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**Intersectional Analysis of the Climate Justice Movement:
Austrian Visions for Climate Justice**

Master thesis

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I have written this master thesis independently and solely by myself. All the sources and literature I have used are duly cited. The thesis was not used in order to obtain a different or the same degree at another institution.

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracovala samostatně. Všechny použité prameny a literatura byly řádně citovány. Práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the underlying concepts behind climate justice as perceived by the members of the Austrian climate justice movement, as well as to what extent these concepts are intersectional. The goal of the research was to unravel the activists' understanding of climate justice, both as a theoretical concept and as a lived reality. It applies an intersectional perspective while drawing on feminist research when ascertaining how the category of gender as well as other social categorisations such as those of class, social status, race etc. are approached by the movement. Ultimately, visions and utopias for a climate just world are employed as a tool to outline how climate justice would look like on the individual, the collective, and the global level.

Keywords: climate justice, intersectionality, gender, ecofeminism

Abstrakt

Tato práce zkoumá koncepty klimatické spravedlnosti tak, jak je vnímají členové*ky rakouského hnutí za klimatickou spravedlnost, a také to, do jaké míry jsou tyto koncepty intersekcionalní. Cílem výzkumu bylo odhalit, jak aktivisté*ky chápou klimatickou spravedlnost, jednak jako teoretický koncept, ale také jako žitou realitu. Při analýze toho, jak klimatické hnutí přistupuje ke kategorii genderu a dalším sociálním kategoriím, jako je třída, sociální status, rasa atd., uplatňuji intersekcionalní perspektivu a čerpám z feministického výzkumu. Vize a utopie klimaticky spravedlivého světa jsou zde použity jako nástroj k nastínění toho, jak by klimatická spravedlnost vypadala na individuální, kolektivní a globální úrovni.

Klíčová slova: klimatická spravedlnost, intersekcionalita, gender, ekofeminismus

List of abbreviations

CJ - climate justice

CJM - climate justice movement

COP - Conference of the parties (UN climate change conference)

FFF - Fridays for future

NIMBY - not in my backyard

#NoDAPL - protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline

SC - System change not climate change

XR - Extinction Rebellion

Foreword

This thesis is a result of many years of – discontinuous – work and countless obstacles. When I first wrote the thesis proposal, it was October 2019. None of us knew what was ahead and that the next two plus years would look so much different than what we knew before the pandemic. The original plan was to conduct research in three different contexts: the post-socialist (Czech Republic), the transnational (Austria), and the indigenous (Canada). I was awarded two scholarships, the AKTION scholarship to conduct research in Vienna, and the Charles University scholarship to be able to dedicate time to indigenous studies at McGill University and conduct research in Canada. However, the Covid-19 outbreak drastically changed my plans. Most of the time I spent in Vienna, there was either a full lockdown and/or other social distancing policies and my stay in Canada was cancelled entirely as no exchanges were taking place in Autumn 2020. When I moved back to the Czech Republic, I wanted to conduct research in Prague, but that was impossible due to various health and personal reasons, long covid being one of them.

I was a completely different person when I started writing and when I finished. Also the whole world, as well as the topic I was researching, changed significantly. Ecofeminism has regained popularity in the Czech Republic in recent years and while I had to explain what it meant in 2019, in 2023 I am suddenly invited to participate in events, exhibitions and lectures dedicated to ecofeminism. Personally, I think that it was the term climate justice which broadened the scope of what caring about the environment means and allowed us to look at people truly as part of the environment, and therefore to view social justice as directly linked and interconnected with climate justice.

However, I think that this thesis represents a certain zeitgeist, spirit of the times we all had to live through. Despite all the obstacles, I am extremely grateful for all my privileges. My heart is with all those who were less fortunate, for whom their intersectional reality meant negative impacts on health, social status, income, as well as further devastating consequences of the climate crisis.

1. Introduction

We are in the state of a climate crisis, and given the urgency of the situation, it is necessary for social science research to react to it. The climate justice movement is a domain which focuses on equitable solutions to the current climate crisis. However, it is of great importance to examine climate justice also from a feminist perspective. Especially when it comes to the theoretical concept of climate justice, the climate and social aspects are intertwined, and therefore we cannot think of climate justice without its social dimension. (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). Intersectional feminism in particular addresses not only the category of gender, but also other axes of discrimination such as race and class, which have a major impact in terms of how the climate crisis impacts individual lives. This is a central concern not only of climate justice scholarship, but also of (eco)feminist theory.

In recent years, the climate justice movement has been gaining enormous strength. In the countries of the Global North, 2019 appeared to be the year of Greta Thunberg and school climate strikes, however the worldwide climate justice protesters have been active for a much longer period. The more recent examples include protests during COP 21 in Paris in 2015, or the #NoDAPL protests on indigenous lands in the north of the United States. My research project into the climate justice movement is primarily concerned with its gender and intersectional dimensions. Even though various social scientists researching climate justice touch upon gender issues¹, gender has been rarely examined as the underlying conceptual framework on which the ideas of climate justice are being articulated. Therefore, I propose to examine how and if conceptualisations of climate justice critically reflect the social gender order as well as other types of social categorizations such as those of class and social status, race, ethnicity, disability, etc.

¹ E.g. Dankelman (2010), Agostino & Lizarde (2012), Terry (2009).

Macnagthen & Urry (1998, p. 15) assert that science still operates under the erroneous modernist assumption that people (culture) are separate from their physical environment (nature). What does this mean in terms of the underlying concepts behind climate justice? Richard Twine (1997) argues that as long as hegemonic masculinity is built upon the logic of Cartesian dualism and masculinity as such is seen as directly linked to reason, it means that new ecological practices can go as far as to challenge patriarchy and consequently those participating in such practices are likely to be exposed to other emancipatory discourses as well. Considering that the ‘western’ positivist conceptualisation of science (on which the environmental debate is largely based on) is androcentric, does the climate justice movement reflect upon this? On the surface, it is obvious that people of all genders play an active part in the climate justice movement. But does the patriarchal principal function in the climate justice movement as well? And does dissolving one hierarchy really mean that all others are more likely to fall apart?

In my thesis, I examine gender and intersectionality in the climate justice movement by focusing on various aspects in which it plays an integral part. The main goal of my research is to understand the underlying concepts behind climate justice by looking at the discourses various actors operate within. I focus on how is climate justice understood both as a theoretical concept and as a lived reality, how is it perceived by the members of the climate justice movement (CJM), and to what extent is this conceptualisation intersectional. Furthermore, I analyse how the climate justice movement operates with the category of gender. I’m interested in what context is it used, when is it omitted and what is the relationship of the CJM to concepts related to gender and gender equality – feminism and patriarchy. Additionally, in what way do the climate justice activists critically reflect other types of social categorisations such as those of class, social status, race, ethnicity, disability etc.? And finally, what is their vision for climate justice? What types of imaginaries does it contain and how is it framed?

By conducting interviews with members of the Austrian climate justice movement, I examine the relationship between gender, intersectionality and the climate

justice movement, taking into account intersectional perspective while drawing on feminist research. Based on my data collection, I conduct a feminist critical discourse analysis in order to ascertain how the conceptions of climate justice are produced and reproduced as well as represented in the movement.

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, I examine the main theoretical concepts present within my research, as well as within climate justice activism. In order to understand the intricate interplay between gender, intersectionality and climate justice, it is necessary to start by assessing the relationship between people, and specifically the relationship between women and other marginalised groups, and nature. I therefore begin by reviewing ecofeminism as a key link between gender studies and climate justice. This is followed by intersectional environmentalism as a tool that is less academic, but closer to the lived reality of the participants. I also introduce intersectionality and climate justice, as they are an integral part of the research.

2.1. Ecofeminism

The most notable connection between gender and the environment has been made within ecofeminism. The main premise at the heart of ecofeminism is that in patriarchy, there is a direct link between the oppression of women and subjugation of nature (Mellor, 1997, p. 1, Vance, 1997, p. 60). The structure which enables it, is in some instances specified further, not simply as patriarchy, but rather as a capitalist patriarchy or heteropatriarchy. The threat to ecofeminism could be described as a symbolic white patriarchal male, however, it tends to be the capitalist white patriarchal male in position of power, who is most threatening not only to the environment, but also to women. According to Mellor, ecofeminism “takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women.” (Mellor, 1997, p. 1). Therefore, the domination is by some referred to as rape (Collard, 1988, p. 1). Ecofeminism isn’t simply a combination of a gender perspective with an environmental perspective combined, but rather a distinctive theory in its own right and with its own history. Ecofeminism can be thought of both in terms

of philosophical theory and activist practice. In the following paragraphs, I am focusing on the history of ecofeminist theory.

The term ecofeminism was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le féminisme ou la mort*² in 1974 and has since undergone various transformations. Even though its inception dates back to the 70's, the most prolific ecofeminist theorists published the bulk of the key texts in the 1990's, especially in the U.S. As a parallel to feminisms in plural, it is also more precise to consider ecofeminisms, rather than one ecofeminism with unified traits.

Mary Mellor (1997) distinguishes between three main types of ecofeminism – affinity, social (or socialist) and Global South ecofeminism, and despite the differences, the main feature all ecofeminists agree on, is that there is a significant connection between gender and nature, despite associating it with different reasons. Additionally, the majority of ecofeminists consider women more likely to be involved in the transformation of society facing the environmental crisis – whether that is based on gender essentialist arguments as in the case of affinity ecofeminism, or on gender socialisation, as with socialist ecofeminism.

Historically, ecofeminism has been criticised especially for its gender essentialism and as the climate justice movement usually works with intersectional feminism, it is socialist ecofeminism, which proves especially useful in terms of understanding the movement. Ynestra King perceives the “(...) domination of men over women as the 'prototype' of other forms of domination (...)” (Mellor, 1997, p. 59). Twine (1997) argues that as long as hegemonic masculinity is built upon the logic of Cartesian dualism and masculinity as such is seen as directly linked to reason, it means that new ecological practices can go as far as to challenge patriarchy and consequently those participating in such practices are likely to be exposed to other emancipatory discourses as well. If the climate justice movement implements such new ecological

² Feminism or death in English. The first English translation is from Verso (2022).

practices, the masculinities present in the movement can threaten the patriarchal social order and contribute to equality and justice.

For the climate justice movement, the critique of capitalism is an especially important aspect, and within ecofeminist arguments, we can trace a clear line from the critique of the patriarchal system to the critique of capitalism. Carolyn Merchant argues that the environmental problems are “rooted in the rise of capitalist patriarchy and the ideology that the Earth and nature can be exploited for human progress through technology” (Merchant in Mellor, 1997, p. 62).

Besides gender essentialism, ecofeminism has also been criticised for its cultural appropriation. Since its inception, it has been drawing inspiration from indigenous knowledge and especially from indigenous understanding of nature and the non-human world. I find it crucial to emphasise this indigenous inspiration and simultaneously highlight that the thoughts which ecofeminism represents have been around much earlier and are until this day an integral part of many indigenous cultures. It is therefore problematic to consider ecofeminist ideas as something new or even as something distinctively “western” and “modern”. Valentine & Henderson argue that “Native American women have operated on the principles of ecofeminism for centuries.” (2009, p. 4). Additionally, most indigenous communities are, and have been, truly embracing human embeddedness in nature, which Mellor considers to be a cornerstone of ecofeminism (Mellor, 1997, p. 2). Despite some voices which disregard feminism all together as a colonial tool, other authors may claim the contrary, such as Andrea Smith who concludes that “feminism is actually an indigenous concept that has been co-opted by white women” (Smith, 2017, p. 1). It is not possible to use ecofeminist theory without recognising the history of its cultural appropriation and the complexity of concepts, which are considered ecofeminist.

As this is an academic text, there is an overrepresentation of academic approaches to the links between gender and nature originating predominantly in English speaking countries, and privileged perspectives of ecofeminist academics mostly coming from the Global North. I would therefore like to recognise and acknowledge

traditional and indigenous knowledge systems which I consider by no means inferior to any academic work.

Claiming that women have a prominent or privileged epistemological position in solving the environmental crisis humanity is facing, is a dangerous assumption, as there is a threat of homogenising women's experiences (Mellor, 1997, p. 102). When we look at the Global South ecofeminism in relation to postcolonial feminist critique as conceptualised by Mohanty, such a reductionist position simply isn't viable. Mohanty (1986) criticises this discursive colonisation of the multiplicities of lives of women from the Global South by western science (including feminist science), as well as reducing women only to their gender identities and omitting other aspects such as class or race.

However, whether women are usually the first to notice the impacts of environmental degradation and therefore more likely to consider it urgent, is an entirely different question. Women and other marginalised groups are also bearing the brunt of the impacts of environmental degradation³, so it would be problematic to position them in a space where they are both most significantly impacted and are supposed to solve an issue they are the victims of.

2.1.1. Hierarchical dualisms and the logic of domination

Within ecofeminism, the issue of dismantling hierarchical dualisms is absolutely crucial, as it reveals the interconnection between the domination of patriarchal systems not only over women, but also over nature and other marginalised groups. The main issue with hierarchical dualisms is that they are a structure which supports the institutionalisation of power relations (Mellor, 1997, p. 112). Dismantling it would result in a fairer world for everybody to whom the logic of domination is applied, therefore not only women, but also ethnic minorities, gender minorities, people with disabilities etc., as well as nature.

Logic of domination, as outlined by Karen Warren (1990), illustrates the assumptions on which domination of men over women is based. Warren starts by

³ See for example Agostino & Lizarde (2012).

arguing that women are identified with nature and the realm of the physical, while men are identified with the "human" and the realm of the mental. Based on this assumption, she deduces that whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to whatever is identified with the "human" and the realm of the mental. Consequently, women are inferior and men are superior. Furthermore, whoever is superior is justified to exploit the inferior. Thus, she concludes that men are justified in subordinating women.

When examining the logic of domination from an ecofeminist perspective, we can identify similarities between women and other marginalised groups, as well as examine the implications it has on people's relationship to nature. The duality between the dominating and dominated has a centre stage here. As illustrated by Val Plumwood "Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast to reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilized, the non-human world, matter, physicality, and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness. In other words, nature includes everything that reason excludes." (1993, p. 20).

The systems of oppressions which are key for this thesis are capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism, as often referred to by the activists. Within ecofeminism, all of these systems are considered to translate into how humans treat nature. Therefore, structural transformation is necessary in order to reach equality and justice for human and non-human others. In other words, we need to heal the root cause instead of managing the symptoms.

2.1.2. Intersectional ecofeminism

Ecofeminism has been considering aspects of intersectionality since its inception, however, these were usually limited to class, race and age. Since the emergence of the term intersectionality in 1989, ecofeminism was able, according to A. E. Kings, to address its essentialist and exclusionary past (2017, p. 64). Intersectionality, when used as a tool within ecofeminism can widen our understanding of relationships

between humans and the environment, while not constricting them to any single-axis identities. Kings points out that the main foundation of intersectional ecofeminism is that we need to reach intersectional liberation, which will take into account all intersecting social categorisations, instead of focusing only on liberation of women or nature (Kings, 2017, p. 71).

Intersectional aspects of ecofeminism can also be found in queer ecofeminism. Greta Gaard emphasises the historical bias where various oppressed groups were seen as closer to nature, which justified the oppression, while queer people are being devalued through being against nature (Gaard, 1997, p. 119). Arguments framed by nature – regardless of whether it was closer to, or against nature – have been often used to justify the existing social order, instead of actually helping us understand nature (Fausto-Sterling 1985) from (Gaard 1997: 122).

2.2. Intersectional environmentalism

Besides various streams of ecofeminism, another framework within which gender and intersectionality are linked to environmentalism, is intersectional environmentalism. The approach was defined by a black American climate activist Leah Thomas, first on social media following the murder of George Floyd in 2020⁴ and later on in her book *The Intersectional Environmentalist* in 2022. She defines intersectional environmentalism as an “(...) inclusive approach to environmentalism that advocates for the protection of both people and the planet.” (Thomas, 2022, p. 39). Therefore positing that climate justice is directly linked to social justice and one shouldn't be regarded without the other, otherwise it will hurt either people or the planet – or both. According to Thomas' interpretation, the difference between ecofeminism and intersectional environmentalism is that the latter focuses on all intersections and a wider

⁴ The Instagram post from 28th of May 2020 which went viral reads “Environmentalists For Black Lives Matter” and is followed by a definition of intersectional environmentalism. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CAvaxdRJRxu/>

array of injustices as well as marginalised groups, not only those related to gender and the patriarchy (Thomas, 2022, p. 40).

While intersectional environmentalism significantly overlaps with intersectional ecofeminism, I find the main value of the term in the fact that it doesn't contain the word feminism and therefore might be more widely acceptable. At least within the American climate justice context, intersectional environmentalism seemed to gain unprecedented popularity, and even though it is not yet firmly established as an academic concept, it should most definitely be reckoned with.

2.3. Intersectionality

The term intersectionality originates in an article by Kimberlé Crenshaw published in 1989⁵, relating to the intersections of discrimination based on sex and race, particularly to the situation of black women in the U.S. However, the foundation of the theoretical framework was laid earlier within the black feminist theory. The Combahee River Collective Statement provides a great starting point into what it is to experience a reality that is dominated by various forms of oppression that are intertwined and therefore mutually inseparable. Within the statement, the oppression along racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class lines is explicitly mentioned as well as the fact that these major systems of oppressions are interlocking (Combahee River Collective, 1977, p. 362).

In this thesis, I am approaching intersectionality as a dynamic category, a combination of discrimination(s) and privilege(s) which is unique to a particular situation. In line with this, I view intersectionality in terms of simultaneity, putting matrix thinking into its centre instead of thinking about oppressions as being cumulative (May, 2015, p. 22). This approach is useful as a tool against homogenisation and simplification of lived realities of the activists. It examines intersectionality as a form

⁵ Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), pp. 139 - 167.

of social action which is defined in terms of what it can do rather than what it is (May, 2015, p. 19).

Intersectionality became an important part of feminist theory and practice and it is also a highly recognised term within the climate justice movement. I am further elaborating on issues connected to intersectionality as thematised within the climate justice movement in chapter 4.4.

2.4. Climate justice

The theoretical framing of climate justice is not unified and comes from different sources. Schlosberg and Collins (2014) identify three approaches to climate justice based on their source – they differentiate between academic, NGO, and grassroots perspective. When referring to climate justice, I am using the wide grassroots conceptualisation, as outlined in this chapter. Schlosberg and Collins emphasise the importance of environmental justice stemming from grassroots movements and the importance of knowing the history of such development. Even though the Austrian context differs from the American context where most of the environmental and climate justice theory originates from, the main topics correlate to those used by the Austrian climate justice movement.

Climate justice is based on “principles of social justice, democratic accountability and participation, and ecological sustainability” (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014, p. 12) and topics which are considered related to CJ also include the rights of women and indigenous people, as well as historical responsibility. These principles are significant not only by themselves in an isolated form, but also as symptoms of wider systemic conditions. According to this approach, the solution to climate justice can’t therefore be found only in partial changes, but requires a deeper restructuring of the existing unequal system, which produces the injustices.

2.4.1. The climate & the environment

The concept of climate justice has evolved from environmental justice. Therefore, the understanding of what the environment and climate is, determines how environmental or climate justice is framed. Environmental justice theory was significantly shaped by the idea that it is impossible to separate people from their environment. Instead of understanding the environment as nature or wilderness, something that is “out there”, this shift meant that suddenly the environment was defined as what is right here – and therefore where there are people (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014, p. 2). The important aspect of such conceptualisation is especially its racial and indigenous dimension.

2.4.2. Intersectionality and climate justice

Mohai (2018) concludes that communities of colour in the U.S. are disproportionately burdened by environmental hazards and that racial composition is the determining aspect in terms of environmental injustice – unlike poverty per se. On the example of the Flint water crisis, he illustrates that it is not simply a case of singular environmental injustice, but a symptomatic example of the systemic nature of environmental injustice, for which local governing bodies are responsible (Mohai, 2018, p. 20). In such instances, a parallel can be drawn between Judith Butler’s frames of war (2009) and her question of what are – and what aren’t – grievable lives. The framing of violence by Butler and the framing of environmental hazard within environmental justice discourse, can be seen as operating on a similar level, as they both not only impact different communities differently, but the narratives by the government and media often differ drastically as well.

2.4.3. Climate justice in Austria

Glatter-Götz et al. (2019) argue that unlike the U.S., environmental injustice in Austria doesn't correlate with the racial composition, but rather with the immigrant status, even though both contexts show certain similarities in terms of socioeconomic inequalities. This is significant because, similarly as with the situation in the U.S., only one factor – in this case socio-economic status – is not sufficient to determine the unequal distribution of environmental burdens. Even though race and ethnicity can overlap with the immigrant status, it isn't necessarily so. The biggest group of immigrants in Austria are Germans, but as the immigrants from EU-15 countries bear no correlation to exposition of environmental burdens, they identify that it is immigrants from Turkey, former Yugoslavia and the new EU countries (those who joined in 2004), who are most impacted by unequal distribution of environmental burdens (Glatter-Götz et al., 2019).

The role of immigrant status (and also the type of immigrant status as described above), is a key point when it comes to Austrian climate activism and the understanding of intersectionality in the CJM. According to Wending (2016), environmental impacts in Austria have been mostly studied in relation to health and livelihoods, however, their racial and social class aspect was absent.

2.4.4. Transformative adaptation

Issues related to climate justice are often based on solving the existing problems, however, another perspective which can be used is that of transformative adaptation. Instead of being reactive, transformative adaptation can be reconstructive (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014, p. 12), and therefore focus on positive imaginaries and positive narratives. There are many existing examples of transformative adaptation, focusing on issues ranging from economical transition to transportation and food. Food coops, such as those organised around community supported agriculture, transition towns with

alternative currencies, or community-based sharing of cargo bikes are just a few examples.

3. Methodological framework

This chapter provides a detailed outline of the research methodology as well as gives a sketch of the research strategy. I am approaching methodology in a broad way, which involves the paradigm, ontology, epistemology, as well as research methods used. I will also elaborate upon the specificities of feminist research and advantages of using a qualitative research approach. Furthermore, I will reflect my positionality, outline the research purpose together with the research questions, elaborate further on the data collection as well as data analysis. The end of this chapter is dedicated to ethical considerations.

3.1. Paradigm

Guba and Lincoln define paradigms as “(...) basic belief systems based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions.” (1994, p. 107). Ontology specifies the nature of reality, while epistemology conceptualises the nature of relationship between the researchers and what they know, and the chosen methodology outlines the rules of how the researchers approach what they believe can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2004, p. 11-12). Paradigm therefore represents not only the potential ways in which we perceive, experience and structure reality, but also the possibilities of how we can approach investigating reality. Guba and Lincoln link the paradigms with theologies and cosmologies, for instance, because similarly, there is a certain faith needed as it is impossible to determine their truthfulness (1994, p. 107).

My research is framed by a constructivist paradigm, where people’s own understandings and constructions inform their perceptions of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It is also important to keep in mind that as much as different realities can be considered constructions, they form the experience of people’s lives and are therefore

most certainly real in their consequences. This is also why I have decided to use concepts that correspond to my participant's perception of reality.

3.2. Feminist research approach

Together with Ramazanoglu and Holland (2004), I recognize the plurality within feminist thought and refrain from assuming that there is one particular 'right' feminist methodology. Having said that, I believe that there is a common ground within the plurality of feminist methodologies with the main characteristics being a) an attempt to establish a non-hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the communication partners (Reinharz, 1992, p. 32, Letherby, 2003, p. 83); b) transparency and reciprocity in terms of both the research process as well as in the relationship with the communication partners (Letherby, 2003, p. 83); c) recognising and understanding the plurality of the participants' perspectives and 'truths' (Reinharz, 1992, p. 52); d) recognition of positivist science as androcentric (not universal) and therefore in need of critique as well as an alternative way of approaching theory and methodology (Reinharz, 1992, p. 46, Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2004, p. 15).

Power is a focal point in most feminist research. It is therefore essential to be transparent and reflective on "who is doing the knowing" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2004, p. 10), who is producing knowledge, who has the right or perhaps authority to distribute it further, and whose knowledge is likely to be widely accepted. Together with Ramazanoglu and Holland (2004, p. 10) and many other feminists, I therefore consider feminist research highly political.

I don't consider knowledge as something that can be objectively deducted based on scientifically proven evidence, but rather as something that is highly dependent on our constructions of realities and embodied experience and therefore can't be separated or considered independent of our pre-existing conceptions in any way.

All the aforementioned points were taken into consideration while designing the research. During the research itself, the conditions were heavily influenced by the

Covid-19 pandemic, which often complicated their implementation, but I had attempted to be as transparent and non-hierarchical as the conditions allowed me to be.

3.3. Qualitative research approach

The great benefits of using qualitative research methods are especially the chance of providing holistic context, the inclusion of meaning in regards to human behaviour, providing emic view instead of creating all-encompassing theories, applicability of general findings on individual cases and inclusion of inductive reasoning⁶. As I am interested in the underlying concepts of climate justice as perceived by the members of the climate justice movement, I am inquiring into their experience with the objective of acquiring their own understanding. Therefore, it was the research question that guided me towards the qualitative research approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1999, p. 11).

However, I recognise that quantitative research methods can be very beneficial in terms of studying climate justice. In my particular case though, as the main aim of the research is to discover the motives and self-narratives (rather than quantifying the answers), using quantitative methods wouldn't allow me to find answers to my research questions.

3.4. Research purpose and research questions

Below, I would like to elaborate further on the purpose of my research as well as outline the research questions.

⁶ Here I have used Guba and Lincoln's (1994, p. 106) intraparadigm critiques of quantitative approach, but reversed them.

3.4.1. Research purpose

The aim of this research was to find out whether conceptions of climate justice are (as perceived by the activists themselves) truly intersectional. I am curious about how gender is being (or perhaps not being) addressed in the movement and to what extent (if at all) the activists reflect upon other types of social categorisations such as class and social status, race, ethnicity, disability, etc.

Even though various social scientists researching climate justice touch upon gender issues, gender has been rarely examined as the underlying conceptual framework on which the ideas of climate justice are being articulated. I was curious whether the activists consider gender an important aspect of climate justice, and ultimately whether the multitude of voices present in the movement is being heard.

The research topic has emerged from a thought I had during a seminar on environmental sociology, where we critiqued western positivist science and discussed its role in the climate debate. Activists often use (positivist) science-based evidence as a tool in public debates (see for example *Are we armed only with peer-reviewed science?*⁷). I started to wonder whether activists are aware of the limitations that such arguments may present, to what extent are they being critical, and if they perhaps use these arguments strategically in order to achieve their goals, whilst being fully aware of its limitations. From this, the idea of researching climate justice has emerged as it is still a relatively new term which accommodates various points of critique and can go as far as to challenge the current system altogether.

I would like to enrich the climate justice debate with perspectives directly from the ground. My aim was to amplify the multitude of voices that exists within the movement, and not all of these voices are being heard⁸. Besides that, I was interested in exploring whether this might be a unique opportunity for the activists to reflect on their own positions. It is understandable that movements tend to be presented (or present themselves) in a uniform way. However, the non-hierarchical organisations within the

⁷ Bowman (2010). Are we armed only with peer-review science? The Scientization of Politics in the Radical Environmental Movement in Skrismhire, S (Eds.) *Future Ethics*, (1 ed., pp. 173-196). Bloomsbury Publishing.

⁸ Many examples of this can be found in *The Intersectional Environmentalist* (Thomas, 2022), for example in the essay by Nā Kera Sherwood-O'Regan (pp. 41-51).

CJM, are characteristic for their inclusivity and non-hierarchical structure, the multitude of voices as well as open discussions at plenums and that should be taken into consideration. I was interested in what happens when a group that is internally diversified, allows for widening of the perspective and truly incorporates voices that are usually not being heard, as well as in the reasons why this might not be the case.

3.4.2. Research questions

As I have stated above, my main interest is in the overlap between gender, intersectionality and climate justice. My main research question is as follows:

- What are the underlying concepts behind climate justice as perceived by the members of the climate justice movement⁹ and to what extent are these concepts intersectional?

Furthermore, I am interested in finding out the following:

- How do climate justice activists operate with the category of gender?
- In what way do they critically reflect other types of social categorisations such as those of class and social status, race, ethnicity, disability, etc.?
- What is the activists' vision for climate justice?

3.5. Positioning

In line with the feminist research approach, admitting my subjectivity and social situation is a necessity (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2004, p. 16). As in every other research, the data I have collected were shaped by my positionality – both in terms of

⁹ In this research meaning climate justice movement represented by the activists I have interviewed.

their scope and the content. I find it important to emphasise that positionality as well as my active involvement in the field are important to acknowledge, despite the level of self-reflexivity I have attempted to achieve throughout the research. On the other hand, empathy and the humaneness of the researcher is often considered an asset in social research. As Caton asserts: "The researcher's identity and values cannot be excluded from the research process, and even if this were possible, it would not be desirable, as a researcher's humanity is precisely what endows her with the capacity for empathy, a prerequisite for understanding others' worlds." (2014, p. 130).

The simple fact that I am enrolled in a Gender Studies programme predetermined my interest as well as what I am likely to find in the field. Besides that, my interest in the intersection of feminism and climate justice was pivotal in the research. Towards the participants, this interest was presented both as academic, as well as personal. I have entered the field as a white middle class cis female researcher from Prague (even though having an international background came up occasionally as well), who is linked to the Institute of Social Ecology at the University of Life Sciences Vienna (BOKU). Throughout the research, my position was being shaped as well as incited to be specified further by the participants, so that more attributes were added – such as someone with left-wing political views, anarchist-leaning, anti-racist, queer etc., most of which were either implicitly present in the initially outlined characteristics or already roughly known by the participants. However, I consider positionality as situated rather than given or rigid, and besides pointing out the basic characteristics with which I was entering the field, I find it important to emphasise, that I perceive positionality as a process (Laliberté & Schurr, 2015, p. 3) and therefore as something that was developing throughout the research as well as with each of the participants.

All of the research participants knew the topic of my thesis – they have therefore heard the word intersectionality even though intersectionality as a term didn't appear in any of the interview questions¹⁰. It is likely that they have been influenced by it and perhaps emphasised some aspects of their experience which they otherwise wouldn't have articulated. However, I don't consider this a disadvantage as I recognise that most

¹⁰ The interview guide is attached as Appendix 2.

of them were very analytical in their thinking and issues linked to intersectionality would most likely come up eventually.

3.6. Data collection

I consider myself what Guba and Lincoln characterise as a "*passionate participant*" who is dedicated to representing the multitude of voices present in the field (1994, p. 115). I am very passionate about the topic of this thesis, and I would have attended many of the events, lectures and workshops even if I wasn't conducting the research. Because of this, it was sometimes difficult to draw a line between the research and the rest of my life. Often, I felt that my participation is defined by my embodied experience, which by itself would be interesting to analyse.

The original scope of the research was completely different and as the Covid-19 pandemic was progressing, I had to change a lot of my plans. Despite being most interested in conducting participant observation, it proved impossible as most of the activism has moved online during my whole stay in Vienna. I also rephrased some of the research questions and instead of focusing on a particular organisation or a segment of the movement, I have broadened my scope of communication partners to all those who self-identified as climate justice activists. Even though I didn't have a strict understanding of what being a member of the CJM looks like, a very useful guiding question was whether they attend the Climate camp, as it is the main climate justice event in Vienna, which takes place on an annual basis. Because I wasn't able to observe a particular field per se, I have focused on the perception of the activists regarding climate justice as represented within the semi-structured interviews. As the world was getting really gloomy and there wasn't much space for positive emotions, I attempted to create a space where they could envision a positive future – a climate justice utopia. In the end, it is these imaginaries of the utopian future which seem to be the biggest added value of my research.

3.6.1. Timeline

The first phase of the research took place in Vienna from March until June 2020. That was the time when I wrote the first chapters of this thesis whilst simultaneously conducting research. The whole process was heavily influenced by the Covid-19 outbreak and the special measures which remained in place for most of my stay. From the 16th of March onwards, there were strict rules regarding social gatherings in Austria. This research can therefore additionally provide an insight into what were the activists' thoughts in the midst of the first wave of pandemic. The context in which my research was conducted influences not only the type of data I was able to collect, but also the scope and type of people I was able to interview.

After leaving Vienna, I had the privilege of dedicating some more time to this thesis, but then unfortunately had to take a long break from writing due to health and personal reasons. Even though I had quite a lot of material from before, I returned to writing in Autumn 2023 and had to rewrite, reevaluate and rethink many of the things I already had. Some of the analysis was therefore done more than 3 years after I collected the data and might have influenced the findings.

3.6.2. Interviews

The main research method used were semi-structured interviews. As the goal of my thesis was to find out underlying concepts of climate justice, as well as to what extent these concepts are intersectional, it required a thorough emic analysis. Semi-structured interviews enabled me to proceed in an organised way while also allowing space for the participants to articulate their ideas and thoughts.

According to Reinharz (1992), the advantages of using feminist interview research include the access of participants' individual perceptions of reality, its open nature as well as the friendly relationships that emerge from such type of research and allow for involving the participants in the process of analysis. The interviews were conducted in the most non-hierarchical way possible. Even though I was the one asking

the questions and therefore in a sense, I had more power than my research participants, I wanted them to resonate with the research. I included open-ended questions encouraging them to express anything they consider important in terms of climate justice, let them choose the time and place of our meetings as well as the length of the interview and always asked whether there was anything I could do for them from my position. I tried to give back to the participants as much as possible through sharing my knowledge and answering their questions in an attempt to break the usual ‘male paradigm of inquiry’ (Letherby, 2003, p. 83).

The interviews were conducted both in person and via online communication platforms, depending on the participants’ preference and the current safety measures. In total, there were 7 interviews, lasting between 45 minutes and almost 2 hours. The interviews were recorded (only the audio even if it was a video call) and then transcribed.

3.6.2.1. Selection of the participants

Due to the state of emergency, the initial interviews had to be conducted online. Because the Covid-19 pandemic brought a lot of uncertainty and changes into the activists’ lives, the beginning stages of the research were very slow. I didn’t have much choice than to contact the people I met personally during the first two weeks of my stay and make use of the contacts I already had. That was quite difficult because I was counting on meeting the activists multiple times at all the planned events which ended up being cancelled and therefore, I didn’t have their contact details and often didn’t even know their full names. Also, within the CJM it is not uncommon to have shared email addresses, where the responsibility for each email address works on a rotating basis, which makes it slightly more complicated to contact an individual person.

That is where my own activism and contacts were invaluable as I was able to ask friends (and friends of friends) which allowed me to connect with people I wouldn’t have been able to reach otherwise. A part of my strategy was also asking during the interviews whether they would recommend someone who would be interested in

participating. The snowball method of sampling has proved to work very well and also allowed for a more diversified range of participants. However, due to the difficult circumstances, many planned interviews were cancelled or rescheduled and some of them never ended up materialising.

3.7. Data analysis

The data have been analysed by using a feminist critical discourse analysis, which focuses on scrutinising the existing power relations and gendered assumptions, and how these are used (created, produced and reproduced) within a particular discourse (Lazar, 2014, p. 182). This approach is especially useful because it examines questions of social justice from a feminist perspective and contextualises them on the background of existing power relations. Climate justice is directly related to social justice and as the feminist critical discourse analysis actively works with the concept of feminist imagination, transformation and social change (Lazar, 2014), it is ideal for analysing not only the conceptual understanding of climate justice, but also the climate justice utopias. Additionally, feminist imagination as proposed by Forsberg (2010), is framed politically and contains an aspect of struggles for social change.

Throughout the research, I have been simultaneously collecting and interpreting the data, which allowed me to refrain from a linear research approach. Instead, it resulted in a continuous interaction between the data and the analysis, which Kennedy and Thornberg call an iterative approach (2018, p. 49). I was using open coding while analysing the data, which resulted in a set of inductive codes to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1999). Even though one approach towards coding can be simply described as a method of indexing the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26), in my research approach, I consider coding as an integral part of the analysis (Strauss, 1987). Thanks to this, I have also decided to rephrase some of the research questions and focus on positive climate justice narratives which seemed to be really needed during the pandemic.

3.8. Ethical considerations

Kingston defines empowerment, reflexivity and reciprocity as key principles of feminist research (2019, p. 2). I made sure to flatten the hierarchy between me and the research participants in every way possible, allowed space for the participants' involvement as well as offered to help them in return. The fact that I was the one asking questions as well as possessing the interpretative authority in terms of the data analysis gave me more power, but I tried to include their feedback and remarks as much as possible.

Before the research, all of the participants either signed an informed consent (see Appendix 1) or allowed me to record an audio consent upon reading the informed consent form. They knew that they had the right not to answer any questions that would make them feel uncomfortable as well as to end the interview any time they wished. They were all anonymised and some of them have chosen to pick their own pseudonym at the beginning of the interview. All of the interviews were recorded, but I was the only person who had access to the recordings, the transcripts and raw notes. Drawing on Guillemin & Gillam (2004) in terms of qualitative research ethics, I did my best to be mindful in terms of both procedural ethics as well as "ethics in practice" while aiming to be as reflexive as possible throughout the whole research.

A crucial ethical aspect I have decided to take into consideration, was to not include information on specific organisations, as I originally intended. In one of the interviews, I was told about a case in Germany where master theses were used to spy on activists in order to reveal internal structures of the movement. This was phrased as a reason why activists and organisations within the CJM might be hesitant to participate in research. Considering the seriousness of such possibility, especially given that this thesis is in English, a decision was made to not reveal any details about the particular organisations besides information that is publicly available or well known. I have also focused on the content of anonymised accounts and made sure that they don't include information that might hurt the movement or the participants.

4. Intersectional analysis of the climate justice movement

The goal of this chapter is to introduce the findings of my thesis by answering the research questions. The first subchapter focuses on the climate justice movement. Firstly, I examine how the activists view the CJM itself. I continue by focusing on their perspectives on hierarchies within non-hierarchical organisations in the movement. Consequently, I stress their perception of urgency in terms of acting on climate justice.

In the second subchapter, I unravel the activists' understanding of climate justice, both as a theoretical concept and as a lived reality. Based on the interviews conducted, I reveal two approaches to climate justice as well as elaborate on how climate justice is understood in relation to geographical location. Furthermore, I examine the relationship between climate justice, feminism and anti-racism as conceptualised by the activists. I then continue by identifying what is considered to be the source of climate injustices. Subsequently, I analyse what is the activists' understanding of the root cause of climate justice.

The third subchapter is dedicated to the relationship between gender and climate justice on one hand, and gender and the climate justice movement on the other. I identify a contrast between the understanding of gender and feminism in the data, and explain why it is important in terms of interpreting the role of gender in the climate justice movement.

In the fourth subchapter, different aspects of intersectionality are discussed. I start by elaborating on how intersectionality itself is being understood in the movement, and continue by outlining the main social categorisations which were most frequently thematised by the activists, as well as illustrate how they were used and how it shapes the intersectional understanding of climate justice.

And finally, the last subchapter is dedicated to visions and utopias for a climate just world. I start by explaining where the need for utopias comes from. Subsequently,

I briefly introduce the three levels of change which play an important part in climate justice solutions – the individual, the collective, and the global. And I conclude by introducing the visions and utopias themselves.

4.1. Climate justice movement

We are a very white, educated, middle-class, academic bubble.

Alma

The question of who is part of the climate justice movement is not entirely clear and I didn't want to limit the activists' own perceptions of it. Within the interviews, the following organisations were mentioned as being part of the movement – System change not climate change, Climate camp, Fridays for future, Extinction rebellion, Global 2000, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace. However, the list is certainly not complete and it wasn't a question that seemed pressing in the interview accounts. Also, experiences with and connections to German climate justice activism, especially Ende Gelände and Hambi bleibt, were absolutely crucial.

4.1.1. Hierarchy of knowledge

Hierarchies are not necessarily bad. There's a lot of bad hierarchies, but not every hierarchy is bad.

Tim

When focusing on the movement, anti-hierarchical structures play a significant role. This is why I would like to elaborate on this further, because it connects to how the movement views privilege and hierarchies. In the climate justice movement, many organisations have a non-hierarchical organisational structure. This stems from the value of equality and its ultimate goal is to destroy hierarchies and make the movement

as inclusive as possible. Such a structure is considered inclusive in itself, however, the main obstacle in joining non-hierarchical organisations is usually the amount of free time this requires. Volunteering in general often means time investment from those participating, but in the case of non-hierarchical organisations, the time aspect seems to play an even more important role, as decisions might take longer due to the organisational structure.

Participating in the CJM requires spending unpaid time volunteering, which means that only people who have the privilege of spending a certain amount of free time can participate. It also means that those who have more time (which usually means more privilege), are then able to be more active. Even if we only focus on the hierarchy of knowledge and experience, which is often considered a useful hierarchy to have, we encounter a similar problem. As more time spent volunteering results in more experience, it not only plays a significant role in the knowledge hierarchy itself, but can also reproduce the privileges within the movement.

I mean, officially, and in our dreams, we don't have any hierarchies (...) But you just can't deny that there are hierarchies in how long people are involved, how much experience they have.

Alma

This is usually reflected within the movement, at least to some extent. Transparency is often the main tool which is used to make sure that the hierarchies of knowledge can be addressed in a constructive way.

Privilege is also pivotal in terms of motivation for participating in the CJM. Climate justice was being viewed as something with disproportionate negative effects on already marginalised people, and therefore fighting for climate justice was framed by responsibility to those, who can't fight themselves.

*I think [motivation for climate justice activism] has to do a lot with being privileged
and finding out about it.*

Flora

4.1.2. We have enough data, now we need to act

*People like this have to go. Trump has to go. All those mad men who are ruining the
world right now, they actually have to leave right now.*

Luna

Climate justice activism is connected to urgency. If we don't start acting right now, soon it will be too late. In the interviews, this urgency took many different forms – from focusing on Austrian politics and the lack of effective climate policies, to proposing that we need scientists researching climate change and climate justice to be more political. Not to only present their data, but embody the urgency with which we have to act through activist research. This thesis is a humble attempt to do exactly that.

4.2. Climate justice

*And the fact that people are even talking about climate justice – even if it is a watered
down version of the word – is a huge achievement that wasn't even thinkable [five]
years ago.*

Alma

The theory behind climate justice was introduced in chapter 2.4. Here, I would like to focus on how climate justice was conceptualised by the activists in the interviews. The key research finding is that there are two main approaches to climate justice. The first approach can be described as *climate first*, which deems the CJM as a space where strategically considering climate justice stripped of its social aspects and

focusing primarily on planetary survival, is essential in order to reach climate justice. The second approach can be described as *justice first*, where all types of justice are considered an integral part of climate justice and therefore they are not separable and have to be treated and approached simultaneously, also when communicating the goals of the climate justice movement.

When conceptualising climate justice, its relation to geographical location is key. The importance of global and local understanding of climate justice is further elaborated upon. Additionally, the differences between the local and the global perspective emerge.

The relationship between climate justice and feminism as well as between climate justice and anti-racism is essential in terms of understanding climate justice. Therefore, I focus on these relationships as conceptualised by the activists.

For conceptualisation of climate justice, it is crucial to identify what is considered to be the source of climate injustices, and therefore how we can find solutions to these injustices. Within the CJM, the source of injustices is framed by hierarchies, which I connect with ecofeminist theory.

Subsequently, disconnection is identified as the root cause of climate injustice. While the activists' perceptions of sources and reasons for climate injustices differed, disconnection was a common theme – whether it was disconnection from oneself, from nature, or from the “bigger picture”.

4.2.1. Climate first vs. justice first

If you want justice for the world, you have to go step by step. And the first step is not destroying the world. And then you can look at justice.

Tim

I wouldn't want to rate [different types of justice] or say climate justice is the biggest issue at the moment, that's probably a very privileged point of view.

Alma

The basic understanding of climate justice within the climate justice movement could be described as unanimous. All my communication partners were aware of the different aspects of climate justice and considered social justice an integral part of it. However, when focusing on the underlying concepts behind climate justice, and therefore solutions and strategy which need to be implemented if we want to see a world with climate justice, two very different approaches to climate justice surfaced.

Climate first is an approach that, despite seeing the interconnectedness of different aspects that contribute to climate justice, perceives its climate aspects as more urgent and important than its social aspects. It puts saving the planet above everything else through the argument that there will be no justice if there is no planet. This is important to understand within the wider context of strategy and goals of the climate justice movement towards the general public, because it is connected to the climate justice movement's strategy of only focusing on climate change and climate justice. Within the movement, this approach is represented most notably by the *Extinction Rebellion* and *Fridays for Future*. Within my research, it was Tim who was a strong proponent of *climate first*.

(...) you cannot look at one issue without looking at the other issues... However, it might not be the best approach, I think.

Tim

Along with arguing that the CJM needs very clear messaging – and in this case, it means focusing primarily on climate justice – connecting or including different struggles is sometimes considered an academic perspective, which is not comprehensible to a “regular” person. Within the *climate first* approach, while internally discussing the various injustices and aspects which relate and are relevant to climate justice, for external purposes, the sole focus on climate change and climate justice is considered more strategic. Within such a strategy, emotions can be used as a tool to raise awareness of climate change, and according to Tim, even using populist

tactics can be useful in terms of reaching climate justice. Therefore, reducing emissions, decarbonisation and focusing on quantifiable aspects of climate change impacts is often thought of as the solution and a main presumed goal of the climate justice movement.

In opposition to *climate first*, the approach supported by most of the activists, is *justice first*. Unlike prioritising one type of justice above the others, they see climate justice as an integral part of justice as such. The main argument is that only by looking at climate justice in a complex and interconnected way, we can create a just future for everyone. Climate justice is considered a goal, a direction where we need to go, but the path which leads there requires not only addressing issues related to climate change, but also destroying all oppressive societal structures – because without that, there can be no climate justice.

If we are not talking about interconnectedness and intersectionality, that patriarchy and racism and men, and the capitalism and many other forms of oppression would have to change if we want to have a really climate just world, because the changes we would need for actual climate justice are so fundamental, and would bring about a lot of other social change as well.

Alma

This systemic approach, focusing on justice in its entirety, examines all the sources of injustices simultaneously, or even perceives climate justice as a manifestation of all injustices combined.

[Climate justice] is a field that combines a lot of struggles (...) and where you can see what goes wrong in the world.

Ella

According to Alma, an approach, which considers one type of justice superior to others, is based on a privileged position. Unlike Tim's interpretation that the CJM should have a clear messaging focusing only on climate change and CJ in order to be

understood by the general public, Alma, Ella, Flitzer, Flora, Luna and Paula consider wider understanding of justice integral to the whole climate justice debate. This corresponds to their need for addressing and understanding the source of climate injustice and dealing with the source directly.

It's just learning that you see something, but also to see the background – the machinery behind it.

Paula

Another point which was highlighted by Ella is the question of who decides what is just. A common theme of most of the interviews was the need for reflecting on privilege, personal biases and assumptions, also in relation to climate justice. Asking who makes the rules, who decides and who then judges what is just.

I always had my problems with justice – and the word justice – because who says what justice is?

Ella

Along with the questions relating to justice itself, the topic of rights have been emphasised as well. Climate justice was seen as an area where we need to focus on basic human rights, but also develop and widen our understanding of what these rights are. Within the various accounts, especially the right to food, water, shelter and nature has been highlighted. This also connected to the critique of capitalism.

[The Earth] is not yours, it's ours. And everybody has the right for their fresh air, for their clean water and their nutrition.

Luna

4.2.2. Where is climate justice?

For me, [climate] justice is, especially in the global sense, that the climate crisis is caused by the so-called North countries, or Western countries, and it's clear that the people that will suffer most from it are in the Global South.

Flora

I think it is especially trying to point out that the people who are going to suffer first and most are also the people we're exploiting already.

Tim

Climate justice can be approached both as a theoretical concept and as a lived reality. In the interviews, climate justice was perceived as something that is inherently global and can't be thought of only in the local context. The activists were highlighting the role of colonialism, historical exploitation and geographical position in relation to climate (in)justice. There seemed to be an overarching assumption that it is something happening “out there” to “others”.

The localised context of climate justice wasn't as present in the data, which is relevant also in terms of imaginaries of climate just futures. When thinking of the local context, the question of farmers, and especially large scale vs. small scale farmers was brought up. Unlike the global understanding of CJ on an abstract level – as a theoretical concept illustrated by international relations and history of colonisation, the local context was understood through tangible examples and as a lived reality. This was thematised mostly through relation to food and land, and the need to reconnect with more traditional practices as well as with the people who grow our food.

One example of how approaches to climate justice can look like in Vienna, was the case of air traffic. During the protests surrounding the planned construction of an additional runway at Vienna Airport¹¹, multiple stakeholders came together. Unlike the

¹¹ Dritte Piste In German.

CJM which framed the construction as a climate justice issue, other actors approached it from a more individualised perception, which can be associated with the “not in my backyard” (NIMBY) approach. In this instance, the question of climate justice is framed as global and interconnected and important because of the principle. The NIMBY approach, on the other hand, is an approach which is localised and individualised, understood as important because it happens right here to “us”. Schlosberg and Collins (2014) criticise this approach as it stems from the privileged perspective of traditional (and mostly white) environmental groups, that we need to focus only on local aspects of climate change, and not on climate change as a global issue. Mellor (Mellor, 1997, p. 24) criticises NIMBY approach from an ecofeminist perspective for similar reasons – it shouldn’t be only privileged women who will profit from being shielded from environmental hazards, because we should all be safe.

I think it was more like this “we don't want more air traffic, because it's affecting our life”.

Flora

4.2.3. Climate justice, feminism and anti-racism

That is something I would wish in the world, that everybody could say “homophobia is shit, and sexism is shit, and racism is shit”.

Luna

As mentioned in the chapter *Climate first vs. justice first*, the understanding of climate justice by the CJM is complex and various social aspects are considered an integral part of climate justice. When it comes to the intersections of climate justice with feminism and anti-racism, the picture becomes more nuanced and questions of capacity, time and energy, as well as strategy emerge.

I think it would be very important to connect the struggles, but it always sounds so easy, and I feel it's just so much work and we all have limited resources.

Flora

The basic premise is that both feminism and anti-racism are important, and on a value level, they are part of the CJM. Even though the extent to which the CJM operates with feminism and anti-racism varies – from organisation to organisation, as well as from individual to individual, they are understood as the “correct” values and a direction in which the CJM should go, at least internally and in discussions behind closed doors.

I think we do quite a lot, considering that feminism isn't our main goal. There's definitely an aspect of prefigurative politics in the way we organise.

Alma

In integrating feminist, anti-racist and other inclusive values, the differences between the perspectives *climate first* and *justice first* are not that significant. The former stems from a position that feminism should be on the agenda of the feminist movement, the latter is concerned about publicly connecting themselves with other topics, and also focuses on strategies for particular events, where it is considered ideal to have one clear goal. Even though there is an overlap between climate justice events and other struggles for equality, this is mostly done on a personal level, through knowing people from other movements and supporting them. The consideration of public support plays a key role here, as the CJM is understood to be connected with issues related to climate change and the environment, and including other demands that may seem far from the perceived goal of the CJM is seen as potentially dangerous.

And it is absolutely correct that you want to reduce [all the injustices]. It's just again, the question (...) is it the role of climate justice movements?

Tim

4.2.4. Hierarchies, capitalism and patriarchy

I mean, of course the first thing that comes to my mind is that basically capitalism is the cause of all of this.

Flitzer

The Viennese climate justice movement is based on left-wing ideas. This is something that is usually explicitly proclaimed, or something that can be deciphered by looking at the values, the goals, the rhetoric etc. However, when connecting hierarchies with capitalism and patriarchy, multiple approaches appear.

For the movement, hierarchies and hierarchical thinking, which relates to the ecofeminist concept of hierarchical dualisms, are seen as the main problem. Even though some hierarchies can be considered useful (see chapter 4.1.1. Hierarchies of knowledge), it is the feeling of importance, of supremacy, of being higher than others, which is identified as the source of inequalities and injustices.

In this, some of the activists were proponents of capitalism being the main source of hierarchical thinking, while others considered patriarchy to be the original source, and capitalism stemming from it. Some of them have analysed the situation with the result that capitalism and patriarchy are connected, but the main theme was that it is hierarchy and value-based judgments which make our society unequal and unfair. In this case, I think it is essential to not put these perceptions in opposition, but use them in synthesis, as the core of the issue is the same.

For me, capitalism comes out of [patriarchy] because I'd say the attributes, which are perceived as good – like when you are strong, when you're all the things that you associate with male people – I think that you can see them everywhere in capitalism, and everything works towards them.

Ella

4.2.5. Disconnection as the root cause of climate injustice

A lot of people see themselves above nature, or don't really see themselves connected to it, even though we are part of it.

Flitzer

A major theme of the interviews was disconnection. It was touched upon in various contexts, and even though these remarks were sometimes implicit, it seemed to be the red thread when assessing what is wrong with the world. There was also an interesting aspect in regards to the imaginaries linked to disconnection. Dichotomy of culture – associated with technology, speed and power on one hand – and nature, associated with harmony and slowness on the other, was identified as the source of disconnection. In a capitalist world where everything is measured by productivity and effectiveness, these values were identified as the source of disconnection from the natural world. Assuming that capitalist values have impacted how humans approach everything in their lives, slowness was recognised as an antidote to the current system.

The disconnection happens on multiple levels. It is disconnection from ourselves, from impacts of our actions, from not seeing the whole picture, as well as disconnection from nature as such. A holistic understanding of the world and the importance of interconnectedness between people and nature, but also between different parts of the world was called for. Especially in regards to consumerism, the disconnection lies in the selectivity with which people look at the world, in focusing only on a small segment surrounding the individual, rather than seeing the global impact of their actions.

(...) and [people] not understanding, not seeing the whole thing behind, how the circle closes, and what impacts my actions have.

Paula

4.3. Gender and climate justice

I mean, everywhere woman goes, there are feminism problems, everywhere, where trans people go, there are trans problems and everywhere where people of colour go, there are racism problems.

Luna

The most surprising finding of my research was that gender is not really thought of in connection to climate justice. It was either seen as something that is already present in the movement in a form of gender equality or anti-patriarchal values, or as something that doesn't relate to the main goal of the CJM, both of these views however referred to the movement, and not to the concept of climate justice itself.

On a deeper level, there was quite a clear and unified understanding of the connections between how women and nature are treated, either implicitly referring to ecofeminist theory, while some of the activists were using ecofeminism explicitly.

This domination over nature, which you saw a lot in the past, and also can see right now... If you look into very traditional jobs or hobbies, like hunting for example, or something like that – it's super closely related to how certain men treat women as well. Because this fuels the picture of a man who is this strong dominant – like a male alpha animal.

Flitzer

4.3.1. Gender vs. feminism

(...) in Vienna, I think it's way less focused on patriarchy – we always say we are anti-sexist and anti-racist, but I think every person could reflect on their own patterns and their own assumptions way more.

Ella

When talking about gender and feminism, there was an interesting tendency of considering gender struggles separate from feminist struggles. Feminism was understood as a movement with a long history, a movement where the public understands its goals, which are considered very clear. However, when asked about gender and the CJM, the activists focused more on what some of them called the *gender diversity movement* rather than gender aspects of climate justice or gender equality as such. Gender diversity and feminism were perceived as something that is connected, however, the gender diversity movement and the feminist movement are understood to have different goals.

The interpretation of this situation was highly dependent on the activists' understanding of feminism itself, however, there seemed to be two directions. There was never really a question of whether feminism is valid, useful, or part of the movement, this always seemed to be counted on as a fact.

The first approach corresponds to *climate first*, where the main goal of the CJM should be the focus on dealing with the impacts of climate change. While it agreed on feminism and feminist values being important on an abstract and theoretical level, it viewed CJ as something separate. The CJM was then perceived as a space where climate justice is the main purpose and even though internally, discussing and holding feminist values is appreciated, it's not something that should be presented externally.

(...) [*feminism*] *doesn't really serve the purpose of reaching decarbonising.*

Tim

The *justice first* approach considered feminism as an integral part of the CJM on a theoretical and value level, however, there were reservations about how it was being implemented. Feminist values were seen as something to aspire to, and this was perceived as the consensus of the movement, but the reality differed from this ideal in some of the activists' eyes. This wasn't usually framed in a negative way, but rather as a space for improvement, or a direction to aim towards. Also taking into consideration the varying degrees of awareness of feminist values. Reflection, discussion and education was mentioned as a main path to making the CJM more feminist.

[In the CJM] everybody's saying "Yeah, of course, I totally agree with feminism", but maybe not all the theory and reflection has already happened. So the awareness is maybe on a rather low level.

Paula

4.3.2. Where are the men?

I always wonder if men are maybe organising themselves in different things or different ways (...)?

Paula

The climate justice movement in Vienna is seen as a feminised movement. This is not unusual and corresponds to a global trend. On one hand, this is perceived as empowering because it is not uncommon for women to be publicly visible and seen as representative of the movement. On the other hand, some of the activists were left wondering – where are the men?

Paula's quote in the beginning of this chapter was representative of multiple interviews, where the activists were reflecting on the reasons why, despite knowing the same amount of men and women who care about the environment, they don't see as many men in the CJM. An answer could be found in Alma's account where, if the difficulty of entry into the CJM and other left-wing groups is compared, the CJM seems more approachable and open.

I think we attract young women because we make it very easy to join, especially compared to other left wing radical groups.

Alma

4.3.3. Women in the climate justice movement

I think, in general, maybe women have struggled more (...) because they're in more oppressed situations.

Ella

It would be hard to generalise based on the data I have collected, and neither is it a point of qualitative research, however, it was hard not to notice that gendered perception of climate justice and the roots of climate justice might have played a role. According to Ella, women have been facing more oppressive situations, which has a deep impact on their perception of reality. Additionally, socialisation may play an important role not only in what topics women chose to focus on, but also on the types of roles they represent within the movement.

While wondering about the role of women in the movement, the traditional caring role and care in general were used to illustrate the reproduction of such gender stereotypes in the movement. Despite the CJM being considered more progressive in terms of gender equality and anti-patriarchal values than the general society, residues of stereotypical gender roles were identified.

There is no gender equality basically anywhere, so why should it be in the climate justice movement?

Flitzer

As for gender socialisation, according to Luna, women are socialised and allowed to be more emotional and caring, and that can be used in the CJM in order to inspire the men to also be caring and connect with their emotions. Connected to socialisation and valuing emotions was the invisibility of caring activities carried out in the movement.

Climate camp was seen as an essential part of the CJM and as a caring environment – as an example of prefigurative politics. It was described as a place where people can breathe, slow down, educate themselves, and gain inspiration and energy for

their fights. Therefore, Climate camp was described as a key event which is nourishing the entire CJM. Flora made a connection between the care and nourishment associated with the Climate camp, and the fact that more women are actively involved in its organisation. According to Flora, there is a direct link between the lack of appreciation of such work, which can be seen in other activities as well, some of which copy the societal appreciation for productive or reproductive labour.

It's just again, women giving the energy and not being viewed as the heroes of the movement, and that's something that I'm very critical about.

Flora

4.4. Intersectionality and the climate justice movement

I think every person tries their best. It's always a process of getting more aware of things.

Ella

All the people I have interviewed as well as all the interactions I had with the Austrian climate justice movement had one thing in common – a really deep self-reflection. From reflecting on their own biases, to fighting gender stereotypes, evaluating the reasons for the lack of diversity and its roots, to analysing how structural conditions such as time available for volunteering influence how intersectionality looks like. A common theme was that everybody is doing their best – given the tools available. The constraints to addressing inclusivity issues were mostly the lack of time, energy, or personal motivation. However, the understanding of climate justice was always intersectional to some extent.

The categories that were mentioned most frequently and seemed to be most important were class, education background and socio-economic status. These were used usually in opposition to activists' privilege and on an abstract level, rather than in concrete terms. Migration background was also thematised, which corresponds to the

situation regarding climate justice in Austria, where migrant background is more relevant than race when it comes to environmental injustices, which are not necessarily racialised and can't be explained by a single-factor analysis.

There seemed to be two main approaches to viewing intersectionality. The first one could be described as static intersectionality – in the activists' words mostly referred to as inclusivity. This mostly referred to whether (or how) the movement takes into account different types of social categorisations in terms of accessibility, either of particular events, or of the movement itself. The second approach is dynamic intersectionality – meaning the intersectional understanding of reality that is situational, and therefore not rigid, as described in chapter 2.3. This related more to the reflection of their own position, as well as to a theoretical understanding of climate justice.

4.4.1. Inclusivity and diversity

We're all aware of it and criticise ourselves for it, but don't prioritise it enough to change it.
Alma

Inclusivity and diversity were often mentioned in the interviews. It was mostly relating to the various types of social categorisation, which I focus on in the following chapters, but also included aspects like energy, time, personal motivation, level of extroversion/introversion, alignment with opinions of the particular organisation, or personal connections in the movement. While it is considered important to the movement, due to the limited time and energy people have for volunteering, other aspects which are considered closer to climate justice may be prioritised.

Another point which was made is that the activists tend to focus on the issues that are the closest to their heart, which often mean also being closest to their own experience. This might be the reason why in this *white, educated, middle-class*,

academic bubble, as Alma described the Austrian CJM, the existing lack of diversity reproduces and strengthens the lack of diversity even further.

I try to also work on the struggles that I experience in my own life.

Paula

The uniformity of the movement can also result in situations, which some of the activists consider absurd. Flora compared a situation where two men wanted to start a group which would focus on inspiring more women to join the movement to the following:

So this is how I feel sometimes also with racism – that two white people (...) come together and think about how we can involve people with migration background. And then I feel it's so hard, because we don't know anything.

Flora

4.4.2. Privilege

Also it [takes] a lot of privileges actually that people are aware of their privileges.

And so this is why they are doing something (...)

Flora

The issue of privilege was primarily framed by the position *what we have = what others don't have*. The awareness of privileges of the members of CJM was omnipresent. By Flora, privilege was understood as the condition for any type of activism. It was also seen as a responsibility to others. This was touched upon in relation to climate justice where privilege was constituted by geographical location as well as the history (and present) of colonial practices and exploitation of the Global South, but also locally in the form of unequal environmental burdens of vulnerable populations.

An additional aspect related to the measures during the first wave of the pandemic which were seen both as unfair, and as accelerating the environmental crisis.

Because like in part what the government is doing now, in the financial support, most of it gets to the real huge farms and corporations and not to the small farmers. So the small farmers are mostly more hit by climate change.

Luna

Flexibility was the main attribute linked to privilege. In the CJM, this took the form of aforementioned time (and financial) flexibility which allowed “the privileged” to volunteer in the first place.

In terms of climate justice, flexibility was illustrated most notably on the production of food. The difference between large- and small-scale farmers seemed to resonate a lot, as seen in the quote by Luna above, as well as by that of Flora below. In this instance, flexibility correlated with the amount of wealth, which then influenced the possibilities of climate adaptation.

So if you're a farmer, it depends on how much capital you have and if you're a rich farmer, you can rather adapt to what happens with the climate. But if you're not, then you are just stuck with heavier agriculture, which is super sad, because actually it's the small-scale farmers that are good for the environment, and so it's kind of a vicious circle.

Flora

4.4.3. Age

I've seen people in their 50s, maybe their 60s, in blockades. So I was like “Yeah, nice! Cool, you're here”, because it's also a very physical thing to do. But also a very, strong picture you give to the public. But it was just very few...

Paula

As mentioned previously, the Austrian CJM is quite homogenous when it comes to its composition. The activists often described it as a student movement, or referred to young people in it. The category of age as such was mentioned especially in connection with the Climate camp, which is considered a family-friendly environment as well as a place where the older activists return. The fact that most of the climate justice movement centred around activist groups, who consisted of young people was emphasised, however, the consequence of it – that most of the other age groups were missing and therefore weren't represented, was present only on a very implicit level.

Besides Climate camp, other age groups were considered harder to come by, which was explained by a shift from activism in the form of direct actions, blockades and protests to “more settled” activities, such as food coops, working in academia, or in the more traditional environmental organisations. Additionally, the lack of personal connections with the younger activists was thematised, and considered one of the reasons why the older activists are not as visible and active.

The last reason for the lack of representation of older age groups could be described as a form of resignation. This was either interpreted as a “natural” process where older people focus more on their families etc., but also as a form of resignation on climate justice, or at least a resignation of their own role in fighting for climate justice.

But I also see many old people who have been more political and active in their youth, and after a while, it just seems to disappear. And they just start to accept it and not to worry anymore.

Paula

4.4.4. Migrant background

People that have migration backgrounds are not heard, and there are very few connections (...) but I think it's so white and we don't really achieve to change it. But I would say that regarding many activist struggles in Vienna, it is like that.

Flora

The importance of migration background was significant on multiple levels. On one hand, a lack of people with migration background was identified within the movement itself. This was compared to other movements where the situation was considered to be similar – and therefore similarly white and privileged. On the other hand, migration background was an important aspect in terms of unequal distribution of negative impacts of climate change.

Glatter-Götz et al. (2019) compare the situation in Austria to the U.S. where most of the theory on environmental and climate justice comes from and identify that it is the category of migration background in Austria, which is comparable to the category of race in the U.S. This is significant because only one factor (such as socio-economic status), is not sufficient to explain the unequal environmental burdens. They identify that despite the biggest group of immigrants in Austria are from Germany, it is the immigrants from Turkey, former Yugoslavia and “new” EU countries¹², who are most impacted by unequal distribution of environmental burdens (Glatter-Götz et al., 2019).

Even though migration background was in some instances connected with race or ethnicity, it was mostly used as an overarching category. The theory seemed to be well reflected by some and thought of tangibly in the local context. However, it was viewed as an issue that is not sufficiently represented in the movement and requires more attention.

And also these [issues] are all connected. How cities are built for example, and how we saw it now at Corona times, that especially migrant families don't have gardens, or

¹² Those who joined in 2004, sometimes referred to as A10 countries.

don't have so many possibilities to go outside. And I feel if we approach this topic of having cities with less cars and so on, it would actually be these families that profit from it. But this is something that is also not approached, I think, in the movement.

Flora

4.4.5. Language

So, there was a time when the plenaries were in English, and it did include a few people that couldn't participate otherwise, but I think they just changed it back because it was so much harder for everyone.

Alma

The issue of language was omnipresent, even though much of it was probably influenced by my own positionality and the fact that I spoke English with all the activists. Nonetheless, when participating in the CJM, I used my limited German skills, which were sufficient for understanding what was going on, but I always spoke English even if the event was in German¹³. This might be relevant also to the data I have managed to collect, as most of the activists I interviewed had lived abroad for extended periods of time.

And now I feel it's even more important to do things in English, because I really appreciate you talking my language, but I find out more and more that even doing something in Vienna, it excludes so many people if you do it just in German.

Flora

When talking about language accessibility, no other languages than German and English were mentioned. There was a large variability between the different organisations and some of them had created options for non-German speakers to

¹³ This was communicated to the people taking part in the particular event, and if somebody didn't speak English, there was always someone willing to translate. Overall, I found the Austrian CJM really inclusive in terms of language, even though the initial barrier was quite high if one didn't speak German at all.

participate. The Austrian CJM was seen as inclusive for all German-speaking people, while through this inclusivity being simultaneously perceived as excluding people who didn't speak German.

An important point made was that it is vital not to assume that people are comfortable with English – even if they are capable of understanding it. This related to the educational, class and other social categorisations which were being considered, and a comfort with speaking English was linked to privilege.

The strong ties of the Austrian CJM to Germany and the German CJM, is another potentially significant factor. Especially the connection to Ende Gelände played a key role. The lack of more significant connections to the international CJM, which was understood as everything besides the German CJM, or personal ties to people with migrant backgrounds was considered the main reason why English wasn't more present in the movement.

4.4.6. Different voices

I think in case your voice fits to the other voices inside, it works. But you also need to get along with the people, and you need to have broad consensus on your opinions.

And if you're more radical, or less radical, or have a different perception about different issues, you would choose another group.

Paula

Due to the non-hierarchical organisational structure of the movement, or more specifically particular groups within the movement, an importance of consensus creates another type of homogeneity. Diversity was seen either as diversity in terms of representation of people from different backgrounds, or as diversity in terms of different voices. The latter was often touched upon in the interview accounts and was considered simultaneously problematic and beneficial.

A relative uniformity of voices within a particular organisation allowed it to function on non-hierarchical principles and usually there were systems in place which

ensured that the members were in agreement on the elementary principles and values. This intra-organisational uniformity then meant that people who were in disagreement usually decided to join another group. Therefore, the CJM was fragmented into groups that internally had similar approaches and values, but often disagreed with other groups. The *climate first vs justice first* perspective mirrors the main disagreement between the two symbolic sides, however, the ultimate goal of the CJM was never questioned.

(...) everyone disagrees on something behind closed doors, but everyone still supports each other in the long run – or on the bigger picture.

Flitzer

The main disadvantage of uniformity of voices was seen as exclusionary towards people who are not (yet) represented. Representation, or the lack thereof, was seen as a source of consensus on topics which are prioritised in the movement. The main issue and question which the activists thought about, was whether the topics they are most active in actually reflect the needs of groups which are not represented.

But then it also depends a lot, I think, on which people are involved in the group, and if you feel welcomed, or if you feel safe. So this is all something that we could view more, why certain people maybe don't feel safe in these groups. Or why the topics we're approaching (and not approaching), why are they not interested.

Flora

4.5. Austrian visions for climate justice

If I don't have hope, I have nothing else.

Luna

In this chapter, I would like to focus on visions and utopias for a climate just future. However, before that, I feel it is my responsibility to emphasise the urgency of

having positive imaginaries of the future. In the climate justice movement, it is not uncommon to talk about the dark scenarios which await if we don't start acting right now. The degree to which these scenarios are considered likely differs, but especially during the pandemic, there weren't many optimistic voices.

That is the reason why I have decided to shortly outline the dark vision before focusing on the solutions on individual, collective and global levels. Furthermore, I introduce the personal utopias of the participants. At the end of this chapter, I have attempted to capture the ultimate utopia, a synthesis of what I have been told throughout the research by all the participants.

4.5.1. The dark future

- How do you deal with that scenario?

- Well, as I told you, I had a breakdown.

Tim

I would like to illustrate the dark future on two contrasting potential scenarios – one for the local context, in this case for Austria, and one for the global context, which was in the interviews usually represented by the Global South. The amount of reflection on what the climate crisis means in the privileged parts of the world was omnipresent, as was the awareness that even in Europe, the climate crisis won't hit everyone in the same way.

4.5.1.1. The local context – “no more avocados”

There's not gonna be any avocados anymore, I'm sorry.

Tim

The dark vision of the future for Austria was painted as difficult, however, not necessarily absolutely destructive. This, to a large extent, corresponded to the privilege of the activists, and was sometimes accompanied by attempts to lighten the mood. Besides the climate aspects such as draughts and floods, impacts of closing the borders of the EU as well as nationalist or fascist tendencies were the main source of anxiety. Again, the main dangers were mostly considered something which will probably happen to “others”, to people running away from places which were already destroyed by climate change.

I do think there'll be more nationalistic tendencies, with more migration and refugees. I do think a lot of people will actually die from the implicit and explicit consequences of the climate crisis. And sometimes I feel like what we have to do is prepare those of us who will survive to rebuild society in a more healthy way.

Alma

4.5.1.2. The global context – “it would be nice to survive”

And [indigenous people should] not get murdered at least. I mean, that's the minimum.

Luna

In opposition to losing the luxuries of life or dealing with extreme weather events and increasing migration, the global context was depicted as life-threatening. As a consequence of the pandemic, many people lost hope of the world acting in solidarity across borders. And because the changes in reaction to the pandemic or its impacts were perceived as not sufficient enough, as not going deep enough, a sad truth that there will need to be a lot more suffering before the society will be able to change, surfaced.

4.5.2. Individual care, collective resilience, global justice

For me, it always starts with myself. So definitely, that's the most local way. And in a community, in a city, in your peer group, you can already actually have an impact, I think, especially in climate issues. (...) But to change the whole problem together by the roots, it must be fought globally.

Paula

As a response to the anxiety-inducing visions of a dark future, solutions were seen as the main tool for being able to deal with the impacts of the climate crisis. They were identified on three different levels – individual care, collective resilience and global justice.

On an individual level, sustainable activism was mentioned, as well as the need for safe space and self-care. The importance of individual action in the form of recycling, using bikes or trains as a means of transportation, rethinking how we travel and educate ourselves was also emphasised.

The community level was framed by resilience and the importance of building communities which won't be constrained to traditional families. Climate camp served as an example of good practice, as a way to experience how it feels to spend a week in a village that attempts to be as sustainable as possible.

On a global level, the focus was mostly on global climate justice. On trying to do as much as we can as soon as possible, so that people in other parts of the world don't suffer from the consequences. From the need for rethinking our consumption patterns, restructuring production so that most of what we need can be produced locally, to abolishing capitalism altogether – potentially through degrowth.

4.5.3. Utopia(s)

I think this vision and this utopia is really important...

Flitzer

In this chapter, I would like to introduce the utopia(s) for climate justice. My starting point were the interviews, however, I also took the liberty of a more narrative approach, which is my own interpretation. In the first section, I am introducing the personal utopias, based directly on the statements of the activists, but rewritten in a way that makes it more comfortable for the reader. The changes are mostly stylistic and the content remains unchanged. While the ultimate utopia is based on the statements and imaginaries of the activists, it is a text which is written by me and not all of the activists might agree with all of the points mentioned. I have decided to take this approach so that there are as many positive imaginaries in one place as possible, as it was something deemed missing in the climate justice discourse.

4.5.3.1. Personal utopias

The personal utopias are arranged in alphabetical order.

Alma's utopia

In my vision of an ideal world, I would like to see people taking more responsibility for their lives. And not just their immediate lives, but also in terms of the life they share with the world, and also acting respectfully. I would like to see people thinking more about their actions, examining what they have been brought up in, and how that shaped their thinking. I'm also very curious to see how much of the comfort and the luxury we are used to now can we actually keep in a world with climate justice. I think it's probably much less than we like to admit to ourselves, even as activists.

The particular things I have in mind is more participation, more collective responsibility, more commons, and more connectedness – with each other and the environment and nature. More freedom, in the sense of developing in ways that you want to develop, instead of a very strict and hierarchical education system. Also most definitely less work and less gender stereotypes. Probably also less travel, which is sad to say, but we have simply travelled too much already.

But right now, I think it is also important to prepare the society for rebuilding everything in a better and healthier way. As part of this rebuilding process, we need to rethink and restructure our dependence on the market and focus more on sustainable food production and consumption. And also change the way states work, so that we are more resilient as a society. A system, where we will have the chance to learn how to organise and also how to live more again, not just survive.

Ella's utopia

I don't know the contexts of other places enough so that I could create a vision for someone else in the world, so I will speak from my own western perspective. I definitely see us living in harmony – with ourselves, with the people around us, as well as with our environment. I see us all living according to our values and needs. It would also be important to be an active part of a community, which would allow everybody to participate in decision-making.

Also, I think it is important to create a world where we can express and develop our creativity, as well as the thing you give to the world. The environment and the living context should be made for people, and it would also be people who can decide and create this together. There is also no oppression, there are no rules for how you have to look like or act, also in terms of gender expression. You could just be yourself and experience everything in your own way. We would also live and organise in small groups and we would be political in our private and everyday life. People would also work on themselves and their own issues.

It would mean connecting the microcosmos and the macrocosmos, the individual and community aspects. And the ultimate utopia is that the needs of all people are satisfied and fulfilled – from the physical needs to the emotional needs.

Flitzer's utopia

I feel the utopia would be if everyone had the same chances and was able to do whatever they wanted. Also there would be a lot more space for nature again, both in the physical, and the symbolic sense. People would reconnect with nature again, and stop seeing themselves above it. We would truly be part of nature again.

And everyone would just be able to do whatever they want in life, but with knowing that they are part of nature, looking out for it and not destroying it.

Flora's utopia

First of all, there would be universal basic income and people would have more freedom to really think about what they want to do in their life. They would also work less for sure, and at work, there would be less hierarchies and they would have better working conditions. And thanks to that, we would have more time. More time to build strong connections – with other people, with our children, but also we would have a stronger connection with agriculture and food production. It could mean going to the countryside, visiting the farmers and seeing how they produce the food that we eat, and maybe helping them. It would mean learning how to fix your own bike, how to build something yourself or knowing how to repair the things you already have. There would also be taxes on property and high income and less traffic.

I would approach the utopia also from a political and societal critique and focus on how we can live in well-functioning communities and completely abandon the path to individualisation. This would probably be challenging, but we would get rid of all the internalised things which are related to the current society and economic system. We would share money and live in solidarity. There would still be families, but the main system of organisation would revolve around communities, they would be the most important.

But this is my vision and I'm really afraid of imposing it on others, and especially others in other parts of the world. Locally, it would mean focusing more on the local life, like making music together or going to a concert where you live. But we would still be connected internationally, I don't think that degrowth has to mean that we will be more separated from the rest of the world. But most of all, it would be joyful. And the utopia has to be accessible for everyone.

Luna's utopia

I believe that people are strong enough and the world is strong enough to set everything right again. Because if I don't have my hope, I have nothing.

We will share our place with nature. We will work with it – not from it, or against it. We will be living in harmony with plants and animals. There will be no more plastic in the oceans and everything will run on renewable energy. In urban spaces, we will be living in spaces with gardens, similar to what Hundertwasser dreamed of. There will be things growing in the cities and you will be able to just walk on a street and pick a tomato. And it will be safe, because there won't be any cars.

Food will be produced on smaller farms, not like today where large scale farms produce a lot of food, which is then fed to the animals that we eat and uses extreme amounts of water and other resources. All indigenous people will have their own land, which will be safe and clean. And all the people who are still living in harmony with nature will be able to live their lives like they always did.

Paula's utopia

There will be less cities and more subsistence economies and sustainable food production. There will be these colourful, artsy, organic villages. Everything will become a little smaller. There will be a complete restructuring of the economy. So less big supermarkets and more agriculture that produces in a more sustainable way, but also a more “just economy” and a more local food supply.

We would organise ourselves in communities that are 100, maybe 1.000, maybe 10.000 people. And they will care about art, nature, and the communities. We will have everything we need – and also some of the things which we don't really need, but bring us joy. Like video games or a Gameboy, but they won't be used to accumulate capital or power, they will exist just because people like them and enjoy them. Like video games for fun, not for profit.

Tim's utopia

The utopia probably means a smaller, slower world. A system, with net zero emissions, which is organised through self-sustaining communities. And we definitely need to go back to the more traditional ways of doing things, like producing food for example. But obviously there will be modern aspects of it, we will have solar and wind energy, maybe we will even have cars powered by solar panels.

Global trade will be reduced and even though it will still exist, it will be reorganised in a better way. We will stop sending every tiny part of a product between the countries just because it is cheaper, and as much as possible will be produced locally. So there's not gonna be any avocados anymore, I'm sorry. Even though, maybe as it gets warmer, we can grow them on our own...?

4.5.3.2. The ultimate utopia

The ultimate utopia will mean moving from a passive consumptive culture to creative, productive, and imaginative culture. Imagination must always come first. The world and our lives will be joyful, above all else and this utopia will be accessible for everyone. People will live according to their needs and in alignment with their values. There will be no oppression, domination, or supremacy.

Everything will become slower, smaller, and more peaceful. The world will still be connected and the global connection will be significant, but the local context will become more meaningful. Some people will leave cities and become organic farmers, some will be growing food for themselves and their communities. Traditional trades will return and there will be awareness of what we consume, what we need, and how much of it we need.

The economy will be restructured based on degrowth principles, universal basic income will be implemented and time will become the main “currency” instead of money. Local exchange trading systems will come back to life in places from which they disappeared.

Food production will become as localised as possible, people will eat less meat and eat more seasonally. Foraging will be a favourite way of spending time with others and also connecting to nature. People will either own land, have access to it through their community, or the chance to use commons, where they will grow food. Edible forests will be planted and food will bring the society closer.

Cities will use the existing structures to produce renewable energy and as there will be less cars, the urban environments will become cleaner and safer. This will create space for community-building and people will be more connected to their

neighbourhoods, spend more time outside and transform the cityscape into a more inviting, green and joyful environment.

In the countryside, many community-based villages will emerge. People in them will organise in a non-hierarchical way and decisions will be made communally. The cultural life will be rich and colourful even in smaller places as people will have more time to make art, music or poetry.

Education system will reflect the reality of the world outside, critical thinking will be developed and there will be more space for various approaches as well as needs. More time will be spent outside as well as learning essential skills like sewing, constructing, fermenting, preserving, or gardening.

People will see themselves as part of nature, not as separate from it and will do their best to not exploit the natural resources. They will only use what is absolutely necessary and make sure that the natural environments flourish. Animals and plants will be taken into consideration and people won't see themselves as superior to them. Nature's laws will become more important than those which are created by humans – everything will lead towards harmony of the natural world of which humans are an integral part.

The value of connection will become central and people will be more connected to themselves, their communities as well as to the environment. Gender expression won't be restricted by societal expectations and there will be no gender stereotypes. Within communities, families won't be the main factor in terms of relationships, living situation, or finances. Families of choice and wider connection to communities will be the most important.

Despite having less luxuries, people will be happier and more fulfilled. Spending quality time with others, learning and creating will be the luxury people will strive for. But we will still have the chance to travel, by a bike or a train, even though it won't be

too far away. And there will still be the occasional video game we will be able to play and joke about the world depicted in it. A past where humans were destroying nature. A past which no longer seems real.

~

So what do we want?

Climate justice!

When do we want it?

NOW!

5. Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to examine gender and intersectionality in the climate justice movement by focusing on various aspects in which it plays an integral part. This was done by conducting interviews with members of the Austrian climate justice movement, which were then analysed using feminist critical discourse analysis. The research itself as well as the consequent writing of the thesis were heavily influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides its negative impacts, it gave me a chance to reflect back on the interviews which were conducted in unprecedented conditions and potentially, through the data, to capture a moment in time which could be considered a historically significant breaking point.

Firstly, I have focused on how climate justice is understood both as a theoretical concept and as a lived reality, how it is perceived by the members of the climate justice movement, what is the basis that climate justice stands on, and to what extent is this conceptualisation intersectional. I have identified two contrasting approaches to climate justice. I refer to the first one as *climate first*. This approach considers the climate justice movement a space, where it is important to strategically present issues related to climate justice as close to climate change as possible, therefore stripping it of its social dimensions. The second approach, which can be described as *justice first*, considers all types of justice, including its social dimensions, an integral part of climate justice. Consequently, this means that the goals of the climate justice movement are communicated from a systemic point of view, where climate justice is inseparable from other types of justices.

Secondly, I have analysed how the climate justice movement operates with the category of gender. Through examining in what contexts was the category of gender being used, when was it omitted, I have also focused on the relationship between the climate justice movement and concepts related to gender and gender equality such as feminism and patriarchy. The conclusion is that gender was not usually thought of in

connection to climate justice. When it was being interpreted as related to issues of gender equality or anti-patriarchal values, it was either seen as something that is already present in the movement, or as something that isn't relevant in terms of the main goal of the climate justice movement. However, upon deeper examination of the underlying values, there was a clear and unified understanding of the connections between how women and nature are treated in patriarchal society, which corresponds to ecofeminist theory.

Thirdly, awareness of intersectionality in the climate justice movement was identified as omnipresent, both through the self-reflection of individuals and the movement on their own privileges, as well as through intersectional conceptualisation of climate justice itself. Various social categorisations play an important part in the movement and are discussed when the questions of inclusivity and diversity emerge. By looking closer at the categories of age, migrant background, language and different voices, I attempted to uncover the foundation such intersectional understanding is built on.

And finally, the activists' visions for climate justice were introduced. The importance of creating as well as actively engaging in positive imaginaries was emphasised as a crucial coping mechanism necessary in the times of climate crisis. The dark visions of a potential future were introduced – on the local level, they related mostly to losing luxuries, but also to dramatic changes in terms of international policy and migration. On the global level, the dark vision was even darker and urgent action was considered essential not only for planetary survival, but also survival of underprivileged groups. These were followed by personal utopias of the activists. Subsequently, I have created a fusion – the ultimate utopia – based on the data collected throughout the research.

In conclusion, I would like to note that despite this research being personally really challenging due to various reasons, it was an honour to be trusted with information that, even though it didn't seem personal in the beginning, usually ended

up to be exactly that. It was hard not to be influenced by stories of burnout, disillusion or loss of optimism. However, I consider this aspect, which is inherent to talking about climate justice, a key stepping stone towards a brighter future. I think that similarly as in feminism, we need our anger to fuel our actions. We need to be personally touched so that we can start acting. Now.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Informed consent

Dear climate justice warrior,

If you are reading these lines, it means that I would like to conduct an interview with you for my thesis. The title of the research is Intersectional Analysis of the Climate Justice Movement and it will be submitted as a MA thesis at the Department of Gender Studies (Faculty of Humanities, Charles University). Currently, I am based at the Institute of Social Ecology at BOKU here in Vienna.

Here are a few information which I consider important:

- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may withdraw and discontinue your participation at any time.
- If you feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview, you can decline to answer any of the questions or end the interview entirely.
- The interview can last anything between 15 and 90 minutes. Audio recording will be made in order to minimize any potential misinterpretations of your answers. You will be sent the transcript and will be given an opportunity to correct any factual errors as well as add notes to it if you think that some important thought is missing.
- You will be anonymised and your confidentiality will remain secure. I will ask you to choose your own pseudonym at the beginning of the research. If you for some reason don't wish to be anonymised, it is also a possibility.

- I will be transcribing the interviews myself and no one else besides me will have access to the recording, the interview transcript, or my raw notes. I will be consulting the analysis with my academic supervisors, but only after anonymisation and never in their entirety so that your confidentiality remains secure.

By letting me record an audio consent, you confirm that you have read and understood all of the above and agree with taking part in the interview and its use for the implementation of the research project.

If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them at xxx.

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Introduction

- Mutual introduction
- Introducing the research (perceptions of climate justice, feminist, inclusive, non-hierarchical, inductive, hopefully creative, inspiring and innovative)

Climate justice & intersectionality

- What does climate justice mean to you?
- What questions or areas do you consider related to climate justice?
- Do you think about climate justice on a global scale?
- What do you consider the main role of the climate justice movement here in Austria?
- Within the movement, what voices do you think are being heard? And whose interests are being protected?
- Is there anything else you would like to say or share?

CJM organisations, collectives and initiatives

a) for long-term members

- From what you said, when you spoke about the movement, did you mean your organisation in particular? If not, how would you describe the role of your organisation in the climate justice movement/debate?
- What do you think about the way your organisation functions? (hierarchy, inclusivity, responsibilities, workload, voluntary involvement, gender)
- Would you say that there is a consensus about what climate justice means to the members? And if not, how would you describe the situation?

b) for newer members

- When you were talking about the climate justice movement, was it specifically about your organisation or in general?
- From what you know so far, how would you describe the way your organisation functions? (hierarchy, inclusivity, responsibilities, workload, voluntary involvement, gender)
- Again, from what you know so far, would you say that there is a consensus about what climate justice means to the members? And if not, how would you describe the situation?

Gender

- Do you ever think about gender in the movement? Is it important?
- Would you say that gender equality is embedded in the CJM? If so, how?
- Do you think about women having a particular role in the CJM or the climate justice debate?
- Within your activism, do you feel that all voices are being heard? (women, minorities, migrants, LGBTQ+)
- Would you say that your organisation functions in a non-hierarchical way?
- Are there any issues with someone being invisible?

Science and sources of information

- How did you first learn about climate justice? And what was it?
- What are your main sources of information when it comes to climate change and climate justice?
- Do you read academic articles etc.?
- Would you distinguish between various sources? (such as academic, activist, news etc.)
- What do you think of climate science?

Local context

- How would you describe the situation in terms of climate justice in Austria?
- What do you think needs to be done? Or done differently?

- What is the role of your organisation in the transformation?
- What is your personal priority? What do you consider most important? And why?

Visions

- How do you envision the future?
- What do you consider the possibilities for change in terms of climate justice?

Covid-19

- Do you think the current situation will have an influence on climate justice? If so, in what way?
- How did your perception of what might happen developed throughout the Covid outbreak?
- Do you think that Covid and climate change are somehow related? If so, in what way?

Utopia

- In an ideal world, would the vision be different?
- What would it look like?

Additional remarks

- Is there anything you would like to say?
- Is there something I could do to help you in any way?

