes “the poor are strong, they can withstand, and they will bound but not rise” (301). This narrative uses concepts such as “resilience” to engage with individuals in precarious positions, overlooking their anxieties and suggesting individuals can bounce back

Clouded in vague dogma, such as “sustainable development” and “cities fit for the future,” the evolving global sustainability agenda overlooks the intersections of marginalized communities and place-based specificities. Lacey-Barnacle (2019) provides an ethnographic account of an energy transition in a low-income neighborhood in Bristol. In the case of Bristol, like Bospolder-Tussendijken, corporative solar panels, as cited in the introduction of this dissertation, were one approach to the energy transition. In both cases, using collective solar energy would reduce energy bills and, therefore, energy poverty. However, Lacey-

Barnacle (2019) found, and as I witnessed in my fieldwork, this would depend highly on the energy efficiency of the appliances and the building.

As suggested by Howe (2015), anthropological analysis of such projects and policies plays a crucial role in understanding the “planet-preserving appeal (the universal appeal)” and the “benefit to local populations (the particular appeal)” (239). However, O’Reily et al. (2020) highlight how anthropological scholarship on energy transitions has highlighted a gap within academic literature (20). Academic literature on socio-technical transitions often fails to consider issues of equity and justice (Howe 2015; Jenkins et al. 2018). In other words, although energy transitions, along with other green forms of energy production, are seemingly universally positive in the long term, it fails to acknowledge the everyday local experiences of poverty as a barrier to reaping such benefits. Studying the localities of environmentally sustainable transitions will provide a more concise analysis.

During an interview, I asked Houria, a volunteer and environment coach, what role she played during the intake conversation; “We first ask, what kind of lamps do you need? What size airtight window strips do you need? I make some notes, and besides that, more importantly, we ask about their wishes, do they want to learn Dutch? Can we help you with your household bills? I am not interested in the houses and energy; I get to come behind the front door and see what happens in someone’s home - to help them. It is about helping people”. On many occasions, the women would suggest that it was more to do with helping people rather than reducing energy bills. In the weeks after my initial meeting, I attended the environmental coach course. Marie would ask us to reflect on our experiences. Najat found the courses vague and the Dutch too fast for her to understand. During the course, we had to do a presentation every week. Najat explained she found this nerve-wracking, as the rest of the people attending the course were, in her words, “professionals, civil servants, I don’t know any of them, but I don’t think they get what we are trying to do.”

Najat decided not to complete the course in the end. Marie suggested Najat could focus on the Dutch course rather than the environmental coach course. During this time, it was coming to the end of Ramadan, as most of the women were Muslim, they wanted to celebrate this together. Najat decided to organize a small dinner to celebrate. Everyone would bring something small to the dinner. Najat explained, “I will provide the plastic cups and plates and a Moroccan dish.” Marie interpreted jokingly, “seeing as we are an environmental coach team, maybe plastic isn’t the best idea.” Najat, along with some others, replied, “oh, but we can’t expect anything more, does it matter anyway? It’s the cheapest and the easiest option”. This simple encounter illustrated the contested ideas of “being sustainable” amongst

specific communities and groups. On the one hand, the women understood the importance of greening initiatives and the energy transition as climate change policy. However, the more relevant factor for communities in Bospolder-Tussendijken was about social engagement, caring for one another, especially in low-income households. For them, the environment was not at the forefront of issues. It was poverty.

Angueloski et al. (2017) suggest that planners and elected officials often portray sustainable urban transitions, such as “Resilient BoTu 2028,” as a “no-regrets solution with win-win resilience, adaptation and mitigation of climate change” (26139). However, sustainable urban transitions and the dogma around such projects often portray “dominant visions, discourses, and practices of municipal greening and resilience,” which overlook everyday experiences of “just surviving” in specific marginalized communities (Anguelovski et al. 2017, 26141). Hagerman’s (2007) ethnographic research of sustainable urban transitions and its intersection with marginalized communities in Portland suggests that sustainability policies have been targeted to appeal to “very specific and elitist visions of ‘livability’” (287). The contested notion of “liveability” and “being sustainable” was something I witnessed throughout my fieldwork experience. “Resilient BoTu 2028” sets out ideal visions of sustainability and how residents should behavior and adapt according to global standards of “liveability.” The reality was that The Language Company’s aim was positive and beneficial for environmental justice. However, this only scratched the surface of the real problems that remain. The inextricably interconnected conditions of energy poverty, poverty, and limited welfare support directly hindered residents, specifically women, in gaining environmental justice and overcoming conditions of poverty and energy poverty. Social and environmental transitions, such as “Resilient BoTu 2028”, are planned, initiated, and realized across the global North and seemingly promote positive, sustainable change. However, such transitions like “Resilient BoTu 2028” require researching the local everyday experiences of specific groups, such as women, to uncover the contestations and complexities of such transitions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This ethnographic chapters in this dissertation highlight the need to challenge the dominant discourse of seemingly “apolitical” sustainable urban transitions. By conducting ethnographic research, I have illustrated how an example of a sustainable urban transition, “Resilient BoTu 2028”, is planned, initiated, and realized in Bospolder-Tussendijken in Rotterdam and experienced in the everyday lives of women in the neighborhood.

I have uncovered the place-based specificities of sustainable transitions seen globally in urban environments by conducting participant observation, interviews, and desk research. This dissertation used conceptual debates that challenge the “apolitical” discourse of sustainable urban transitions and explores the one-size-fits-all idea of “livability” that state-led transitions look to promote (Swyngedouw 2010; Hagerman 2007; Harvey 1989). To critique the manifestations of sustainable urban transitions, I have used a social and environmental justice framework. By incorporating works from Davenport and Mishtal (2019) and Checker (2011), the social and environmental justice framework has enabled me to interrogate the lived experience of “Resilient BoTu 2028”. I have conceptualized current and historic anthropological debate surrounding the contested notions of citizenship, drawing on works from T.H Marshall (1992) and more recent works from Ong (1996) in terms of cultural interpretations of citizenship. Finally, utilizing Verkaaik’s (2011) concept of the “culturalization of citizenship” in the context of dominant political debates, I have highlighted the conditions of “deservedness” in the context of women and ethnic minorities in the Netherlands.

The “Resilient BoTu 2028” plan promotes specific societal goals and favored interactions, such as improving language skills and employability. Ultimately these goals and favored interactions are formulated by the state under a neoliberal constructions of citizenship. As illustrated in this dissertation, the Give-Away Store facilitated residents to gain these skills and perform these interactions with the state. Simultaneously, under Third Way regimes, welfare dependency has become more punitive, requiring claimants to fulfill specific requirements. Again, the punitive nature of welfare regimes discourages citizens from performing non-productive forms of labor, such as caregiving, and instead promotes employment. As primary caregivers, this leads women to constantly negotiate their “deservedness” as they cannot fulfill specific requirements and interactions with the state. In academic literature, it is acknowledged that women are disproportionately affected by their restricted access to resources, limited social mobility, and income poverty (Massey 2013;

Hall 2016). Under the “breadwinner” welfare approach utilized in the Netherlands, welfare support assumes households are homogenized units. However, evidence has shown that the house remains one of the most gendered spheres of society (Petrova and Simmock 2017, 850). Ultimately, my findings have shown how neoliberal constructions of a limited, punitive, and “breadwinner” approach to the welfare state, coupled with its emphasis on neoliberal construction of citizenship, reinforce and expose gendered inequalities.

As noted at the beginning of this dissertation, my initial research focus was the environmental transition taking place in Bospolder-Tussendijken. However, as I realized, the social and environmental aspects of “Resilient BoTu 2028” are intrinsically linked. Women were again negotiating their position as “domestic leaders” within the household and the community. Although their role was empowering and positive for environmental justice conditions in many ways, it nevertheless reinforces gender inequalities, for example, the position of women in caretaking and domestic roles. Overall, I have illustrated the paradoxes and complex negotiations of power that women take on in everyday life.

My first initial research goal was to ethnographically explore the local and place-based specificities of sustainable urban transitions in the context of Bospolder-Tussendijken in the Netherlands. As suggested by McDonough et al. (2011), sustainable urban transitions can create possibilities for self-determination. However, what I have attempted to uncover is gender and engendered vulnerabilities are conditions to self-determination. In the context of Bospolder-Tussendijken, women are constantly negotiating their ability of self-determination because of conditions of poverty, precariousness, and limited language ability. The way “Resilient BoTu 2028” is planned, initiated, and realized ultimately overlooks these conditions, reinforcing engendered vulnerabilities. Secondly, my research goal was to explore how “Resilient BoTu 2028” is lived and experienced in the everyday lives of women in Bospolder-Tussendijken. As suggested by Anguelovski et al. (2019), neighborhoods with larger social problems “tend to clash with dominant visions, discourses, and practices of municipal greening and resilience” (26142). In the case of Bospolder-Tussendijken, women I interacted with were constantly negotiating conditions of poverty and precariousness, which made them unable to access the resources and public geometries of power that would enable “elitist visions of sustainability” (Hagerman 2007, 287).

My research opens a path for further research and academic contributions that look specifically at the role of women and ethnicity in such communities, especially regarding the debate about citizenship and the gendered levels of “deservedness” amongst ethnic minorities. Additionally, academics should explore further research to integrate ethnic

minorities and women into the policy and planning process to enforce “citizen science and vernacular knowledge” (Anguelovski et al. 2019, 26142). Although this dissertation touched upon the empowering nature of the Language Company and its role in the energy transition, academics can explore more research to uncover the extent to which their roles reinforce gendered vulnerabilities. Planning and policymakers have attempted to incorporate a more community-based initiative through “Reilisent BoTu 2028” by funding organizations such as the Give-Away store and The Language Company. However, attempts from planning and policymakers do not go far enough in understanding the more important societal conditions of neoliberalism in the Netherlands. To guarantee success to transitions such as “Resilient BoTu 2028” in the form of increasing social mobility and improving the socio-economic conditions of residents, anthropologists should conduct more research and attempts to adjust welfare policy to avoid further engendered vulnerabilities.

Chapter 8: Bibliography

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