

***“In Rotterdam you do not need to starve, you
just need to know where to go”***

Insurgent enactments of citizenship among Dutch
alternative food aid initiatives.

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“IN ROTTERDAM YOU DO NOT NEED TO STARVE, YOU JUST NEED TO KNOW WHERE TO GO”
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INITIATIVES.

ABSTRACT

This study explores how grassroots food aid initiatives in Rotterdam, Gaarkeuken Rotterdam and Hotspot Hutspot, enact insurgent forms of citizenship through the provision of free and affordable food and meals. By organising aid beyond institutional norms, they are able to provide support to over a thousand households weekly. Amidst overlapping crises (covid-19, inflation, rising energy bills, housing shortages) such aid has become more and more necessary amongst austerity driven welfare cuts and the exclusionary practices of institutionalised food banks. Drawing on the concept of insurgent citizenship by Holston (2008), this study is embedded in ethnographic fieldwork using participant observation through volunteering and semi-structured interviews to analyse how insurgent citizenship is enacted by alternative food aid initiatives. Key findings include their flexibility and creativity to work beyond institutionalised norms and conditionalities. By navigating the logistical distribution of our food and revaluing voluntary labour as a tool for solidarity and care they build resistance against the neo-liberal governmentality. This research contributes to discussions on citizenship, poverty and food justice demonstrating how resistance can be enacted through non-confrontational acts of care to reimagine a more just society.

KEYWORDS:

Insurgent citizenship, Food aid, Neo-liberal Governmentality, Volunteer work

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Introduction

Every week, grassroots foundations Gaarkeuken Rotterdam and Hotspot Hutspot, provide affordable and free healthy food and meals to over a thousand households in the city of Rotterdam. These alternative food aid initiatives rely on dedicated volunteers to support anyone facing food insecurity in the city. Their work is both crucial for the survival of these people and demonstrates a large failure of the neo-liberal welfare state in the Netherlands.

Recent overlapping crises; Covid-19, inflation, rising energy-bills and housing shortages, have intensified a structural crisis of poverty that pushes more and more people to the edge of survival. Simultaneously, welfare systems have been weakened by austerity measures while food banks have been normalised as substitutes for state support. Multiple studies have proven that, rather than alleviating poverty, institutionalised food banks reinforce the scarcity logic produced by austerity and use this to justify conditional access to aid and stigmatising practices that frame recipients as undeserving (May et al., 2020; Milbourne, 2024). In the Netherlands, this means people are excluded on the basis of an income limit, municipal registration and legal status. This concerns over a million people who are either homeless, undocumented, living in non-registered housing or actually make too much money than the set 'poverty line' while they still experience severe food insecurities (Milbourne, 2024; Vetter, 2024).

In responding to the urgent needs of these people, the Gaarkeuken Rotterdam and Hotspot Hutspot, as alternative food aid initiatives, are able to assert their right to nutritious food. Their emergence, necessity and continued existence serve as evidence for the failures of welfare programs under neo-liberal policies and culminate a moment of grassroots mobilisation where they felt the need to step up and organise their own food aid. Hence, it entails a form of resistance to a failing welfare system and thereby transforms food aid from mere charity to a political act of citizenship.

This process describes the core of insurgent citizenship enactment as described by Holston (2008). Building on this concept and the enactment of citizenship by Isin and Nielsen (2008), this study examines the way in which insurgent citizenship is enacted among the work of Gaarkeuken Rotterdam and Hotspot Hutspot. This includes an exploration of the research by May et al. (2020) and Milbourne (2024) that describe the role of austerity logic and scarcity thinking and the practice of exclusion within institutionalised food aid. Additionally, this study draws on the work of Miraftab (2009) and Brownlow (2011) to explore the contextual trade-offs and implementation of insurgent citizenship through re-valuing volunteer work as a counterforce to neo-liberal governance.

This research redescribes food aid as a field of political struggle by analysing the insurgent practices of Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot. Through a four-week ethnographic study, combining participant observation, through volunteering, and semi-structured interviews, I explored how these grassroots foundations organize food aid beyond the formal welfare state. Thus, answering the research question: *How do alternative food aid initiatives enact insurgent forms of citizenship?*

Through several weeks of cooking, preparing plates, handing out fresh products, stacking the groceries bus and cleaning kitchens, I found the key decisions and processes that go on behind the scenes to organise food aid alternatively. The findings indicate crucial moments of decision-making that entail refusals of institutionalised norms in food aid. These rejections of norms are necessary to provide healthy food beyond the limitations of neo-liberal ideals, municipal bureaucracy and conditionality of aid. They manage to do so by finding escapes in the existing systems and logistical distribution of food. Showcasing the possibilities that exist in looking beyond the build-in austerity of our food production system. Through the decisions that they make, they showcase new possibilities to organise food aid and simultaneously provide people with a socially supportive network of care. In this process of enactment, these organizations provide the space for people claim their rights to nutritious food and simultaneously build new ways of belonging together in the city.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the literature on citizenship, poverty, and food justice by demonstrating how grassroots initiatives reconfigure aid as a political act. It reveals that insurgent citizenship is not only enacted through protest or legal reform but also through non-confrontational acts of resistance and care. In a city where poverty continues to grow and exclusion is institutionalized, the Gaarkeuken Rotterdam and Hotspot Hutspot represent not only a lifeline for many, but also a vision of a more just and inclusive urban society.

Theoretical Framework

This study explores the ways in which alternative food aid initiatives offer resistance to the state and its neo-liberal governmentality by providing aid beyond institutionalised norms. These initiatives provide aid for survival and the fulfillment of basic needs, hence, they raise fundamental questions about citizenship and the responsibilities of a state to provide for its citizens. Yet, when the responsibility for welfare is shifted to market rationals and framed as an individual's problem, this traditional understanding of citizenship is contested. Hence, an exploration of resistance to the neo-liberal governmentality can be found in the concept of insurgent citizenship enactment by Holston (2008). This theoretical lens enables an analysis of resistance against both the legal exclusion of individuals and the neo-liberal governmentality through which institutions neglects those who hold formal citizenship. This dual form of exclusion characterises the systemic failures to which the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot act in response to.

A Matter of Citizenship

Citizenship is not just a stable legal categorisation of people, it is rather a social act that emerges through effort, performances and defines a relation between a state and its subjects (Isin, 2008; Olivius, 2019; Anand, 2015). Anand (2015) describes this as “a flexible and contingent form of political subjectification that emerges through performances between the state and its subjects” (p.8). Here, citizenship is understood as a process of enactment, rather than a passive status. This challenges traditional conceptions of citizenship as a fixed social contract that passively guarantees rights and basic needs (Holston, 2008). As Isin and Nielsen (2008) argue instead, citizenship requires active enactment of claims to rights.

Focusing on this enactment allows us to analyse citizenship through acts rather than abstract ideals or principles (Lozano-Cabedo and Gómez-Benito, 2016). Isin (2008) proposes that such acts are more than routinized actions or activities, they are “more deliberate and accomplish something politically and socially meaningful” (p. 38). Hence, citizenship contains acts through which “subjects constitute themselves as citizens” (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 16). This makes it possible to look at citizenship beyond the legal framework and as a process of mediation between lived experiences and formal rights, where it is expanded and given value within a certain context by the actors that actualize it (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Olivius, 2019).

This agency of actors constituting citizenship is especially relevant when discussing the right to food as it concerns systemic inequalities among matters of survival. When dealing with food insecurity and hunger, you do not passively wait, you act. As Holston (2008) indicates, claims to rights amidst such inequalities happen outside of the traditional legal infrastructure and institutions of the state. He translates this to the concept of insurgent citizenship, in which he captures the collective action of marginalised or excluded people to challenge established infrastructures and systems of inequality, exclusion and injustice (Holston, 2008). While his research is situated in the favelas of Brazilian cities, it has been used by many scholars to capture this enactment of citizenship that embodies resistance through their claims to human rights (Brownlow, 2011; Butcher & Frediani, 2014; Cahen et al., 2019; Olivius, 2019). Holston specifically uses insurgent citizenship to re-describe the residents of favelas as active actors who create and make space to live dignified lives in the borders of the cities (Holston, 2008; Olivius, 2019). This active enactment establishes that once people are excluded from formal structures, they will enact citizenship through their own forms of care, solidarity and systems of governing. Hence, in insurgent forms, this process of citizenship enactment does not assume institutional inclusion, rather it occurs precisely because of institutional exclusion.

Additionally, Olivius (2019) indicates that insurgent enactments of citizenship thereby do not require to specifically reference the state or legal citizenship. While the state remains the central site of power, its influence is exercised through policies and institutions that likewise produce exclusion. As a result, insurgent enactments of citizenship can entail an assertion of rights through indirect and less confrontational forms than direct resistance to authorities (Butcher & Frediani, 2014; Olivius, 2019). This is why insurgent acts of citizenship allow for a broader understanding of claimed rights in a process of enactment as a form of resistance, without specifically targeting the state (Holston, 2008). That makes it an especially relevant theoretical lens for the analysis of alternative forms of food aid which respond to food insecurities.

Insurgent Citizenship under Neo-liberal Governmentality

Food insecurity does not exist in a vacuum, there is a clear political context and governmentality in which access to healthy nutritious food and food aid is limited. May et al. (2019) demonstrate how this occurs during and by periods of austerity which reinforces a moral economy of scarcity. Their research among food banks indicates the process of institutionalisation of food banks, where food banks have been normalised under neo-liberal

governing and come to replace welfare systems. (Caplan, 2017; Hebinck et al. 2018; Milbourne, 2024; Riol & Connelly, 2023). Milbourne (2024) explains this precisely:

The proliferation of food banks over recent years in the UK has acted both to normalise and to depoliticise food poverty. Hunger has come to be constructed as a problem whose solution lies in the technical realm - the efficient distribution of sufficient amounts of donated food to sustain the operations of food banks - rather than in terms of citizens' rights to affordable and nutritious food (p. 2).

While Milbourne's research focuses on the UK, a similar analysis has been made to the Dutch system of food banks by Hebinck et al. (2018). The cuts to public spending on welfare have been justified under a discourse of austerity, which May et al (2019) underline, reaches the most consequences among the poorer households, as they note that: "the cumulative effects of austerity have pushed more and more households into poverty" (p. 211).

It represents a neoliberal strategy of governance that not only exacerbates poverty but also dismantles the very systems designed to provide social support. Schinkel and van Houdt elaborate on this governmentality in the Dutch context, by describing neo-liberalism as a 'double helix' in which citizenship becomes conditional: citizens are expected to demonstrate self-reliance, integration and active participation (2010). It reflects a process of *responsibilisation*: "of making individuals, private sector and community responsible for public tasks", which shifts citizenship to a moral performance and individual obligation (Schinkel & van Houdt, 2011, p. 699).

When someone cannot fulfil such obligation, they have to rely on food banks, institutionalised food banks which characterise and implement neo-liberal ideals. As May et al. (2019) demonstrate that food banks act as an "articulation of an alternative moral economy that sits outside of, or at least alongside mainstream market mechanisms" (p. 217). They discuss how austerity produces and reinforces scarcity as a moral judgement within food banks, framing food aid receivers as undeserving: workshy, poor at budgeting and wasteful. This narrows down 'deservingness' of aid to cases of extreme hunger and at same time justifies rationing and access criteria among food banks (May et al., 2019). This 'scarcity thinking' has become rooted in the practice of food banks to make it seem 'fair' and 'natural' that the access to aid is reserved only for the most visibly in need (May et al., 2019).

This is reflected among the Dutch national organisation of food banks which excludes access to their aid on the basis of income criteria, municipal registration and the status of legal citizenship (Milbourne, 2024; Vetter, 2024). Based on known numbers, this exclusion

concerns at least 1 million individuals who experience food insecurity and thereby depend on alternative forms of food aid (Vetter, 2024). This regards both refugees, non-documented or homeless people, as well as residents that earn just above the income criteria, the set poverty line (Vetter, 2024). This diverse groups includes people who cannot manage to make ends meet under the rising inflation over the past two decades and also people who through their legal status or documentation are not allowed to work and earn their own income. These limits on access to aid contribute to existing shame and stigma around not being able to provide for oneself (Bernaschi & Leonardi, 2022; Caplan, 2017). Such stigmas and notions of deservingness do not only create a significant entry barrier to those seeking food aid, but it also normalises exclusion and the rationing of aid, as May et al. conclude, this does real structural harm (2019). Hence, they frame scarcity as a question of social (in)justice rather than the logistical re-distribution of food. This re-framing is also necessary to address the depoliticization of food aid and hunger as Milbourne indicates (2024).

It concerns a neoliberal ‘moment’ as Miraftab (2009) describes, in which state control is extended by depoliticising communities’ struggles and institutionalising state partnerships with NGO’s and grassroots organisations. While such institutionalisation should promote access and civil participation, Miraftab points out that it does not lead to substantive inclusion. She further notes that “as people’s political rights expand, their access to livelihood recourses may simultaneously erode” (2009, p. 40). Hence, she concludes that tangible citizenship does not arrive through state’s legislative institutions but rather motivates contemporary insurgent citizenship (2009). This exemplifies the ways in which the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot originated and organised their activities to support people who through neo-liberal governing are unable to make ends meet or are not given access to food aid. In responding to the needs of people excluded by this system, these alternative initiatives acknowledge their rights to nutritious food and enact insurgent forms of citizenship.

Invented and invited spaces

The practical context in which this enactment takes place deals with a social and historical situatedness of the power relations that a practice is embedded in (Cahen et al., 2019).

Miraftab argues that such power relations are usually one sided, but insurgent movements do co-produce the landscape among which citizenship is enacted (2009). This means that insurgent actors do not limit their movement to the spaces which are sanctioned for citizen participation by the authorities. They invent new spaces as they actualize their claim to rights

and thereby invent or re-purpose old ones. Miraftab calls these spaces ‘invited’ and ‘invented’, to refer to the domains in which citizenship enactment takes place, and notes that these spaces are not static: “through the entanglement of inclusion and resistance they move across the invited and invented spaces of citizenship” (p. 35).

Cahen et al. build on these concepts by demonstrating that they are not only not static, but also mutually constituted and interactive (2019). Hence, invited spaces might also have to be envisioned first by grassroots pressure to solidify victories through collaboration with the state and its institutions (Cahen et al., 2019). These situations have also been explored by Butcher and Frediani (2014), who describe the common trade-offs that insurgent movements deal with. Often this concerns a choice between continuing confrontational activism or moving towards a negotiations-based relation with state actors or governing bodies. This captures the decision-making process which Isin and Nielsen describe when they discuss the matter of intentionality of acts of citizenship: “acts happen because of a decision to perform the act. The decision can be intentional or non-intentional, but an act will always involve a decision” (p. 23). As acts can be differentiated between choices that are worth resisting and acts that worth cultivating (2008). Hence, the movement between invited and invented spaces concerns a decision between confrontational acts or negotiations-based enactment.

While this intentionality is not always controlled, Cahen et al. do explain that to them a negotiations-based relation is usually not preferred, as they note that this often leads to a loss of radicalism (2019). Yet, they do not believe that interaction within formal frameworks limits the future potential of counter-hegemonic interventions (Cahen et al., 2019). Their research assures that such collaborative efforts may sometimes be necessary to achieve a movement’s goals and assure change. In the context on the institutionalization of food banks this seems like a completely irreversible future, though a concrete conclusion will always depend on the exact context to determine whether future interventions are impossible. Hence, the future potential of the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot in response to this institutionalization is relevant to explore.

Such interventions entail enactment in invented spaces. These invented spaces are built on the original concept of Holston, who explains insurgent citizenship enactment as the process of building new forms of citizenship beyond resisting hegemonic systems of power (2008). Similarly, this is important to Miraftab. She explains that insurgent planning of organizations and movements involves seizing advantage of the contradictory nature of neoliberal capitalism and exposes a rift between inclusion and redistribution (2009). This ties into how Isin (2008) describes acts of citizenship, as ruptures to break given norms, practices

or habitus. Such an understanding of insurgent enactment compliments the work of the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot as they turn oversupplies into food aid. This requires an imaginative vision as Miraftab lists: “an idealism for a just society...that offer hope from which to work towards alternatives” (p. 45) . She concludes by saying that this requires a stubborn hold to an ideal of justice. Again, this aligns with Isin’s theorization of a political act of citizenship. To Isin, the matter of resistance and the extent to which this is experienced as political by the actor, does not define the political implications of an act (2008). Rather he emphasizes it lies in the interpretation of an act to determine how the enactment of citizenship orients itself towards justice (Isin, 2008). Hence, the matter of justice concerns the extent to which an act can be analyzed as political and how it’s impact may be measured.

The enactment: Gaarkeuken Rotterdam and Hotspot Hutspot

The work of the Gaarkeuken Rotterdam and Hotspot Hutspot exemplifies this justice-oriented character as they provide food aid in an accessible and affordable way. Both organizations provide food by turning oversupplies from supermarkets and distribution centers into meals for people in need. At the Gaarkeuken, accessibility is reflected in their creative response to people’s needs, by preparing meals rather than food boxes for those unable to cook themselves. They simultaneously provide an environment to have dinner and socialize. Hence, the name means ‘soup kitchen’. This response originates for the Gaarkeuken from their founders who also founded the first Dutch food bank in Rotterdam. After they transferred control of the food bank to the national organization, they shifted their efforts back to one neighborhood and started the Gaarkeuken.

Now, the Gaarkeuken provides meals to over 350 people per week through several kitchens and locations where people can either pick up a meal or sit down to have dinner. The kitchens used to prepare the food are situated in various organizations that they made a deal with. This includes for example care homes whose kitchens were previously inactive due to austerity cuts. By striking up a deal they created mutual benefits: residents of the care homes receive freshly cooked meals and the Gaarkeuken has a place to operate from. Therefore, they cook for both the residents of care homes and their own guests. Such a collaboration signals the creativity to working around the deterioration of welfare systems and find allies that have been affected by the neo-liberal governing.

Their mission is guided by five pillars: poverty, food waste, voluntary labour, loneliness and health. Hence, their work provides a complete provision of care and nutrition as the meals are healthy and volunteers deliver to those who cannot physically pick them up

themselves. This volunteer work has proven crucial to maintaining the foundation and therefore a large part of the work concerns facilitating a comfortable and stimulating environment for the volunteers. This includes all variations of people that are either retired, unable to work due to physical or mental conditions or choose to sacrifice their free time to building a more just society. This contributes to the view of insurgent citizenship enactment that Miraftab (2009) describes. Likewise, Brownlow (2011) demonstrates this potential of voluntary public participation as it can facilitate spaces for alternative political agendas, new hegemonies of participation and responsibility. This ties into the space which the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot provide.

At Hotspot Hutspot they therefore consider their work as helping to bring ‘lives back on track’. By providing a space for volunteers to learn, take on responsibilities and also have access to the food aid, as many of the volunteers likewise deal with situations of food insecurities. Like the Gaarkeuken, Hotspot Hutspot depends on volunteers and is able to organize multiple initiatives because of their volunteers. They prepare meals for a homeless shelter, lunches for schoolchildren living in poverty and operate a mobile groceries bus that provides free groceries to neighborhoods. By using this bus, they can drive to any neighborhood in need and reach more people than food banks. Alongside this they facilitate a platform where people can donate free meals to a restaurant which can be picked up by people experiencing food insecurities. It demonstrates creative and innovative responses to sustain people with aid and allows for flexible adjustments to people’s needs. While these are not all of their projects, they are the main activities that incorporate food aid and target food insecurities.

Together, both organizations illustrate how food aid can be organized alternatively and function as spaces for the enactment of insurgent citizenship. Driven by the needs of people experiencing food insecurities, they operate within and beyond the existing formal spaces of citizenship enactment. Creatively and flexibly re-purposing and reinventing labor and food waste to food aid. Building the inventive spaces that Miraftab (2009) and Holston (2008) illustrate and challenging the exclusions of neo-liberal governance. Hence, the lens of insurgent citizenship offers a powerful analysis to explore the political significance of these organizations. In the following chapters I will elaborate on how this enactment plays out in the provision of alternative food aid. For this I will first describe the methodology and decisions made during the process of data collection.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adapts a qualitative research design to answer the main research question: how do alternative food aid initiatives enact insurgent forms of citizenship? To experience, observe and understand this enactment up close, I conducted field research and employed ethnographic methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Such an ethnographic approach allows for up close observations and accessible conversations during their daily work by taking part in it myself (Creswell, 2007). Hence, my primary method of participant observation included joining both organisations through active volunteering. Drawing on the research of Pijpers (2024), this allowed for an exchange rather than only an extractive process and provided me with access to the multiple locations of both organisations. Likewise, it helped me relate to the volunteers and interact with everyone on a more comfortable and accessible level.

The practices of the Gaarkeuken Rotterdam and Hutspot Hotspot were selected on the basis of a purposive strategy to allow an in-depth exploration of the research question. Both these initiatives offer a diverse range of services and methods in the provision of food aid that differ from institutionalised food banks. It allowed for a full range of insurgent acts of citizenship to be explored while also validating their similarities. Additionally, informed by existing research on the political positioning of food aid receivers, I chose to focus this study on the providers of food aid rather than the receivers themselves. Considering the depoliticization of hunger that contributes to the invisibility of food insecurity as a systematic issue, food aid receivers are not the active actors enacting insurgent citizenship (Riol & Connelly, 2023). This is directly connected to the structural harm that May et al. (2020) describe. Any claim to rights requires basic living conditions, food insecurities and hunger prevent people from assessing their political positioning or engaging in activism (Lozano-Cabedo and Gómez-Benito, 2016). This means that resistance to the dominant hegemonic infrastructure largely comes from those running the food aid initiative, rather than the users themselves (Riol & Connelly, 2023).

The Fieldwork

The fieldwork entailed four weeks of volunteer work across both organisations (see Appendix A). Each week I divided my time between the Gaarkeuken Rotterdam and Hotspot Hutspot, prioritising key moments and activities. Such key moments included speaking with different

groups of volunteers, preparing the mobile groceries bus and spending the day with the employees responsible for picking up the food. It required quick reflection and decision-making on where I could be present when, to capture a full observation of both organisations.

Hence, being informed by a prior literature review was important to make the decision for where to focus my attention. At Hotspot Hutspot we agreed to focus my time on their mobile groceries bus as it provided direct interaction with people experiencing food insecurities. Given the limitations of time, it was necessary to narrow down my focus to one of their initiatives. The first days I spend doing what any other volunteer does: cooking, stocking the mobile groceries bus and handing out the food. Which opened up informal conversations with volunteers.

While their motivations were very valuable to learn, it soon became clear that I needed to gain deeper insights into the organisational perspectives. Therefore, I conducted two semi-structured interviews of around 1,5 to 2 hours: one with a board member at the Gaarkeuken and one with the financial manager at Hotspot Hutspot. These interviews complemented my observations and informal conversations by clarifying their views, political positioning and the main values of their organisation. Finally, to observe the logistics around the oversupplies I joined employees responsible for the collection of the food for two full days at each organisation. This helped me gain access to the supermarkets distribution centres and gain broader insights into the operational context of all initiatives.

To validate my observations, I often spoke with employees about my thoughts and insights and noted down these conversations to capture their core values. These observations and informal conversations were captured in handwritten fieldnotes to avoid appearing distracted on my phone, although quick notes were occasionally made digitally, especially during car rides.

Positionality and Ethics

My position as a researcher and a volunteer among the other volunteers demanded an open and honest communication about my research. Hence, while introducing myself I made it clear to everyone that while volunteering I would also be conducting research. This meant notifying everyone of the fact that I would take notes but likewise, that their anonymity would be assured. I explained that if at any moment someone would want to withdraw information from my notes, they were allowed to do so and that I would not record personal information. While personal information did come up, and it sometimes informed their motivation to volunteer, I did not use any of that information for the analysis and hence this

information is not shared beyond me. Thereby, anonymity was assured. In the following analysis and discussion of data I furthermore assure this anonymity by using alternative names to the actual names of the people I spoke to. Likewise, none of the volunteers are named. To provide security on this, a consent form was signed within both organisations.

Overall, I remained critically reflective on how my presence in the organisations could be experienced as unpleasant to volunteers. In practice, this did not seem necessary as I was welcomed everywhere and immediately taken in to their community. It helped build a comfortable relation because all volunteers and employee were excited to learn and hear about my research. To maintain this welcoming entrance, I made sure to learn everyone's names and remember them as this was proven to be an effective strategy of the managers to provide a welcoming atmosphere. Such strategies helped me adjust my own positioning and continue their practice.

Process of Analysis

The fieldnotes were gathered and transferred digitally from week to week and the data from the interviews was transcribed to analyse using the program, Atlas.ti. As the process of analysis partly took place during the fieldwork itself, I organised many of the fieldnotes based on thematical content early on. This allowed for a division of matters that concerned the collecting and preparation of the food itself and situations of interactions with the receivers of the aid. Additionally, the transcripts of the interviews provided additional context to the decision-making process of the organisation of food aid. Once the data collection was completed, I moved on to an inductive process of thematic analysis through coding the data. Starting with open coding and expanding the themes I had initially organised, I identified recurring situations and patterns of similarities among the organisations. This led to 184 codes that were then adjusted for overlap and edited into 6 main categories: 'Access & Inclusivity', 'Volunteer work', 'Poverty & Receivers of aid', 'Policy & Governing bodies', 'Insurgent enactments' and 'Logistics'.

Based on these categories I explored the data in their relation to the main research question and found a way to address the enactment of insurgent citizenship as a rejection of various systems. Each category then allowed for insights on these systems. This allowed a start on the writing process of the analysis through which different quotes were selected on their potential to highlight forms of resistance or offer contextual content on the decision-making process. In the following chapters I will discuss these decisions and expand on their relation to the literature.

Insurgent citizenship enacted through alternative food aid

After spending the full day on the bus to pick up food with Ed, an older man who continuously makes jokes, I sit in the canteen to gather my thoughts. While on the road, I told him about my astonishment with the amount of food that we saw stored at the foodbank of Rotterdam. Ed told me to ask Ben [the founder] about my questions regarding this, “..I simply pick up the food” he said smilingly. When I run into Ben and ask him, “How come food banks have leftovers? Why don’t they hand out this extra food themselves?”, he smiles and doesn’t need to think long about his answer “because they don’t have the guts to do it in the same way as us.”

This interaction illustrates the moment in which my perplexity with the organisation of institutionalised food aid began to shift towards a deeper understanding for how insurgent enactments of citizenship can be observed among alternative ways of providing food aid. Seeing the vast amount of pallets filled with food stored in boxes or crates, I could not help but wonder how it is possible that there are still people living in hunger and without access to this abundance. Through talking about perplexity, I realised that the decisions involved in designing, organising and managing access to this abundance, are the key differences to distinguishing alternative food aid initiatives from institutionalised ones and identify insurgent enactments of citizenship.

As Ben says, it requires guts to do things differently. So, what are these organisations doing differently and why is this important? Why does this require guts? In the following chapters I will answer these questions and explain how the decision-making process uncovers insurgent enactment of citizenship. Moreover, I will explain how organising food aid differently is often met with friction from governing bodies, resulting in an nuanced conclusion about the nature of resistance that alternative food initiatives embody in their insurgent enactment of citizenship.

Deservingness and access, the people

Miraftab’s (2009) explanations of rifts and Isin’s (2008) focus on decision-making invites a look into the decisions that the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot make in breaking with the given norms in the organisation of food aid. The initial and most impactful decision is their refusal of access criteria. For both, this starts with challenging the neo-liberal ideal of self-

reliance and notions of deservingness. To both organizations it is completely unnecessary to ask people about their address, nationality, citizenship status or proof of income. They accept anyone in need of healthy food and reject the neo-liberal urge to make moral evaluations on who deserves it. Rather, they offer an alternative space in which people in need are simply treated as such, people who need aid. At Hotspot Hutspot, the financial manager Simone emphasizes this by sharing that they broke off a collaboration with a partner because they did not agree on this:

And that is something where we in the beginning, when we worked with [partner organization].. they had a different view on this. That's also part of the reason the collaboration fell apart. They wanted to do a lot more checks and intakes and.. kind of like the foodbank, check whether people needed it.

This is a choice that sets the organization apart from other food aid initiatives and allows us to approach their work as a political act. They are refusing the neo-liberal norm, of evaluating deservingness, that structure most food aid. Viewed through Isin's (2008) theorisation, this allows us to consider this an act of citizenship rather than a routinized activity.

Secondly, there is a conscious intention among both organisations to provide aid to more people than the institutionalised food banks currently provide for. This concerns all people who for whichever reason are unable to buy groceries or prepare a meal. From undocumented, or homeless people, to families who make just above the income limit of the food bank or to people who cannot or do not want to cook. The latter concerns the guests of the Gaarkeuken who might also not be able to afford groceries, but as experience of the founders has shown, will not cook their own meals when the ingredients are provided for.

This group is so big and diverse, and yet remains very invisible. Several volunteers at the Gaarkeuken confirm this while we're having a break and discussing it: "you don't always see it, there's a whole layer of the society that struggles to get by and you can't see or notice them." Another volunteer responds: "Here you see it.. that you're in your bubble, at least for me.. here you're simply confronted with it". By recognising this diverse group and their needs, both organisations are challenging this invisibility. This is captured in the way they deal with the following three factors that lead to such invisibility: the conditionality of food aid (Caplan, 2017), the myth of absolute hunger (May et al., 2020), and internalised shame over personal blame (Bernaschi & Leonadri, 2023). Each of these can be traced back to the neo-liberal ideal of self-reliance, which assumes that through enough effort, everyone can and *should* be able to provide for themselves or their family (May et al., 2020). Firstly, the

income limit at institutionalised food banks, indicates an assumption about the level of income that establishes the point at which you should be able to live without food aid. While in reality, this is not the case for a large group of people. An experience of Simone highlights how this ideal does not only uphold an unfair narrative, but is also considered to work:

Sometimes we get a question from funds or the municipality like “..why is this necessary? Don’t we have a food bank?” and then I’ll reply, “yes, we do, but it’s not accessible for everyone.” (..) We’ve had people [come to us] who went to the food bank but were there for too long and then no longer met the criteria. Look, I see you have certain criteria that you’re acting upon, but that does not mean these people become self-reliant from one day to the next.

The question indicates an unawareness of food insecurity beyond the food banks, and at the same time, the food bank assumes a level of self-reliance that is unrealistic. Likewise, the myth of ‘absolute hunger’ as May et al. (2020) explain, dismisses the nuances of food insecurity and frames anyone beyond ‘extreme hunger’ as not being in ‘real need’. By providing food to these groups, both Hotspot Hutspot and the Gaarkeuken reject these assumptions and refuse the dominant framing of poverty.

Lastly, the neo-liberal ideal of self-reliance, inflicts a lot of internalised shame which can function like a barrier to seeking aid (May et al., 2020; Butcher and Frediani, 2014). At the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot they are very aware of this barrier. To refuse this narrative of shame, both organizations make sure their guests or residents are addressed personally and not treated completely anonymous. When picking up a meal at the Gaarkeuken or when shopping in the mobile groceries bus from Hotspot Hutspot, everyone is asked to write down or check off their name. Simone explains that this was a conscious decision: “.. doing this anonymous would make people completely invisible. We don’t want to give people the feeling that they should be ashamed of shopping here or that this should remain hidden from neighbours.” She adds that this is completely voluntary: “if someone does not want to, it won’t happen. But it is a way to arrive, you know?” Similarly, the Gaarkeuken has specific volunteers who provide this welcome at the entrance.

This characterises their conscious effort to make the interactions with people comfortable and more personal, but moreover, to affirm people’s dignity. Such decisions to refuse these norms and organise food aid differently embody how we can consider their work as more than the provision of food aid. It is a deliberate intention to reach more people.

To embody this rupture throughout their organisations, it's important that employees and volunteers follow this example and do not act on misconceptions. At the Gaarkeuken, this was demonstrated when I heard a volunteer explain that undocumented people cannot pick up a meal, I asked Frits, a board member, about this decision, and he immediately refuted the statement. "That is nonsense, we don't ask for residence documents, I don't understand how a volunteer can say this. I don't need names [for who said this] but that is not true, that is not how we do things." Likewise, Ben, founder of Hotspot Hutspot, continuously teaches his staff by enacting his vision on who deserves their aid: "you can't tell on the outside why someone needs this." His employee, Nabil, shared with me that Ben reminds him of this every now and then:

Sometimes I do wonder if some people [who shop in the bus] don't have the money to buy their groceries, because when you look at their clothing, jewellery.." He looks at me and wonders if I get his point. "...you know? ...but Ben always says "you can't always see everything on the outside"

He doesn't finish his argument, he knows Ben would not agree. And it's in the way that he stops, that I can see he is thinking about Ben's words. Of course, people may have different opinions or ideas within an organization, but this moment showed me how reminding employees and volunteers can be necessary to continue to break norms as an organisation. It requires acting as an organisation and not as an individual. This is what Isin (2008) considers a form of learning citizenship and learning how to cultivate it. To maintain this refusal of self-reliance as an act of citizenship, it is necessary that the whole organization embodies it.

Such a lack of judgment additionally contributes to maintaining an accessible environment. Simone shares that she sees their approach as changing the narrative from a position of shame to a space in which people can help each other: "...maybe that neighbour actually wants to help, and if the neighbour really has a problem with it, then it says more about them." Through this, they emphasize that needing help is not the exception but for certain neighbourhoods is actually the norm.

By addressing this neo-liberal narrative of self-reliance, they're working to create an environment in which people can interact and approach each other more humanely. To Frits, this goes hand in hand with providing healthy meals: "we are not a restaurant where you can get a quick cheap meal, it is important that if you eat here, that you invest in the neighbourhood and the social relations." This emphasizes that they view their work as more than merely providing a form of aid or service, they are building a social environment and

community in which people care for one another. For the Gaarkeuken this is therefore part of the six pillars that define the work they do, as Frits explains further: “our goal is to set up a restaurant in every neighbourhood in the city, where everyone can come to share a meal. Not just the people who cannot afford it.” Such a mission reflects the potential to build new social networks and demonstrates a look to the future in transforming the neighbourhoods that they are active in by taking a step further than institutionalised food banks. At Hotspot Hutspot, this transformation is also happening as people return to the mobile groceries bus for the social connections that they build:

“At first, I came here because I needed the groceries, but later I found myself coming for the chat too, for the social part.” The woman next to her adds, “it’s also important to leave feeling good.” Another woman joins in, “I once went to another neighbourhood, but there was so much hassle around the bus there, I didn’t like it.. Now I bike a bit further, but I get to have a nice conversation. It’s a bit of a ride, but it’s worth it.”

These comments underline the impact of facilitating a social environment alongside the food, and that the organizations take on a responsibility for this. This embodies the transformative character of inventive space that Holston (2008), Cahen et al. (2019) and Miraftlab (2009) describe when they explain the nature of insurgent citizenship enactments. It is the ability to see a different society and building it that enacts this insurgent character. Hence, the refusal of access criteria and conditionality, allows these organizations to reach the people that have become invisible through notions of self-reliance. Such an act of insurgent citizenship redefines who needs aid and refuses the neo-liberal ideals that have come to institutionalise and structure access to traditional food aid. Simultaneously, they use this opportunity to design food aid differently, in which their work is not just a service to provide food but builds a social environment. For people to notice and take care of each other. Through rejecting self-reliance, new space is created to reimagine food aid on the basis of need, trust and reciprocity rather than control, surveillance and moral judgements.

Austerity and abundance, the food

“Don’t you need to check?” Ben imitates the questions he often receives from within the municipality. He replies, “check what?” and continues, “if the food is divided equally? It’s already not. There’s nothing wrong with someone who comes to pick up

food twice. We have plenty. Actually, .., we have too much. There is simply too much food.

He ends by laughing away the absurdity of the question, to him, this is no question. He knows there is enough food and there is no need to act as if we're dealing with scarcity. Still, they receive these questions and regularly encounter the lived experience of scarcity among people waiting for mobile groceries bus. People assume that if they go last, there will be nothing left, even when Sara, the manager of the bus, has assured them many times: "there is enough". Scarcity thinking based in an austerity logic continues to shape people's thinking and behaviour (May et al., 2020). These moments invite a look into their perspective on scarcity and introduce their enactment of insurgent citizenship through the rejection of it.

The rupture that the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot create among the norms in food aid reaches further than challenging the conditionality of aid; it also reimagines the logistical distribution of food itself. Their ability to move beyond notions of deservingness is enabled through their rejection of the scarcity that have shaped the logistics and distribution of food and food aid. As May et al. (2020) explain, this notion of scarcity, shaped by the logic of austerity, has been internalised by food banks. To the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot, this logic is both flawed and unnecessary. Their resistance to it is characterised by avoiding this logic, through which they have found access to an abundance of food. They do this by identifying and exploiting gaps in the logistical distribution of food, by reframing 'food waste' as valuable and by providing food and meals year-round regardless of seasonal changes.

Firstly, to gain access to this abundance, both the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot have built a broad network of suppliers, distribution centres, supermarkets and local producers where they pick up food that is either leftover, close to its expiration date or has no use to the shops. This means that daily, the Gaarkeuken is not only able to make enough meals, they regularly hand out more than one meal per person because they simply had a large amount of ingredients to work with. At Hotspot Hutspot's own distribution centre this is also materialized in the shelving units that are packed with vegetables, potatoes, dairy, bread and so on. Many of these are fresh products, like vegetables and fruits, but they also regularly have pallets of canned meals, packages of soup or noodles stacked up. Currently, this includes a large batch of long-lasting oat milk. It made me laugh to see the piles of barista oat milk stocked up, what to do with so much barista oat milk? As they taught me, you hand it out as long as you can. They are able to bring in enough weekly to sustain their various

projects. As Simone explained to me, they have so far come up with a new project when the opportunity presented itself. In this case, the oversupplies presented themselves.

This did not happen instantly of course, it required hard work to set up relations with these suppliers and demanded knowledge on the gaps, weak spots and inefficiencies of the distribution of food. As Simone explains, they play into the decisions that a supermarket makes:

At a certain moment a business, a commercial business, has to make a decision: do I let an employee put this on the shelves? That employee costs money.. and that refrigerated storage costs money.. Or do I throw it away? These are business decisions.

Such decisions usually revolve around an expiration date. If a product is too close to its date and they have large amounts of it stored, it will cost them too much to put the whole batch on the shelves with no guarantee that it will sell. Hence, to many supermarkets, the food is not valued to make enough of a profit and therefore labelled as waste. By being aware of these decisions, Hotspot Hutspot can relieve businesses of this ‘burden’ and take over the costs, labour and logistics of the transport and sorting of the food. Simone continues, “we come by and pick it all up, we don’t ask questions, we take everything, and we’ll figure out ourselves what to do with it.” This understanding of the cost-benefits analysis that businesses make, enables them to get access to these oversupplies. Similarly, the Gaarkeuken picks up food from organisations like Hutspot Hotspot, where they can buy oversupplies for a much smaller price. By recognising the potential of these products, they reframe what is deemed ‘waste’ into a meal for someone else. They reimagine oversupplies into nourishment, dignity and a means for survival. This challenges the dominant narratives of scarcity and disposability which underlines their enactment of insurgent citizenship.

Such a transformation is possible due to their quick distribution process. The Gaarkeuken is able to turn products that come in, into a meal, within the same day. At Hotspot Hutspot, Ben explains that this is the reason that they are able to distribute so many more products than the food banks: “we don’t have to assure the quality of a product up to a certain date, within a day we can sort the products and hand them out.” This requires a lot of flexibility and creativity. Coordinator Bas and head chef Ivo at the Gaarkeuken show me that this creativity makes up half of the work:

Two carts filled with boxes of asparagus are brought in, Bas looks uncertain at Ivo, “what can we do with these?” Ivo’s face turns into a big smile, “the white gold”, his eyes light up. “So so much” he starts talking fast, “we can make soup as a starter or go the classic route and prepare them with potatoes and maybe find some meat or fish” He continues with about 3 other recipes that he knows from the top of his head. Bas looks relieved, another two days are taken care of.

Ivo is a trained chef who skilfully navigates different cuisines, ranging from a classic Dutch ‘hutsot’ to traditional recipes from his family and home country, Cabo Verde. His enthusiasm lifts everyone’s energy in the kitchen. This creativity enables them to make use of many more products and make decisions on the ingredients on the spot. This is necessary to reframe the food from waste to valuable and maximize the potential of its abundance.

While much of this reframing relies on reacting quickly to the availability of fresh products that fail to survive the distribution timeline due to their shorter shelf life, it is a misconception that the food industry’s ‘waste’ solely consists of such items. Rather, there are many instances in which they receive products of perfectly good quality. As Ed explains:

If two crates fall off a pallet, the entire pallet is rejected and must go. So, sometimes we end up receiving a whole pallet of a single product, like oranges for example. That is not my preference, but my colleague doesn’t dare to refuse. Like the other day.. we had six pallets of green beans, but we could only use half of it.

It showcases just how much surplus of quality products they receive, but also how much they cannot process themselves. “You’re not going to put a green bean in a kid’s lunchbox”, he jokes. Similarly, they occasionally receive a phone call from Picknick, a delivery service which distributes groceries from their distribution centre directly to people’s homes. Ed describes that their distribution centre is managed by computers, or as he says ‘robots’. When a product, in batches of crates, gets registered twice by accident, the robots are unable to process the batch. In these moments, they call him to pick it up, instead of adjusting the program or having an employee fix it. Ed explains that this can lead up to large amounts: “recently we had 300 crates like that, good quality stuff, that would have otherwise been brought to people’s homes.” He adds enthusiastically, “..even alcohol!” Such instances demonstrate that this ‘waste’ is a logistical problem, not a matter of poor quality or food safety. It is solely a cost-benefits analysis, and such logistical problems lead to an abundance of food that is available.

Maintaining access to this abundance requires managing the relations with suppliers. At the Gaarkeuken, this means keeping a good eye on which products become available and planning out their menus. Reserving the products on time means more security of meals. At Hotspot Hutspot, Ed shows me how he has built a strong relationship their suppliers: “we are guests here so we have to behave as such.” This means obeying their rules, and as he points out specifically: driving by the speed limit on their premises. Likewise, he has built relations at the distribution centre of the food bank in Rotterdam where he comes multiple times per week. Here, he jokes with the ladies at the counter and starts up a conversation with the men in charge. He has a specific routine: “we need enough time at the food bank because I always walk around and have a look first.” After making his rounds, he asks “what can I take today?”, since they know him well enough, they usually respond with: “I believe you know full well what you want to take,” as they both laugh loudly. These jokes are important for their relation. They continuously joke about how Ed is taking too much, yet indeed, he manages to take more than they initially set aside. By walking around the refrigerated unit, he explores the pallets which are not yet given a destination. Looking at the space in his bus, he asks for permission to take some of the extra products. Usually, they give permission. In this way, he walks out with a lot more and more diverse items. But he emphasises, “always ask, you cannot just grab something, they need to give permission and that is how we stay friends.” He knows exactly how to bend the limits of his visit. With every visit, he also picks up small boxes of unrefrigerated products like cookies or chips, “for the lunchboxes” he winks. “Just two boxes every day means around 8 to 10 per week, that’s enough to give the kids something extra.” It’s a creative strategy that allows him to build a relation and expand his access. His emphasis on maintaining the relation is compelling, never sabotage the purpose with bad manners, “we are guests”. Guests with an alternative goal, to make use of the enormous abundance of food that the food bank limits access to.

These insights bring me back to my perplexity I expressed earlier: the towering stacks of food available at the food bank, and the fact that access to this is restricted continues to baffle me. It underlines the contradictions that are inherent to institutionalised food aid, how abundance and waste can coexist alongside scarcity and poverty. A logic of scarcity shaped and reinforced by years of government austerity. Which, Hotspot Hutspot and the Gaarkeuken, demonstrate, is unnecessary. They navigate this logic, see past it and reject it. By building the right relationships and infrastructures to access and redistribute it, they demonstrate that the failures of our food system are not inevitable. They are challenging the

scarcity logic and meaningfully reimagining it, by demonstrating that there is no need to determine who ‘deserves’ access when there is enough.

The politics and trade-offs

In the previous chapters, it has become clear that insurgent citizenship is enacted by the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot through indirect and non-confrontational forms, specifically by disrupting institutionalised norms among food aid practices. Yet, as Holston (2008), Miraftab (2009) and Cahen et al. (2019) argue, insurgent citizenship enactment is always situated within and shaped by a specific political context. Therefore, it remains necessary to explore how these alternative food aid initiatives position themselves towards governing bodies and the broader political and policy frameworks that contribute to the conditions of food insecurity. Hence, it's important to explore the tension in which resistance is enacted by the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot within the politics of food aid.

This is a nuanced relation because both the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot are reluctant to present their work as political or a form of activism, at least not directly. Rather, they prefer to emphasize their efforts as a necessary and practical response to needs of people. For Frits this specifically means that he does not want the Gaarkeuken to be involved in politics: “We stay away from politics, we avoid it. We shouldn’t want that either. Everyone is welcome here, the moment I’m associated with a political party, I’m already in the wrong.” This aversion to politics is also applied to the kitchen by their coordinator, Bas: “I try to avoid bringing up politics while cooking, there’s no use in emphasising disagreements. What matters is working together, and politics does not contribute to that.” This aligns with their objective to provide a welcoming atmosphere and prioritise hospitality over ideological positioning.

Yet, this apolitical stance is not without contradictions. While they reject the idea that the Gaarkeuken has a formal political identity, they do acknowledge that their work has political implications. During another conversation, while driving from one kitchen to the next, Bas also expressed that he considers the Gaarkeuken to be a place where “people who disagree with how society is organised can actively contribute, by making a collective effort to commit oneself to others.” Such a perspective ties into Brownlow’s (2011) understanding of insurgent movements and performances of communities that operate on a voluntary basis. By providing people with the environment and tools to work towards an alternative future, the Gaarkeuken is enabling people to disrupt spaces of institutionalised aid without requiring them to confront the state. It shows that they are aware of this political role for the

Gaarkeuken. This is further confirmed by Frits when he refers to the Gaarkeuken as being part of a movement that offers opposition to the neo-liberal and bureaucratic governmentality that shape social welfare. He describes this in the following way:

The harder the government continues.. , especially this government, continues to harden in being inhumane and continues to uphold those business models, ..the more an undercurrent is developing in society. Which the Gaarkeuken is a part of, and you can notice this undercurrent growing. People who say, “I don’t need the government, none of it.”

The ‘undercurrent’ he refers to is a concept coined by scholar Jan Rotmans, who defines it as people that work locally towards “a world that is more fair, green and humane” (De Onderstroom, 2025). Frits continues by explaining that this perspective should not be perceived as a conspiracy theory but rather as telling the government: “oh well, do as you please and we are going to do it ourselves”. Frits is able to place the Gaarkeuken in such a political position through Rotmans’ concept. Moreover, the emphasis on ‘doing it themselves’ and taking matters into their own hands signals an insurgent character. This contradiction between avoiding politics but enacting a political position is what Isin (2008) addresses through the intentionality of decisions. Acts of citizenship can be performed without explicit political intentions and still be interpreted as political because they are oriented towards justice. Hence, whether intentional or unintentional, their actions have political consequences.

At Hotspot Hutspot, such consequences have likewise led to their avoidance of politics. As Ben explains that he initially took on a more activist stance but discovered that it closed more doors than it opened:

We’re essentially carrying out the municipality’s task, without it costing them anything. But in the meantime, I’ve also learned that getting angry makes you more powerless. So, we just do it ourselves. If they want to join in, join in. If not, we just keep going. That way, we’re not dependent on the municipality.

They would rather show governing bodies how to do things differently than adopt an activist role. “We won’t be writing political pamphlets”, Simone explained, “..if we believe things should be done differently, we’ll just do it ourselves.” She emphasizes that it’s a form of pragmatism that characterises their practice, learning by doing and demonstrating difference through acting. “We see a gap, we jump in it. Rather than.. observing or..” thoughtfully she

finds her words, “..contemplatively looking at our practice.” Such a change in perspective and positioning signals the movement between inventive and invited spaces that Miraftab (2009) and Cahen et al. (2019) discuss. Likewise, it identifies a loss of radicalism as they move closer to formalised institutional frameworks. As Cahen et al. (2019) make clear, the ability to manoeuvre such spaces is the key to achieving victories. For the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot this requires enough independency from such governing bodies to sustain themselves when they do not agree with a municipal demand. Which is also something they encountered in the past, as Simone refers to a time when they depended on municipal subsidies:

In the past, we did have to show, for example, how many people came to the neighbourhood restaurant, and whether those people were actually from Rotterdam and also from the neighbourhood. I don’t really like asking people for their address when they come to eat somewhere. And from a GDPR [General Data Protection Regulation] perspective, you can also question that. So, at a certain point.. well, GDPR has actually helped us out in that regard.

Now, they have been able to minimize this influence by operating more financially independent. To Ben, this is crucial: “it gives us more freedom to do what we believe matters, not hiding behind systems and rules.” This characterises their insurgent enactment, rejecting the systems and rules that institutions bring and rather find alternatives beyond governing bodies. Frits likewise strives for independence from the municipality as he rejects the bureaucracy that working with them entails:

“Soon I’ll have to start reporting how many bell peppers we’ve processed. (..) I’m telling you now, the system will do everything it can to survive. And that all costs [us] time. So, we just don’t do it.” His frustration becomes more visible as he continues: “..soon I won’t be allowed to let in undocumented people anymore. Seriously. Screw that. Just because someone doesn’t have a piece of paper.” He moves his hands towards a piece of paper on the table. “There’s a human being in front of me”.

This frustration towards ‘the system’ entails several different concerns. While he is required to report on the implementation of municipal subsidies, he disagrees with the extent to which these demands could grow in the future. By stating that he would not change their practice to comply with such demands, he enacts a resistance to the risk of co-option and surveillance

that the municipal involvement introduces. While subtle, this is the form in which resistance plays out in their practice. Because Frits explained further that they have no real way of avoiding engagement with the municipality. As it remains the dominant power structure when it comes to funding, networks and legal permissions for social initiatives. As a result, Frits points out that the Gaarkeuken will need municipal support to continue operating and growing within the city:

“If you step outside the system, then you’re done. Ruthless. So.. we give them space to score. If the councillor is in the news.. cutting another ribbon, opening a new Gaarkeuken, they like that. So, that’s how you give them that position. I’m not going to dig my heels in, that’s not how you should see it.” I ask him to explain to me what would happen if he did dig in his heels. He laughs, and then responds quickly, “Noo, yes then I will get a lot of problems, for sure, I have had those problems personally too, when I got everything done outside of the bureaucratic paths.. then you are dismissed as a loose cannon.” But I want to know more, so I ask, “could they also work against the foundation, the Gaarkeuken?” He thinks about his answer, “well, I’ve never thought about that.. But I won’t let it get that far. I’ll certainly remain diplomatic and if they have to cut that ribbon, fine.”

He additionally signals that he does not think a collaboration with the municipality will fix the problems: “but where am I going to make things happen? In the undercurrent. I won’t get anything done there [at the municipality]”. This focus on diplomacy signals the relation they believe they need to maintain to invited spaces. It is a choice to not disrupt the system confrontationally, because they feel their efforts towards helping people survive are more important. A little later, he returns back to my question:

“You asked a good question. What would happen if the municipality.. Really didn’t want us?”, I can see that the question lingered, “I think we would be broken down. As in, “you’re not allowed to work with them anymore” you know. Ben is much more extreme [in this] than I am. Ben has really turned people against him with what he says and how he acts.” I ask further, “Also, within the municipality you mean?” He responds fast: “yes, yes, yes, and yet.. you always,.. see.. that he does..” he hesitates, but then continues confidently “He gets things done, because he works in the undercurrent.”

This is insurgency to Frits, working in the undercurrent where there are no restrictive policies, demands or rules. “In the undercurrent you have no political interference or constraints. Politics only prevents things from happening.” Here you see his aversion to politics, and their response means finding allies to set-up an alternative network. An alternative movement, hence, the undercurrent.

His reference to Ben is also interesting, because he considers Ben to be more extreme, and yet, Ben too stays within a manageable level of diplomacy. Both of them know that if they were more outspoken, more disruptive, the municipality could, and likely would, obstruct their organisation through every channel of influence and power they hold in the city. It demonstrates a negotiation-based form of insurgent citizenship enactment like Butcher and Frediani (2014) describe and simultaneously characterises a resistance to municipal influence. As Ben concluded: “we look at what we can do despite the municipality, not thanks to it.” It shows that they have made a conscious decision over time to navigate the influence of the municipality while rejecting institutionalised norms among food aid. It demonstrates a navigation between negotiating, resisting and building alternative spaces where needs can be provided for and rights to food are asserted. Hence, it entails a nuanced relation to the political infrastructures and systems of power.

As I conclude this analysis of the insurgent enactment of citizenship among alternative food aid initiatives, a nuanced understanding of their political positioning emerges: the Gaarkeuken and Hotspot Hutspot maintain a complicated yet strategic relationship with governing bodies. Despite operating in a depoliticised landscaped, and their reluctance to be identified as political actors, they continue to enact insurgent citizenship through the very way that they organise food aid: outside of the institutional norms, beyond notions of deservingness or conditionality and in response to systemic failure.

Conclusion

These organisations manage to reach more diverse groups of people than institutionalised aid, precisely because they operate outside of the logistics of scarcity, self-reliance and surveillance. When enough food is produced and available, there is no need to determine access criteria. By reframing ‘waste’ as oversupplies, they reimagine food for nourishment and survival. Their resistance is more than a logistical redistribution of food, it is a political act of resistance. These are the guts that I started this analysis with.

Because they do not operate outside of power, being outspoken brings limitations. Such a weaking of their radical positioning has led to a negotiated form of insurgent citizenship enactment, where they need to remain diplomatic. And yet, they continue to open up space for politicised imaginaries and emphasize the space they offer to volunteers to build an alternative future. To bring it back to Isin (2008), the challenge in analysing such efforts is not to overlook their political potential but to value their resistance based on the impact they have for social justice. That is precisely what makes their citizenship enactment insurgent, they resist while navigating and envision while building alternative spaces in which food aid becomes more than aid.

Analysing these initiatives through the lens of insurgent citizenship helps us understand not only how people claim rights outside of formal structures, but also how they build alternative forms of care and responsibility. These initiatives show us that citizenship is not just a legal status or an institutionalised process, it is enacted while cooking, cutting vegetables, stocking potatoes and through social connections build on a shared commitment to a different future. By organising food aid as politics of care rather than scarcity and by focusing on sharing abundance over determining deservingness, they are building more than food aid. They are cultivating a social space where people can connect, share and build a strong resistance to the neo-liberal governmentality that has hollowed out the welfare state.

Both organisations remain ambitious, seeking to grow across the city and reaching everyone in need of their aid. The extent to which they can do this while maintaining independence from the municipality remains a question for the future, but from what I have observed, they will be creative enough to navigate such challenges. Especially while forming meaningful collaborations outside of governing power and while continuing their work for the people that depend it.

Ofcourse, this study has several limitations because the fieldwork was conducted in a limited time framework. Though I fully immersed myself in their practice for those weeks, I

also noticed that more time would allow more analysis to happen alongside the fieldwork and allow for a more expansive reflection on their political positioning. Hence, the current analysis rests a lot more on specific quotes than elaborate observations. Likewise, this means that seasonal shifts could not be explored and the moving between invited or invented spaces could only be discussed rather than observed. Additionally, future research would benefit from expanded fieldwork among more organisations to see the broader network of resistance that both organisations hint at. Nonetheless, the position as volunteer among both organisations allowed for successful implementation of participant observation and gave me broad access to how insurgent citizenship is enacted among alternative organisations of food aid.

To conclude I would like to end with a statement from one volunteer who I believe captures the impact of alternative food aid initiatives well: ‘in Rotterdam, you don’t need to starve, you just need to know where to go’. That is the way to capture the insurgent enactment of citizenship that embodies the way that these organisations are present in the city. If you know where to go, you’re taken care of.

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Appendix A - Fieldwork Overview

Table A. *Overview of dates and activities during fieldwork*

Date	Gaarkeuken Rotterdam	Hotspot Hutspot
15/04	First meeting and conversations	
22/04	Start volunteer work at Zuid	
23/04	Cooking at Noord	First meeting and tour of the organization
24/04	Cooking at Zuid	
25/04	Cooking at Noord	
28/04	Join mobile groceries bus full day: Slinge	
29/04	Interview and observations meal pick- up Noord	
1/05	Full day with coordinator and picking up ingredients	
2/05		Interview and afternoon on groceries bus in neighborhood: Lombardijen
6/05		Full day on the groceries bus: Alexander
7/05		Full day on the groceries bus: Overschie
9/05	Cooking/specific conversations with volunteers Zuid	
12/05	Cooking/specific conversations with volunteers Noord	
13/05	Movie founders Gaarkeuken	
14/05		Full day with driver picking up oversupplies
15/05		Meeting Heat & Eat

Note. Process of data collection by author between 15th of April and 15th of May 2025.

Appendix B - Checklist Ethical And Privacy Aspects

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Insurgent Citizenship among Alternative Food Aid Initiatives

Name, email of student: Eeske Kuipers, 509006tk@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Rogier van Reekum, vanreekum@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: March 24 – June 21

Is the research study conducted within DPAS **YES** ~~NO~~

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. **YES -NO**

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? **YES NO**

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. **YES NO**

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). **YES -NO**

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? ~~YES~~ - **NO**
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? **YES**~~NO~~
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? ~~YES~~ - **NO**
4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? ~~YES~~ - **NO**

Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).
5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? ~~YES~~**NO**
6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? **YES** - ~~NO~~
7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? ~~YES~~ - **NO**
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? ~~YES~~ - **NO**
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? ~~YES~~**NO**
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? ~~YES~~**NO**

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

By observing the practice of the organization, I will also be observing the interactions between the organization and their clients/community. This will only be done from the perspective of the organization to the extent that the interaction is relevant to describe the practice of the organization. But it does mean that people become anonymously part

of the data collection without being aware of this. This consent will then be given by the organisation.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

Within the consent form the organization will indicate their consent over observing their practice and their relationship with their clients/community.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

- Where will you collect or obtain your data?

Among food aid organizations/initiatives in Rotterdam (Zuid-Holland). The Gaarkeuken Rotterdam and Hotspot Hutspot.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

- What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

2 organizations

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

- What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

Not relevant

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

- Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

On my own computer.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

- Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

Me

- How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Not relevant

- In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

Names or other personal data are not relevant to the research so personal data will not be part of the data.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Eeske Kuipers

Name (EUR) supervisor: Rogier van Reekum

Date: 14/03/2025

Date: 19/02/2025