

Coalition Politics, Care Work and Climate Justice

A Case Study of Emerging Alliances in Austria

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“Feminism is an ideological term, that separates women more than it unites them.”

Susanne Raab, Austrian Minister for Women’s Affairs (2020)



“Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening.”

Audre Lorde (2017)



Abstract:

Sustainability transformations will require a fundamental re-thinking of work. However, so far the role of reproductive care work in these transformations is hardly recognized, although this work is low-carbon and essential in sustainable futures. This thesis examines the intersectional coalition politics articulated by feminist activists, climate justice movements and labor unions around the role of care work in environmental politics in Austria. Framed by ecofeminist theory on social reproduction, the analysis shows how these groups lift the relevance of reproductive labor in just sustainability transformations, while articulating it as a strategic frontier in their struggles. Hence, this thesis highlights the necessity of promoting gender-sensitive climate action, to push for a transition not only out of fossil fuels, but out of unequal gender relations, which are perpetuated by the subordination of reproductive to productive labor.

Keywords: social reproduction, work, ecofeminism, climate justice, social movements, coalition-building

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Throughout the process of conceptualizing, planning, researching, writing and re-writing this thesis, I have come to see interdependency as essential, and cooperation as indispensable when engaging in a feminist research project – especially when rising and sitting at the same desk alone day after day, while the world is struck by a pandemic.

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The labour-process (...) is the necessary condition for effecting exchange of matter between man and nature; it is the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence.

(Marx, 1887, p. 130)

1 Introduction

In the face of unprecedented anthropogenic influences on the global life support systems at levels, which now jeopardize human well-being, a fundamental re-thinking of human-nature interactions is needed (Hornborg & Crumley, 2006; Jerneck et al., 2010; Miller, 2013). The challenges related to multiple ecological crises – overuse of natural resources, biodiversity loss, pollution, climate change – are closely associated with society’s consumption and production systems (Akenji et al., 2016; Bengtsson et al., 2018). Consequently, a fundamental transformation of production and consumption, as well as of the present-day energy and material basis towards sustainability will entail profound consequences for work in all social spheres (Hoffmann & Paulsen, 2020).

Yet, the issue of work in sustainability transitions is mostly discussed with regards to the potential of creating ‘green jobs’ in the so-called ‘green economy’ (Renner et al., 2008), or, on the flipside, the ‘jobs-versus-environment’ dilemma, highlighting the risk of job losses in unsustainable, to be abated industry sectors (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2013). Meanwhile, within international labor unions the Just Transition has emerged as a major mobilizing term, geared towards reconciling politics of sustainability with wage labor through creating new, decent jobs by replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy sources (Felli, 2014; Stevis et al., 2018). Overall, the sustainability discourse on work focuses primarily on productive labor, that is, labor within the market economy, while the role of reproduction and care in low-carbon futures receives little attention (Barca, 2020; Salleh, 2009; Wichterich, 2015). Reproductive work refers to “the labor of producing life” (Barca, 2020, p. 29), or the daily and long-term reproduction of the means of production and of labor power, encompassing tasks like giving birth, child and elderly care, education, as well as taking care of the non-human environment (Di Chiro, 2008; Mies, 1986). Hence, this includes activities both within and outside the market economy, carried out primarily, but not exclusively by women (Katz, 2001; UNDP, 2015).

The exclusion of care work in debates around sustainable futures raises several important issues. First, care work is essential not only for the (re-)production and development of human beings, but also for the reproduction of safe and healthy ecosystems (Di Chiro, 2008; Mellor, 2009). Second, care activities are low in carbon emissions, and model a sustainable way of interacting with the non-human

environment already today (Salleh, 2009). Third, targeting debates on sustainable work only towards industrial workers would exclude a large part of the human population, who engage primarily in reproductive activities, from the discussion (Velicu & Barca, 2020; White, 2020). Finally, from a feminist perspective, a redefinition, redistribution and revalorization of care work is essential for achieving gender equality, and a gender-sensitive sustainability transition would thus need to engage with the subordination of reproductive to productive work (Barca, 2020; Wichterich, 2015).

Today, the claim that reproductive work, or care work is relevant in post-carbon transitions has become a central tenet of feminist contributions to the sustainability discourse (Barca, 2020; Goodman & Salleh, 2013; Wichterich, 2015). For example, the U.S. Feminist Green New Deal recognizes that “care work (...) is valuable, low-carbon, community-based work that should be revalued and centered in our new economy” (FemGND, 2018). Similarly, the Green New Deal for Europe proposes the introduction of a care income to value care work towards people and the environment as a crucial part of its Public Works Program (DiEM25, 2019). These claims overlap with demands by the strike waves of teachers, nurses and migrant workers (Battistoni, 2017; Muldoon, 2019), as well as with community mobilizations under the environmental and climate justice (CJ) movement for the reproduction of healthy ecosystems (Di Chiro, 2015).

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

This thesis, then, aims to investigate how care work could become a mobilizing term for social movements and labor to push for a gender-sensitive, fair transformation towards a low-carbon future. To do so, articulations on the role of care work in environmental politics, as well as emerging cross-movement coalitions based on the latter forged by feminist groups, the climate justice movement and labor unions in Austria are examined. Hence, the contribution this thesis aspires to make is twofold: on the one hand, I intend to contribute to a feminist, gender-sensitive understanding of work in sustainability transformations, by examining political mobilizations around care work by different emancipatory movements. In doing so, I aim to challenge “the underlying cultural and social assumptions that inform how we collectively makes sense of and respond to a changing environment” (Lövbrand et al., 2015, p. 212), specifically with regards to the gendered nature of work and its impacts on the non-human environment. On the other hand, findings could advance the debate on coalition-building in and between social movements. This is of theoretical as well as practical relevance, as coalition building is an understudied dimension of social movements (Beamish & Luebbers, 2009), and yet of crucial importance especially for climate activism.

The research questions guiding this investigation are the following:

- 1) How do different emancipatory movements in Austria articulate the link between care work and environmental politics?
- 2) What are strategies and challenges for coalition-building between the climate justice movement, feminist organizers and unions in Austria?
- 3) How do these emerging coalitions contribute to a re-thinking and re-politicizing of work in sustainability transformations?

Thus, this study builds on ecofeminist theory, specifically around social reproduction, as well as on an ecological feminist understanding of coalition building, while being positioned in the broader field of sustainability science.

1.2 Thesis Outline and Clarifications

This thesis is structured as follows. A background section provides some context regarding social movements and labor in Austria. Consequently, the theoretical framework for the investigation is presented, bringing together ecofeminist theory on social reproduction and an ecological feminist understanding of coalitions. Before presenting the analysis and discussion, a method section explains the research design and approach taken to collect and analyze data. Finally, a conclusion sums up findings.

Before continuing, I want to make a short remark on the use of certain concepts and terms. Throughout the text, I use the terms ‘sustainability transition’, ‘sustainability transformation’ and ‘transition to a low-carbon future’ interchangeably. Hence, I take as a normative starting point that the multiple ecological crises outlined above require some sort of transition or transformation towards a different form of human-nature relationships (Lövbrand et al., 2015), and this new mode is most commonly described as ‘sustainable’, although ‘sustainability’ as such is a contested concept (Temper et al., 2018). Yet, this thesis is about care work and coalition-building – in the context of sustainability transitions, but employing ecofeminist theory, rather than the body of theory specifically on sustainability transitions. Further, when I mention ‘environmental politics’, I refer to any political action aiming at tackling climate change and environmental degradation.

2 Background and Literature Review

This section presents the background necessary for understanding the context of environmental politics, social movements and labor unions in Austria. The Austrian case is relevant for investigating cross-movement coalitions around care work and environmental politics for several reasons. Below, I briefly discuss the latter, while situating the conditions of the civil society and social movements in Austria in their historical and political context.

2.1 Social Movements, Environmental Politics and Labor

To start with, it is important to note that both historically and recently, social movements have played a significant role in influencing especially environmental politics, but also politics around women's issues in Austria (Foltin, 2004; Niedermoser, 2017). When it comes to environmental issues, mobilizations around the construction of nuclear and hydropower plants in Zwentendorf and Hainburg had a lasting impact (Soder et al., 2018). On the one hand, in 1969, the Austrian government planned to build a nuclear power station in Zwentendorf, Lower Austria. The power plant had already been constructed, when skepticism and growing protests arose among the civil society, leading to the government holding a plebiscite about the activation of the plant. A tight majority voted for the plant's closure, which led the government to decide against activating the plant and implementing a law that completely banned the production of nuclear energy in Austria, the 'Atomsperrgesetz' (Gottweis, 1997). On the other hand, in 1984 environmental activists protested against the construction of a hydropower plant in Hainburg, south of Vienna, by occupying the building site. In 1996, as a result of the occupations, the construction plans were cancelled, and the location was declared part of the nature conservation area Hainburger Au. Today, the occupation is considered as one of the most significant political events in Austria after 1945, which heavily influenced environmental policy making and led to the formation of the Austrian Green Party 'Die Grünen' (Natter, 1987).

These cases also impacted the relationship between labor unions and said environmental movements. In both cases, Austrian labor unions were in favor of the power plants for economic interests and in coalition with energy producers. In consequence, they came in conflict with environmental movements and acted against them, and these disagreements were considered as traumatic events by trade unions (Niedermoser, 2017). Only recently, these conflict relations are giving way for a slowly emerging alliance between the climate justice movement and trade unions, which could potentially challenge the economic growth paradigm and mobilize for a more transformative environmental politics (Soder et al., 2018).

2.2 Mobilizations Around the 'Crisis of Care'

In Austria, the worsening conditions for care work, described as the 'crisis of care' (*Pflegekrise*) is increasingly lifted into political discussions and becoming a subject for mobilization by unions and social movements. While the Covid-19 pandemic raised the urgency of issues around what has been referred to as 'essential work' (Stevano et al., 2020), already earlier the under-valuation, shortage of skilled staff and lack of training programs in sectors like elderly care, health care, pre-schools and nursery education has been criticized in the Austrian context (Krisch et al., 2020) This not only puts a strain on workers employed in these sectors, but also decreases the quality of public care provision and therefore increases the pressure on unpaid care work at home, which is carried out primarily by women (Krisch et al., 2020).

In response to these circumstances, especially the trade unions representing paid care workers (these are Yunion, GPA and Vida) are pushing for increasing public investments and decreasing working hours in these sectors (ÖGB, 2017). To illustrate, in February 2020, around negotiations for the collective contracts in care and social jobs, the trade unions GPA and Vida mobilized warning strikes in more than 300 care institutions, making it one of the largest mobilizations of workers in care sectors in Austria thus far (Bruckner, 2020). Although the demands were not fulfilled entirely, the protests and strikes signaled a growing discontent among paid care workers, who's conditions only turned bleaker during the pandemic.

In addition to mobilizations around care work by trade unions, feminist organizations and activist groups started campaigning for the increased valuation and remuneration of care activities, while emphasizing the gendered dynamics of both unpaid and paid care work (Attac, 2020). In 2020, a petition for a feminist fiscal package demanding investments in care, education and social solidarity measures was launched, and in 2021, a network and campaign working towards an "economy that cares for everyone" named "Mehr für Care" (*More for Care*) was established (Plattform 20.000 Frauen, 2021). What is more, demands around care work are increasingly being connected to the issue of tackling climate change. For example, the "Mehr für Care" campaign emphasizes that "care for people and care for the planet" is needed. Meanwhile, specifically in the unions GPA and Vida, social provisioning jobs have been framed as 'green jobs' or 'jobs with a future', alongside jobs in rail transport, green infrastructure, and renewable energy provision (Niedermoser, 2017).

2.3 Recent Developments and Emerging Alliances

In general, when compared with other Western European countries, in Austria the use of unconventional forms of political protest is not highly pronounced, and a less confrontational consensus politics is the norm (Dolezal & Hutter, 2007; Pernicka & Hefler, 2015). However, in recent years newly emerging social movements, most notably the climate justice movement gained popularity and a more active protest culture is starting to proliferate (Bohl & Daniel, 2020). Moreover, broad alliances and cooperation between civil society organizations, social movements and to some extent trade unions were forged specifically around the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 (Hoffmann et al., 2019) and to contest the center-right government that was in parliament between 2017 and 2019 (Wutscher, 2017). Also, with regards to the Covid-19 pandemic, a joined proposal for a “Climate Corona Deal” (*Klima Corona Deal*) was developed collectively by different groups in the climate justice movement and supported widely, thus signifying a further civil society alliance with the aim of influencing national politics (Fridays for Future, 2020).

All the above make the Austrian social movement context a relevant case for investigating cross-movement coalitions around care work and environmental politics. Not only is environmental politics being problematized increasingly by the climate justice movement, but simultaneously, mobilizations around lifting the importance and value of care work are proliferating and gaining momentum, as well as urgency in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, as described above social movements have played a significant role in influencing Austrian national politics in recent decades and can thus be viewed as a relevant actor when discussing the future of work in the context of low-carbon transitions.

3 Theoretical Framework

This section brings together two different, yet interlinked theories to broaden the analytical lens of this thesis. First, ecofeminist theory and social reproduction theory (SRT) are introduced to conceptualize the relationship between nature, labor and care work. Second, theory around coalition politics is presented to make sense of connections between climate justice and feminist activism in the Austrian context.

3.1 Ecofeminism and Social Reproduction Theory

Ecofeminist thought emerged as an intersectional analysis of environmental and feminist issues in the 1980s and 1990s, emphasizing the critical connections between the hierarchies and oppression along the lines of race, class, gender and species (Merchant, 1989; Mies, 1986; Plumwood, 1993). Hence, ecofeminism provides valuable tools for analyzing the interconnections between the ecological crisis and hetero/patriarchy (Barca, 2020, p. 28), and a framework to understand the possible grounds for alliance-building between feminist, labor and climate justice groups.

A Feminist Critique of Dualisms

A central critique within ecofeminist scholarship regards the hierarchical dualisms that are widely accepted in Western thought, such as between productive/reproductive labor, human/nature and man/woman, where the subordinated category is backgrounded, made invisible, excluded and objectified (Barca, 2020; Plumwood, 1993; Salleh, 2009). According to Val Plumwood, a dualism results from “a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other” (1993, p. 41), where the denial of dependency and the domination/subordination relation shape the identity of both categories. Hence, a dualism is more than a relationship of dichotomy or difference, but a culturally expressed hierarchical relationship, where separation and domination is naturalized.

This is relevant when examining the issue of work and its sustainability, as these dualisms also influence our understanding of labor: while industrial, productive labor is regarded as valuable, accounted for, and focused on in economics; reproductive labor is considered as an activity ‘outside’ the market, which does not create exchange value and is therefore a ‘blind spot’ in neoclassical economic thought (Jochimsen & Knobloch, 1997; Merchant, 1989; Mies, 1986). Stefania Barca (2020, p. 2) extends this criticism to the Anthropocene narrative, which considers the ‘forces of production’, that is, Western science and industrial technology, as the key driver of human progress and well-being, which is also assumed to provide solutions to the climate crisis. Barca then asks: “Why are the forces of reproduction not accounted for in the hegemonic Anthropocene narrative? Do they *count for nothing* in the

historical balance sheet of human/earth relationships?” This is a relevant starting point for my analysis, to investigate how feminist and climate justice mobilizations are forging alliances, emphasizing that care work is in fact relevant in environmental politics.

Social Reproduction and the Exploitation of Nature

The concept and theory of social reproduction starts from the above-mentioned recognition that reproductive work is often ignored or trivialized in mainstream economic, political and environmental analysis (Di Chiro, 2008; Katz, 2001). Hence, a central insight in social reproduction theory (SRT) maintains, that the human labor of social reproduction is at the heart of creating and reproducing society as a whole (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 2). As such, SRT extends the traditional understanding of Marxism and capitalism, by insisting on an analysis of capitalism that examines the wider social reproduction of the system, including the daily and generational reproductive labor that occurs in households, schools, hospitals and so on (Ferguson, 2017). Social reproduction has political-economic, cultural and environmental aspects, and is secured through a shifting constellation of sources, including the state, the household, capital and civil society. Further, the conditions for social reproduction are in a constant dialectic relationship with production and shift with changes in the political economy (Katz, 2001). At the same time, feminist scholars point towards how the conditions of social reproduction are increasingly difficult to sustain under financialized capitalism. Nancy Fraser (2016), for instance, refers to the ‘crisis of care’, caused by an inherent contradiction in modern capitalism: although social reproduction is a precondition for sustained capitalist accumulation, capitalism’s tendency for unlimited accumulation simultaneously tends to de-stabilize the very processes of social reproduction it relies on (Fraser, 2016, p. 100).

Materialist ecofeminists connect the political and economic devaluation of social reproduction with the degradation of nature (Barca, 2020). For instance, in her feminist contribution political ecology, Maria Mies (1986) builds on the critique of dualisms, to conceptualize production in opposition with both nature *and* women. The latter manifests in the dualistic hierarchy between surplus-producing labor on the one hand, and “life-producing” reproductive labor on the other, translating into the definition of women’s work as ‘nature’, rather than productive. Mies’ argument was that the ‘production of life’ carried out by women, slaves, peasants and other colonized subjects, in fact enabled the material conditions for productive labor to be exploited within the capitalist market. Since reproductive labor was unwaged, its exploitation had to be upheld by violence or coercive institutions.

Hence, for ecofeminists the exploitation of social reproduction under capitalism, described as a ‘hidden abode’, is one that happens on the world scale, and is inextricably linked with the exploitation of nature

(Merchant, 1989; Mies, 1986; Salleh, 1997). This argument is important for understanding the potential boundary role that care work can play for alliance building between labor, feminist and environmental groups. Moreover, social reproduction is understood as encompassing not only human care and household work, but also environmental reproduction or ‘earthcare labor’. Environmental reproduction is described as the (human) labor that is put into making the non-human environment fit for human reproduction, as well as the protection from its over-exploitation and ensuring its regeneration for its own good and for future generations (Barca, 2020, p. 32). The re-centering and re-valuation of such care activities could thus become a solution approach to mobilize around, both for feminist and climate justice activists (Di Chiro, 2015; Wichterich, 2015). At the same time, mobilizations around care could bring together labor and community struggles, that center social *and* environmental justice (Barca, 2020; Bhattacharya, 2019).

An Ecofeminist Understanding of Sustainability

In this light, Giovanna di Chiro (2008) provides an extended understanding of sustainability and climate activism, underlining that:

“(...) all environmental issues are reproductive issues; efforts to protect the health and integrity of natural systems – water, air, soil, biodiversity – are struggles to sustain the ecosystems that make all life possible and enable the production and reproduction processes upon which all communities (human and non-human) depend. *In other words, environmental struggles are about fighting for and ensuring social reproduction.*” (Di Chiro, 2008, p. 285) (Emphasis added)

Such intersectional thinking could allow for new coalitions between what was formerly considered separate movements for environmental and climate justice, and feminist mobilizations around care work. To be able to make sense of these coalition politics, below theoretical contributions on coalition-building are introduced.

3.2 Coalition Politics

“The reason we are stumbling is that we are at the point where in order to take the next step we’ve got to do it with some folk we don’t care too much about.” (Reagon, 1983)

Coalition building across social movement groups is considered a major factor contributing to their viability and capacity to promote change, yet, with a few exceptions, cross-movement alliances have received little empirical and theoretical attention (Beamish & Luebbbers, 2009). A central factor

prohibiting successful coalition work is differences in positionality, or, in other words, status distinctions along the lines of race, class, gender and place and the resulting differentiating experiences, expectations and preferences play into how easy or difficult it is for different groups to enter into alliance (Pulido & Peña, 1998). Hence, a central question for coalition work becomes how to engage with these differences in positionality in a productive way, how to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016), rather than shying away from it through compartmentalization and hyper-separation of interest groups and issues.

Thus, I use Suzanne Staggenborg's (1986, p. 375) definition of "coalition work" as involving "both the formation of coalitions and the subsequent maintenance and activities of coalitions". Hence, success in coalition work means not only that the coalition gets off the ground, but also that it advances towards its goals and maintains active beyond formation. Beyond maintaining the coalition, to be counted successful cross-movement alliances have to be capable of consistently mobilizing for and carrying out collective action, and be able to actually influence the targets of collective action tactics (Staggenborg, 1986). According to Giovanna Di Chiro, coalition politics is also about "articulation", that is, "the power-laden, non-innocent practices of interconnection, alliance-building and joined-up thinking" (2008, p. 280). More specifically, articulation refers to boundary work, or the creation of new collective understandings, which bring situated knowledges together. This is important, as in cross-movement coalitions like the ones under study, the creation of a common understanding of goals and strategies is vital for making a coalition viable. Finally, for Di Chiro (2015), the sort of coalition- or bridge-building referred to above is an essentially feminist ecological politics, where the positionality of those moving in between spaces becomes important to facilitate passage.

4 Methodology

The following section outlines the research methods employed in this thesis, starting from the research design and a case introduction, and consequently detailing data collection and analysis methods. Further, some notes on positionality and limitations are provided.

4.1 Research Design

The research in the underlying study was conducted as a feminist, emancipatory project (Elmhirst, 2015), with the normative aspiration of contributing to the acknowledgement of (mostly) women's care work in sustainability transformations. With the aim of providing an analysis on mobilizations around care work in relation to climate justice, a qualitative case study design (Flyvbjerg, 2006) was adopted as the overall research strategy. This enabled an in-depth investigation of the strategies, articulations, and challenges within and potential coalitions between different groups. The case study provided a credible method to trace specific patterns and to establish a detailed understanding of the latter, due to its relative closeness to human experience (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Specifically, when boundaries between the phenomenon under study and its context are not clearly visible, as with coalition building, case studies are valuable for researching such contemporary phenomena in depth, within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Since the goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the articulation of links between care and climate justice, as well as potential alliances, coalition-work were emphasized, rather than an in-depth engagement with one specific group or social movement.

4.2 Introducing the Case

In this investigation, I examine coalition work to establish cross-movement cooperation among feminist, climate justice and labor groups in Austria, and the articulations of common goals or problem understandings between these groups. Accordingly, I do not consider one specific, well-established coalition, as previously done in other investigations (Beamish & Luebbbers, 2009; Staggenborg, 1986), but rather at a set of practices and the establishment of networks, which allow for different levels of cooperation among activist groups and unions. Hence, this is a case of coalition work between different activist groups and unions, and the articulations they forge around the link between care work and climate justice.

The groups and actors I engaged with were the following: 1) groups within the Austrian climate justice movement, 2) feminist groups that mobilize around care work, 3) labor representatives in unions for care work sectors, as well as experts working on women's and environmental issues in the Austrian Chamber of Labor (the 'Arbeiterkammer' or AK). The AK represents worker's interests, together with

the different trade unions and the Austrian Trade Union Federation (the 'Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund' or ÖGB).

It is important to note that the different groups and trade unions under study did not initially share an apparent common goal or a common cause. On the one hand, Austrian climate movements, who come together on a networking platform called 'Klimaprotest' (*Climate Protest*) mobilize around climate justice, while pushing for more ambitious national climate politics. On the other hand, feminist groups generally organize around a wide range of feminist issues, including women's position in the labor market, women's unpaid care work, sexual violence, to name a few. Further, labor unions primarily represent the interests of their members, and more broadly aim to improve conditions of the working class, while maintaining close relationships with the government and economic interest groups through an agreement called the 'social partnership' ('Sozialpartnerschaft'). Consequently, there is not necessarily a shared immediate goal, although long-term visions of a sustainable and just future, where a good life for all is possible might overlap.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods for this study included semi-structured interviews as the main source of data, alongside online participant observations and a document review. Prior to starting the interview process, preliminary research was conducted to gain an overview of different activist groups in Austria, the issues they were mobilizing around, and to identify potential key informants in these groups. Subsequently, the three main target groups mentioned above were determined. For an overview of the data collection for each group, see Table 1.

Interviews were chosen as a main source of information, as they enable investigating the subject's experience or understanding of their worlds, and to produce knowledge about the human situation (Kvale, 2007). At the same time, the socio-political context interviews are embedded in was taken into account, in this case through considering the potential interests and institutional affiliations of different interview respondents. The choice of interviews as a main data source enabled an investigation of coalition building around the existing theoretical link between social and ecological reproduction and enabled producing empirical insights on this.

Table 1: Methods and data for different actor groups

<i>Actor group</i>	<i>Methods and data</i>
Climate justice movement (groups engaged at Klimaprotest)	-Semi-structured Interviews (n=6) with activists in climate justice groups (Fridays For Future, Attac, System Change Not Climate Change, Klimavolksbegehren)
Feminist groups (groups engaged in the “Mehr für Care” initiative)	-Semi-structured interviews (n=5) with activists in feminist organizations, participant observation at “Mehr für Care” conference in February 2021
Organized labor (unions representing care sectors, Chamber of Labor/AK)	-Expert interviews (n=6) with trade union representatives & experts working in the Chamber of Labor (AK), document review (union’s statements on environmental politics, press releases, strategy papers)

When it comes to specificities of the interview process, certain strategies were followed to gain access to the information needed for answering my research questions. To start with, sampling was done in a targeted way (Bryman, 2015, pp. 201–203), with the goal of achieving a balanced number of informants in all three target groups. Within each group, one to three key informants were contacted initially, and snowballing facilitated further sampling, which apart from easing access also helped to uncover networks between the different activist circles. In total, 17 interviews were conducted, with climate activists, feminist activists and organizers, as well as representatives from labor unions or the chamber of labor. For a detailed list of interviewees, see the appendix.

The interview style for interviews with CJ activists and feminist organizers was semi-structured, with enough flexibility to allow for diverse interactions to emerge. Due to the trade unions and AK being bureaucratic, institutionalized organizations, I treated the interviews with unionists as expert interviews representing their institution’s views. Expert interviews are suitable as a method to gather data in an efficient and concentrated way, although the positionality of the expert has to be taken into account (Bogner et al., 2009). An interview guide with specific themes was prepared in advance, adopted to fit the context of each interviewee and adjusted slightly after the first few interviews. The language in use was German, to allow the interviewees to respond in their own mother tongue and to enable them to express themselves freely. Although conducting the interviews in English would have been a viable option for most respondents, German was prioritized since it eased the establishment of

initial trust and enabled more free-flowing conversations. All interviews were conducted online, via Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Skype, and recorded once permission from the respondents was obtained. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. By transcribing continuously with a focus on reoccurring themes, an adequate level of information redundancy and data saturation was achieved (Bryman, 2015, p. 425).

In addition to the interviews, documents and online participant observations complemented the gathered information. When it comes to documents, publications from the activist groups, organizations and unions under study were collected, to clarify their position towards the issues in focus, and to complement or triangulate interview data. These documents included press releases or other documents on the union's position regarding working time reduction, working conditions in care sectors, reports of recent mobilizations in these sectors, as well as their stance on sustainability and 'green jobs'. In relation to social movements, when available their collective self-definitions were reviewed, as well as information on campaigns related to care work and climate justice, and blog posts or social media releases on the issues under study. Furthermore, I participated in a two-part online conference by the newly established network "Mehr für Care" (*More for Care*), which was set up as a networking and organizing event for different organizations, around demands for more investments in care work in Austria. Participating in the conference allowed me to gain deeper insights in how different groups framed the challenges around the de-valuation of care work, as well as in the connections between different actors and groups.

Overall, I aimed to stay reflective throughout the data collection process, by journaling, taking field notes after each interview or observation, and keeping track of the already gathered information, as well as patterns in data. Thereby, I could enter the analysis with a good understanding of my materials, and a wealth of reflexive notes that would later support my coding and theme development (Nowell et al., 2017).

4.4 Data analysis

To analyze the gathered information, I used a thematic analysis approach (Nowell et al., 2017), with a combination of inductive and deductive coding (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Hence, on the one hand, a set of codes was developed a-priori on the basis of social reproduction and coalition-building theory, and modified slightly after test-coding some of the texts (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). On the other hand, the emergence of codes and themes from the data was enabled by using inductive coding (Boyatzis, 1998).

The data analysis process entailed multiple stages, starting from familiarizing myself with the data already while transcribing, reading through transcripts and gathering initial reflexive thoughts. Consequently, the coding process started, which involved recognizing and encoding important segments in the data, to organize it and develop themes (Boyatzis, 1998). From there, I continued with searching for, developing and reviewing themes, by sorting and collating all the potentially relevant coded data extracts (Nowell et al., 2017), using NVivo as a tool to facilitate the process. While doing so, I kept detailed notes about the development of themes, subthemes, and the hierarchies between them, and used diagrams and mind maps as tools to make sense of emerging concepts. Finally, from these themes and with consideration of the theoretical framework, the main results and arguments presented in the conclusion were developed and written up.

4.5 Positionality

Here, I want to shortly present some reflections regarding my positionality and its impact on my research process. In the case of my research, various factors played a role and influenced the kind of information I was able to gain access to. On the one hand, me being Austrian in some cases facilitated establishing initial trust with interviewees, through speaking the same language, and having a shared understanding of the Austrian political context, for example. On the other hand, me being a young, female graduate student played into the power dynamics of some interviews, especially those with older, professionally more experienced respondents. While power effects are always present when doing qualitative fieldwork, especially the interviewing process, it was important for me to acknowledge that power asymmetries could go both ways (Burawoy, 1998) and I intended to reflect and act on such dynamics whenever possible. My focus throughout the research process was to design it as transparent and ethical as possible, and to engage in 'giving back' when adequate (Walker, 2007) – for example, through sharing literature or insights with activists, when desired.

4.6 Limitations

Being a qualitative inquiry based on interviews and online fieldwork, the underlying study is affected by various limitations. First, as discussed above, power effects in the interview process, as well as my own positionality to some extent had an influence on the information I could gain access to. While acknowledging the existence of these power effects, by staying reflexive I aimed at minimizing them whenever possible, or else, to be attentive of their impacts on my research (Burawoy, 1998). For example, it was easier to obtain more nuanced, in-depth accounts from activists who shared a similar ideological stance to my one, than from unionists who might not have been fully convinced of the relevance of my study, or my sufficient expertise to grasp their position.

Second, the fact that all research had to be carried out online due to the Covid-19 pandemic created some challenges. Not all interview respondents were equally familiar with online meetings, and sometimes building trust was difficult when communicating via the screen. Moreover, the online research format limited my possibility to participate in a wider range of activities organized by the target groups, which could have provided me with richer observations on the context they are operating in. Finally, when engaging in case study research, the generalizability of results is always limited to some extent (Bryman, 2015, p. 70). However, the purpose of this study was not to create findings that are generalizable to all contexts, but rather to generate theoretical results on potential alliance building processes, as well as empirical insights on links between feminist and environmental activism in practice. To achieve this, literature and theory was used to link findings from the micro level to a broader context.

5 Analysis and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of this investigation. First, different articulations around the connection between care work and climate change are outlined, and second, coalition strategies and challenges based on these articulations are described. Third, these findings are discussed in the context of ecofeminist theory and linked back to the larger question around work in sustainability transformations.

5.1 Care Work and Climate Justice: Making the Connection in Practice

Here, existing articulations and coalition politics around interconnections between care work and environmental politics are discussed, and more broadly, of how gender-sensitive climate action is perceived by climate justice activists, feminist groups and unionists in Austria. Overall, the understanding of a link between care work and climate justice is not widespread in this context yet, although some bridge-building and the articulation of joint strategies is in process. One climate activist described the growing links between feminist and climate justice activism as follows:

“It’s like... we’re slowly building a bridge from both sides, I would say (...) I think, it’s an issue [*the relevance of feminism in climate activism*] that has somehow been self-evident for everyone. But that it’s also tied to concrete demands, these feminist agendas and gender equality agendas in connection with climate activism, I think that’s what we’re only slowly realizing now, one by one.” (CJ activist 6, personal communication, 29.03.2021)

Hence, while feminist agendas and demands around care work in sustainability transformations might be at the backdrop of climate justice activism, they are not yet fully integrated into concrete campaigns and demands. Below, I discuss the four most common positions adopted by activists and unionists, regarding the role of care work in environmental politics, to show how different groups engage with this link. Importantly, in practice these positions interact and overlap, and actions driven by actor groups promoting one articulation can feed into another.

Position 1: No Clear Links Yet

To start with, some of the investigated groups did not articulate or perceive a clear link between care work and environmental politics, and viewed the two as separate issues – which might both be tackled in the respective organizations, but not under a joined strategy. This position was common among

unionists, as well as among some climate justice and feminist activists. One unionist recounted, regarding linking demands around care work and environmental politics:

“In the union’s work I don’t really see the connection being made between the two. I see that demands are made around both, but they are not, or hardly combined. By now, at least we’re at a point where demands are also made regarding climate protection. But to explicitly connect that, to say, investments have to be made here so that we can have a more systemic change, that I don’t see yet.” (labor representatives 6, personal communication, 10.03.2021)

In the unions, part of the reason for this might be a compartmentalized organizational structure, whereas in social movements, specifically in the climate justice movement, a concern about the movement claims becoming too broad was mentioned, if too many marginal issues were to be included on their agenda. Moreover, in some cases the link between the two issues was acknowledged, but not perceived as something that should inform strategies and solution approaches.

Position 2: Highlighting Women’s Vulnerability to Climate Change

A second position regarding the relevance of feminist issues in climate activism, that recognized the need for gender-sensitive climate action but did not necessarily link it to care work is centered around highlighting women’s increased vulnerability and exposure to climate change impacts. This kind of engagement does not necessarily imply strategic demands, and often emphasizes the vulnerability of women in the Global South:

“Of course women in the Global South are much more impacted than an OMV-manager or someone like that. When rivers dry out, they have to walk longer distances. There’s also more sexual violence, and these are connections, which really have to be emphasized, to make people understand that these issues are linked.” (CJ activist 6, personal communication, 29.03.2021)

Similar arguments, specifically around women’s exposure to climate change impacts are also dominant in the transnational climate policy arena, and play an important role in adaptation and mitigation projects (Gaard, 2015; Terry, 2009). Yet, within this position, treating gender and climate change as connected issues becomes a concern mostly of international solidarity, since it is women elsewhere who suffer disproportionately from climate change impacts. At the same time, this articulation does not engage with the link between the ‘crisis of care’ and the climate crisis (Fraser, 2016), which might

make women in the Global South more vulnerable on multiple, less acknowledged levels that are not all related directly to climate change.

Position 3: Strategic Links through Re-Thinking Work

To strategically link solution approaches for tackling climate change and gender injustice through re-thinking work is a third common position, adopted by unionists, as well as by activists from both climate justice and feminist groups. In this position, working time reduction is perceived as a “win-win” solution, that would both curb environmental impacts from production and enable more equal distribution of reproductive work between men and women (Dengler & Strunk, 2018). Further, this position rests on the assumption that the transition to a more sustainable mode of production and consumption would require a fundamental re-thinking of the conditions of work, as one feminist organizer underlined:

“One of our approaches is a massive working time reduction. In my opinion, that is connected to ecological issues, because you have to make considerations about, yes, how do we work? What kind of work do we consider important? And what consequences does that have on entire ecosystems, and on our lives? What kind of work is valuable to our society, and what – we’re noticing that at the moment [*in the pandemic*] – can we actually live well without? Well, definitely not without care work.” (feminist organizer 6, personal communication, 08.03.2021)

For feminist organizers like the one above, then, working time reduction is about more than reducing the ecological impact of production and consumption (Schor, 2015), but entails a redefinition of all labor: market and care-based, waged and unwaged, low and high productivity. In this perspective, the division between production and reproduction would be challenged as well, alongside hierarchies and gender stereotypes associated with it, with the goal to more equally distribute and valorize care work and breadwinning work (Wichterich, 2015).

At the same time, not all actors and groups attached the same range of transformative claims to the demand for working time reduction. Within unions, the GPA and Vida for example push for a reduction in working hours in the healthcare and social sectors primarily to improve working conditions, lower the strain connected to these jobs and to ensure the quality of care provision (ÖGB, 2017). Yet, within unions working time reduction is also perceived as a key issue to enable a fair distribution of unpaid care work between men and women.

Overall, the strategic link of care issues and environmental politics through the demand of working time reduction was adopted by different groups, with varying priorities and motivations. Hence, working time reduction also becomes a strategic mobilizing link, for climate justice movements and unions to come together over shared goals:

“Yes, we’re definitely pushing for it [*working time reduction*]. Simply because we perceive it as a win-win, because obviously we can’t convince them [*the unions*] of anything that’s against the interest of their members. Something like shorter working hours, with equal compensation, few employees would object to, I guess. That means, that is something, which we can promote well, like: look, there we can kill two birds with one stone.” (CJ activist 5, personal communication, 09.03.2021)

Position 4: Towards a Caring Economy

Finally, a fourth position on the links between care work and environmental politics is that of demanding a fundamental restructuring of gender relations, work, and human-nature relationships, while centering care in society. Although this is the position pushing for the most transformative changes, it is one that is rather marginal and not embraced widely in practice (yet). Here, in line with ecofeminist thought, the goal is to move beyond patriarchal and capitalist structures of domination, that lie behind women’s and nature’s subordination (Barca, 2020). As one feminist researcher-activist explained, about a campaign for more investments in care work:

“I think, considering materialist as well as ecofeminist literature, it’s so obvious that the principles of subordination and exploitation originate from the same patriarchal patterns and structures. So, this wasn’t something that we added on in hindsight, but we rather say out of principle, an economy that cares for everyone is simultaneously an economy, that views nature completely differently.” (feminist organizer 3, personal communication, 26.02.2021)

Thus, having an ecofeminist problem understanding makes the link between environmental and reproductive issues arise rather naturally, instead of it needing to be articulated in hindsight. Yet, working towards a post-capitalist caring economy within a capitalist system poses practical and strategic challenges, as illustrated below:

“The aspect of criticizing capitalism, or the transformative part is in fact rather, that we ask: how could that work, to place care in the center of our society? And then we engage with a shift towards different forms of service provision, away from the so-

called market, that doesn't actually exist, away from profit-driven structures and towards other structures, that are smaller, more democratic in principle. Although, that's where we're in a kind of paradox, because the current public service provision also isn't necessarily democratic, of course through elections, but not all the way, so there's much work to do." (feminist organizer 3, personal communication, 26.02.2021)

Hence, this position relies on a strong state that can financially support the expansion and re-valuation of paid care work through public services, despite the long-term goal of transitioning towards smaller, community-based and less profit-driven structures of care provision.

Overall, focusing on care work enables bridge-building between climate justice and feminist organizers, specifically when it comes to proposing joint solution approaches. While some groups simply perceive this as a strategic choice, for others, re-valuing care work plays a key role in working towards a broader transformation towards a society with fundamentally different economic, ecological and gender relationships. Furthermore, different motivations and imaginaries not only exist when it comes to the issue of care work in sustainability transitions, but also regarding how a sustainable and desirable future would look like in general. Hence, some groups perceive eventually overcoming capitalism as essential, whereas others push for solutions to the climate crisis within the current economic system.

5.2 Coalition Politics Around Care Work

Considering the different positions regarding the role of care work in environmental politics, in what follows I elaborate on the coalition politics articulated between the climate justice movement, feminist groups and labor unions. Specifically, I focus on coalition strategies that were successful despite differences in immediate goals, positionality, and modes of organization, as well as on challenges that inhibited the formation of alliances.

5.2.1 Coalition Strategies

When it comes to strategies employed to create successful coalitions, various key practices emerged out of my discussions with different actors. As a pre-condition for successful cooperation the articulation of a common cause, or what I refer to as a *boundary issue* was essential, which in this case is care work and its role in the sustainability transition (as described above in section 5.1). In contrast to groups who come together over a similar cause, in this case, the common cause had to be constructed through an articulation process first, and without it, most coalition work would not have

made sense. Furthermore, the observed coalition-building practices overlap with what Beamish & Luebbers (2009) term 'strategic deployment' and 'co-commitment'. Strategic deployment refers to the negotiation of commitment, strategy and leadership, whereas co-commitment describes the development of mutual commitments over time.

In the case of Austrian climate justice and feminist groups, the creation of dialogue spaces, especially at conferences, workshops and re-occurring strategy meetings played a key role in counter-acting potential sources of mistrust or misunderstanding, and to create shared visions and goals. One example of the successful creation of such a space was a two-part conference organized in March 2021, around the feminist initiative "Mehr für Care" (*More for Care*), to launch a network and campaign pushing for more investments in care work and a re-centering of care in the Austrian society. One feminist organizer, who was active in coordinating the conference recounted:

"Our impression is that it was incredible, how much came into being in these two conferences, on a non-material, collective identity level, because many things were brought together. Because what we can't do is to replace all the work of these individual organizations, who are doing concrete work, but we can strengthen each other and then achieve more for care." (feminist organizer 3, personal communication, 26.02.2021)

The interactive conference not only provided space to collectively discuss motivations, goals and strategies among different groups (both from feminist and climate activism backgrounds), but also created a common problem understanding and collective identity. Co-commitment evolved through the establishment of different working groups, that connected activists and organizers from varying backgrounds and laid the ground for continued activism.

Another important factor in coalition building processes was the bridge-building and networking function of specific organizations (or individuals within them), who work to establish links between previously disconnected actors or groups. Within the social movement space, the non-governmental organization Attac was mentioned repeatedly as an organization that continuously worked to connect different groups and to bring actors together over common broader goals of a more sustainable and just future. For example, Attac was part of bringing climate activists into the "Mehr für Care" initiative mentioned above.

Among the unions, AUGÉ-UG (which stands for *Alternative, Green & Independent Unionists*) has acted as a connecting unit between social movements and unions since the 1970s, with the goal of bringing social movement's perspectives and claims into the space of organized labor. Their acceptance among

the other main unions has varied over time, and caused some tension especially due to their closeness to the environmental movements around Zwentendorf and Hainburg (see section 2.1), who's aims sharply contrasted with union's interests. Today, in line with the slowly emerging alliance of Austrian climate movements and trade unions (Soder et al., 2018), AUGÉ-UG's position is less contested, and they still work to bring progressive, feminist and environmental issues, as well as SM demands into the unions and the Austrian Chamber of Labor.

5.2.2 Coalition Challenges and Barriers

Adversely, various challenges and barriers inhibited the formation of successful alliances. As mentioned above, a central issue that was tackled successfully by some groups but proved to be challenging for others was arriving at a common cause to mobilize around, when the linkages between different immediate priorities were not obvious. The other two main challenges were on the one hand, differences in organizational styles as well as repertoires of collective action, and on the other, mistrust regarding the consequences of cooperating with certain groups.

To elaborate, alliance-building especially between trade unions and social movements is influenced by differences in organizational structures between these groups, specifically with regards to different modes of governance (Evans, 2011). While unions engage in a rather hierarchical mode of governance, with a clear pyramid of control bound by the authority of the organization, social movements are organized around a network governance mode, where autonomous stakeholders work together to achieve common goals (Evans, 2011, pp. 34–35). Consequently, the strategies employed to realize change, the means of communication, as well as the actors privileged by each of these groups differ significantly, and this would need to be considered when establishing coalitions. For example, Austrian trade unions would favor cooperation with the actors in the 'social partnership', that is, the government and economic actors, instead of civil society actors in social movements (Pernicka & Hefler, 2015). Moreover, alliance-building between the climate movement and unions in Austria is further complicated by historical tensions between the two (Soder et al., 2018). However, despite these challenges, union and social movement cooperation can and does emerge, at least in the form of creating dialogue spaces for exchanging expertise on specific issues. Also, several unionists expressed the long-term aspiration to align the directions and goals of trade unions and the climate justice movement:

“What is important for us is that the labor movement and the climate movement eventually find together. That's something that historically only worked sparsely (...)”
(labor representative 2, personal communication, 24.2.2021)

Additionally, building trust is another challenge in coalition-building, both between groups with a different and with a similar organization style. Initial mistrust might occur due to ideological differences, a fear of one-sided solidarity demands, or a fear of co-optation. Within climate groups, for instance, trust between different groups had to be established over time, and only eventually differences in action repertoires and ideologies were cherished as something that could make the climate movement stronger overall. One climate activist, who is active in various groups and networks explained:

“I often have the feeling that it takes quite long to build trust, and that groups, or other actors often have an initial mistrust against each other... and I ask myself where that comes from, to say ‘we have to take care not to be co-opted’, that’s a standard statement, and I always wonder, what does that mean, to be co-opted? And then there’s often a lot of diffuse fears, which aren’t really talked about outright.” (CJ activist 4, personal communication, 19.02.2021)

Yet, the same activist also mentioned how initial mistrust eventually was resolved through repeated dialogues and cooperation. Moreover, when solidarity or coalition proposals made the impression to be one-sided and not based on mutual support from both sides, some frustration and hesitance regarding uplifting each other’s cause came up. This was mentioned as an issue that had arose from time to time, both by feminist groups and unionists, when talking about solidarity requests by different groups in the climate justice movement. Especially in the context of limited resources this became problematic, as one feminist organizer, who had been supporting climate groups previously, remarked:

“Where have they [*the climate activists*] been at my actions? In the other direction, I’ve never seen that, the solidarity never extends so far. Those activists are in all sorts of networks, and they are so overburdened with what they do. So at some point, I also said, I just can’t do this anymore.” (feminist organizer 2, personal communication, 24.02.2021)

This links to a final challenge regarding the creation and sustenance of broader cross-movement coalitions, namely, resource constraints when it comes to time and finances in non-profit, voluntary-run activism. The Austrian climate and feminist activist scene is comparably small to start with, meaning that networks usually overlap, and some activists feel like they “constantly have to change hats” on order to fit into the different contexts. Hence, creating broader networks and alliances while maintaining a non-hierarchical organizational structure proves to be challenging:

“To connect all of these groups and to get them involved in a big action, to get all of them pulling together, to create one set of demands, that’s gonna be a big challenge, because that’s also tricky when it comes to resources. So that you don’t create any information hierarchies, there’s all of these issues that are still to be taken care of. And I’m very curious to see how we’ll continue with that in the future.” (CJ activist 6, personal communication, 29.03.2021)

To sum up, what becomes apparent is that the articulation of a boundary issue is an essential precondition for enabling cross-movement alliances. Further, creating dialogue spaces and the existence of bridge-building organizations or individuals contributed to coalition success, while differences in organizational style and initial mistrust had to be overcome. In that sense, the findings underline Di Chiro’s (2008, 2015) and Reagon’s (1983) conceptualization of coalitions and ‘living environmentalisms’, that are not necessarily comfortable or obvious, but strategically necessary on the long run. These coalitions would comprise strategic assemblages of social, cultural and environmental practices, bringing different groups together under a collective recognition that “I ain’t gonna let you live unless you let me live. Now there’s danger in that, but there’s also the possibility that we can both live – if you can stand it.” (Reagon, 1983, p. 365).

5.2.3 Reflecting on Coalition Work

To close this section, I discuss some of the dynamics regarding the necessity and viability of coalition work. First, it is important to note that entering coalitions is often a strategic choice, with different underlying reasons or motivations. For example, one group in the climate justice movement, which is working specifically on an alliance with unions mentioned that the primary reason to do so was to gain access to a wider public, and generally to raise the support for climate politics amongst the working class. This is a context-specific reason, relating back to the general goal of this particular group to appeal to as many people as possible through a non-party stance. With regards to this point, the level of cooperation in coalitions might also differ according to strategies and goals: when the general strategy is a petition, for instance, a different kind of cooperation is needed than when trying to achieve goals through disruptive collective action.

Second, can we speak of the ongoing coalition work in Austria as a “fusion of labor and community struggles” (Bhattacharya, 2019), an “alliance (...) based on a common material interest in keeping the world alive” (Barca, 2020, p. 60), or “a politics of intersectionality linking a variety of problems that have not been deemed properly ‘environmental’ by the mainstream movement” (Di Chiro, 2008, p. 286)? In other words, is there a proliferation of an intersectional alliance for climate and social justice?

This question is important, as much literature on social reproduction and climate justice points towards the necessity of the creation of such alliances, often with the goal of challenging patriarchal capitalism (Barca, 2020; Bhattacharya, 2019; Goodman & Salleh, 2013). What the Austrian case shows is the actual work required to build broad alliances of this kind, and the challenges impeding the latter. Although the link between care work and environmental politics is only starting to contribute to building a bridge between feminist and climate justice activism, those engaged in this kind of coalition work already point towards what is at stake: questions regarding the kind of work that will be valued in sustainable futures, who will be entitled to justice in a just transition, and which oppressive structures are important to tackle together with climate change.

5.3 Re-Thinking and Re-Politicizing Work in Sustainability Transformations

“While science and technology will undoubtedly play a key role in sustainability transitions, how societies choose to construct and pursue visions of sustainability will be an intensely social, political and cultural process.” (Miller, 2013, p. 279)

In the previous analysis sections, I presented different articulations of the role of care work in sustainability transitions, as well as the coalition strategies and challenges when alliances are forged on the basis of linking care work and environmental politics. Below, I connect these empirical findings to ecofeminist theory and literature on just sustainability transitions, to show how integrating feminist issues on care work can lead to the re-thinking and re-politicizing of sustainable work.

A convergence of labor and community struggles

To start with, the coalition politics examined above can be understood as a convergence of labor and community struggles around ensuring the conditions for social and ecological reproduction (Battistoni, 2017; Bhattacharya, 2019). On the one hand, climate justice movements are mobilizing around keeping climate change and environmental degradation at bay, to safeguard the conditions for ecological reproduction at a global scale (Di Chiro, 2008). On the other hand, feminist organizers, as well as trade union representatives problematize the conditions of social reproduction, including its subordination to production, and its under-valuation as paid care work in the market (Floro, 2012). Further, these groups – to different extents – promote a re-thinking of work and are expanding the discourse on work in sustainable futures.

Specifically, the notion of ‘green jobs’ as the primary category where good and fair working conditions should be granted in just transitions (Velicu & Barca, 2020) is questioned:

“I remember, at some point the AK [*Chamber of Labor*] published a couple of press releases, saying ‘green jobs’ should also be ‘good jobs’. Well, obviously, but they made this distinction only in that area! This juxtaposition of ‘green’ and ‘good’. But in sectors, where there has never been ‘good jobs’, regarding working conditions and salaries, they never mentioned that in one breath. So they never said that social welfare jobs should also be good jobs. And of course, these jobs must be good jobs as well, when it comes to working conditions.” (labor representatives 6, personal communication, 10.03.2021)

Hence, instead of focusing mainly on industrial workers in fossil-fuel based sectors in sustainability transitions, who should have the right to green *and* good jobs, this unionist extends the demand for better working conditions to those sectors, which provide low-carbon work already today, but are not often recognized in the discourse on just transitions towards sustainability.

Recognizing that the health care, education, and service sectors are also of relevance in sustainability transformations could be a step towards making just transitions about “decarbonizing, decolonizing, democratizing and decommodifying our carbon-intensive material world” (White, 2020, p. 37), rather than simply replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy sources. Moreover, organizing workers in these sectors is strategic, as it means organizing the working class as it exists today in most industrialized economies, where a high percentage of workers is employed in the service sector, while employment in industry and agriculture is declining (Battistoni, 2017). This also applies to Austria: in 2019, 71 percent of all employees worked in service, whereas only 25.4 percent worked in industry and 3.7 percent in agriculture (International Labor Organisation, 2020). In doing so, this position also challenges the widespread ‘jobs-versus-environment’ dilemma: by emphasizing the importance of a wider variety of employment sectors in sustainable futures, which in fact provide jobs for a large part of the working class already today, while forging an emerging alliance with the climate justice movement instead of playing out industry against ecological concerns (Battistoni, 2017).

Work and sustainability: An ecofeminist perspective

From an ecofeminist perspective, re-thinking work is about more than recognizing care work and service provision as low-carbon sectors that should be expanded, because they produce less emissions than industry. Instead, a transformative and gender-sensitive transition politics would need to consider the invisibilized and undervalued care work that enables capitalist production, while acknowledging that this work is gendered and unequally distributed between men and women (Bauhardt, 2014). This understanding was shared within the “More for Care” campaign:

“This transformative perspective, towards an economy that cares for everyone, requires a radical transformation, which is only possible through radical change: to center care in our society, but also to question the extremely profit-driven economy that’s dominated by large corporations, those two go hand in hand.” (feminist organizer 3, personal communication, 26.02.2021)

The climate and environmental justice movement has long pointed towards the intersecting political, economic, cultural and ecological aspects of a geography of social reproduction under the global capitalist production system, creating local environmental impacts, which disproportionately affect marginalized people (Di Chiro, 2008; Gaard, 2017). Simultaneously, mobilizations around care emphasize that social reproduction is increasingly difficult to sustain, even where climate change impacts are not yet heavily felt (Fraser, 2016). In such contexts, problematizing the conditions of care work can become a “strategic frontier of working class militancy”, demanding that care be provided at the individual, community and planetary scale (Bhattacharya, 2019). What is more, in contrast to global climate change, for much of the population in a country like Austria, care work is related to a more direct everyday politics, and thus easier to grasp and mobilize around.

Simultaneously, any activism targeting a radical re-thinking of work to find solution approaches to the care *and* climate crisis needs to strive for a “deep structural transformation of this social order [*of financialized capitalism*]” (Fraser, 2016, p. 117). This poses practical challenges and paradoxes for activists and requires a strategy focusing both on immediate, realizable change and long-term transformative goals, or a so-called “revolutionary reformism” (Luxemburg, 1999). This concept, coined by Rosa Luxemburg (1999), describes the labor movement strategy of aiming at improving the present-day worker’s situation by presenting alternatives for the current political agendas, while simultaneously making a transformative agenda visible and achievable.

In the Austrian context, some of the mobilizations at the intersection of feminist, labor and climate justice movements provide glimpses into how a revolutionary reformism around care and climate justice could look like: the “More for Care” campaign, for example, mobilizes around immediate public investments in care work to improve the situation of those employed in these sectors, while working towards a decentralization and decommodification of care on the long run, which would include care for nature. In “System Change, Not Climate Change”, the future of work, including reproductive work is problematized and challenged (System Change Not Climate Change, 2021), and immediate demands push for diverting investments for automobile-centered transport infrastructure into the health and social work sectors. Further, creating broad alliances between labor, feminist and climate justice

movements can back demands of this kind with wide-ranging support, and provide access to different ways of strategically employing collective action to enact pressure.

What is at stake?

In the case of mobilizations around environmental politics and just sustainability transitions, the inclusion of ecofeminist demands around care work makes clear, that politics around work in sustainable futures concern more than industrial workers and climate justice activists. As Irina Velicu and Stefania Barca (2020) have noted, what is problematic about the just transition discourse particularly is, that it presupposes its subject – the industrial worker in a waged job – from the onset, and excludes others, as they point out:

“Our concern is not the future of a new order of positions or roles, but the politically dangerous moment when something (or someone) is already left out of a new order.”

(Velicu & Barca, 2020, p. 270)

The Austrian case demonstrates, how social movements problematize the exclusion of (paid and unpaid) care workers from the discourse on sustainable work, through the sometimes messy, complex, and laborious process of articulation and coalition work. Further, in emphasizing the dialectic relationship between production and reproduction, social reproduction theory outlines an expanded notion of the working class as such, where both productive *and* reproductive workers become relevant actors, who should have a say in determining the conditions of work and its sustainability.

To sum up, a broad alliance between the climate justice movement, feminist groups and organized labor has the potential to create a new imaginary for the formulation of the subjects, goals and strategies for sustainability transformations, where not only working conditions within the wage relationship, but the wage relationship itself as it exists today is questioned. Further, such alliances make clear, who should be included in the discourse on sustainable work alongside workers in fossil fuel-based sectors: all those who care, sustain and reproduce life, human and non-human, within and outside the market. Finally, these alliances highlight the necessity of strategies for tackling climate change through an intersectional perspective, taking hierarchies along the lines of gender, as well as race and class into consideration with the goal of moving beyond multiple forms of oppression and domination.

6 Conclusion

This thesis engaged with the issue of work in sustainability transformations, and specifically the often unacknowledged role of care work in the latter. This was done through investigating how care work could become a mobilizing term for social movements and labor to push for a gender-sensitive, fair transformation towards a low-carbon future in the context of Austria. While employing a qualitative case study research design, cross-movement coalition work between feminist groups, the climate justice movement and labor unions was examined, alongside with articulations these groups forged to link the issue of care work to climate justice.

First, four main positions on the articulation of the link between care work and environmental politics were discerned. These positions were more or less transformative in their demands, and allowed for the emergence of shared goals or strategies. Second, coalition work that occurred on the basis of these positions was scrutinized, to uncover both coalition strategies and challenges that inhibited successful alliance-building. Finally, findings were discussed in relation to ecofeminist theory, which yielded several important insights. Not only does the articulation and coalition work under study present a convergence between labor and community struggles to ensure the conditions for socio-ecological reproduction, but they also challenge the hierarchical dualism between production and reproduction. Further, these alliances point towards what is at stake when considering the future of work being mainly about industrial labor: the exclusion of a wide range of actors engaging in paid and unpaid care work, and the important contribution they could make to a sustainable future, where a “good life for all” is possible. Additionally, these alliances emphasize the necessity of tackling climate change and the ecological crisis in an intersectional manner, considering not only unsustainable human-nature relationships, but also gender, race and class difference.

In doing so, this thesis contributes to the re-thinking and re-politicization of work in sustainability transformations, as well as to ongoing research on the formation of intersectional alliances and activism in the face of multiple crises under capitalism, including the ecological crisis and the crisis of care. This is of crucial importance for critical sustainability research, which aims to re-politicize the discourse on the Anthropocene through allowing for diverse comprehensions, problematizations and strategies for sustainability transformations (Lövbrand et al., 2015). Further, the findings provide a glimpse into the messy, laborious process of coalition work and the articulation of common goals among previously separate movements. Hence, this thesis presents empirical insights into struggles over counter-hegemonic ways of tackling the climate crisis, where a central demand is the recognition and valuation of care work, and the transformative potential of re-centering care – for humans and

nature – in our societies. Future research could be directed at deepening our understanding of cross-movement alliances, their strategic relevance in sustainability-related struggles, specifically those that occur at the boundaries where society meets nature, and where production meets reproduction.

7 References

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Appendix

Appendix 1: List of interviewees

Alias	Date	Affiliation	Gender	Notes
CJ activist 1	09.02.2021	CJ organizer in Fridays for Future	Female	
CJ activist 2	10.02.2021	Organizer at climate petition (Klimavolksbegehren)	Male	
CJ activist 3	16.02.2021	CJ activist in Fridays for Future	Female	
CJ activist 4	19.02.2021	Campaigner at System Change Not Climate Change, Attac	Female	
CJ activist 5	09.03.2021	Organizer at Transition Group (working on union-CJ movement cooperation)	Female	
CJ activist 6	29.03.2021	Organizer at Transition Group, Mehr für Care	Female	
Feminist organizer 1	23.02.2021	Feminist organizer, Transform-Europe & Plattform 20.000 Frauen	Female	Not recorded
Feminist organizer 2	24.02.2021	Feminist organizer, One Billion Rising & Mehr für Care	Female	
Feminist organizer 3	26.02.2021	Feminist organizer, Attac & Mehr für Care	Female	
Feminist organizer 4	04.03.2021	Feminist organizer, WIDE & Mehr für Care	Female	
Feminist organizer 5	08.03.2021	Feminist organizer, WIDE	Female	
Labor representative 1	22.02.2021	Women's department at Union Vida	Female	
Labor representative 2	24.02.2021	Expert in chamber of labor, organizer with Workers for Future	Male	
Labor representative 3	01.03.2021	Mobility sector at Union Vida	Female	Not recorded
Labor representative 4	05.03.2021	Expert on women's issues in Chamber of Labor	Female	
Labor representatives 5	09.03.2021	Women's department at Yunion	Female	Two informants
Labor representatives 6	10.03.2021	AUGE-UG (Alternative, Green & Independent Unionists)	Female	Two informants