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## Dear Reader, How Do We Go On? Letters of Reflection on Community Care in Climate Activism in Maine

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Colby College, Waterville, Maine, USA

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**Dear Reader, How Do We Go On?**

*Letters of Reflection on Community Care in Climate Activism in Maine*

by Ester Topolarova '17

under the supervision of professor Winifred L. Tate

and with the second reader professor Catherine L. Besteman

## **Acknowledgments**

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## A short note in the beginning

It is 7 pm. I just decided to delete the first draft of this essay and start from point zero. I did not like my writing at all. When I started thinking about how to put community care into words that would make sense to people who read this, I struggled to not make this paper overly academic, assumptive, or simplistic. I found that, for me, it is easiest to write in letters than in any other format, and so I decided not to take this away from the final product.

As any decision, this inclination to letter-writing is formed, shaped, and re-shaped through my own experiences. In my personal life, I still hand-write letters to my friends and send them by snail mail, and so letters have acquired a very sentimental value – one of closeness, openness, and friendship. Inspired by David Graeber's writing on direct action (2009), I wrote the first few reflections on community care as diary entries. Recently, however, I started writing my own diary and realized that such style of writing no longer feels to be the most appropriate way of sharing my findings. In other words, diary entries became too personal and interwoven with my own, unexplained thoughts. I have yet to disentangle these concepts from each other. Tired from the life outside of my thesis as well as the process of writing this text, I turned to what we would call 'academic writing.' I have never felt as unhappy about a piece of work as when I finished my first draft and submitted it. The idea of going through the tedious work of editing that particular essay felt like the alienated academic work I hope anthropologists seek to counter. Luckily, a few days after I submitted my first draft, I got an evaluation from an anthropology professor on my weekly response for another class. In her comment, she pointed out that when I write letters, I always explain everything clearly and concisely. As I was standing in a cubicle I rarely use, on the third floor in our anthropology department, it finally came to me – I decided to write this thesis as a series of letters.

First, I really wanted to write letters to an activist. But who am I to decide who is an

activist? Who am I to refrain people from reading something just because of labels? And so I title my letters “Dear Reader” because that is what ultimately connects all the readers of this paper – the act of reading it. I also recognize that letters, as anything else, are problematic and that academia can make them sound patronizing. As I was writing these 25 letters, I was reflecting on one of the first books which I read about activism and care – *Letters to a Young Activist* by Todd Gitlin (2012). I decided to not use the book mainly because of its critique of identity politics with which I did not agree. Through the process of writing, I realized that the other reason I did not like this book was the way it made me feel patronized by the older, cis-male, white writer who attempted to tell me how I should feel and what I should do as an activist. And so when I think about the readers of these letters, I think of my peers and fellow activists, I think of my mom and sister, and the people I work with on everyday basis. I do not mean to come across as patronizing but rather as sharing; I am also learning through this process.

I also recognize, however, that letters don't necessarily contain what an anthropology paper should – clearly outlined general argument or introduction. While I think I managed to fit the majority inside, I could not put the overall argument of my thesis into a letter, and so I am including it here.

In these letters, I will be exploring community care in climate and climate justice activism in Maine. I see community care as both a practice and an aspiration. Community care is practice in the acts of people taking care of each other. Aspiration, on the other hand, is a way of living and seeing the self as well as others that replicates the world activists are fighting for. Care, as anything else, does not exist in vacuum. Rather, it is racialized, gendered, classed, and embedded in neoliberal capitalism. This means that for community care to be an aspiration, activists have to care with intentionality and understanding of structural oppression. In activist meetings, care is visible in 'caring practices' which are based on 'prerequisites of care.' These caring practices are visible in interactions, sharing of food, and spatial orientation. Prerequisites of care, then, are knowledge of

each other, understanding of the group structures, and becoming comfortable in the group. These prerequisites of care are fulfilled through activist participation in the 'getting-to-know practices.' These practices include many structured and unstructured exercises which allow people to share and learn about others or the group. Together, I consider the caring practices and the getting-to-know practices 'practices of care.' I believe that these practices of care have to be marked as such in order for people to become caring selves and for these practices to be recognized for their value and thus applied with intention and frequency.

Activism, however, does not only happen in activist meetings. Public events, such as protests, vigils, or conferences, contribute to the possibility of community care in activist meetings through creating collective identity which can carry emotionality, sense of community, and positive experience. Participation in public events facilitates associating these aspects of collective identity with cultural materials such as circular orientation. Later, such cultural materials can be used to recreate these aspects in meeting spaces. Furthermore, speakers at public events model and normalize sharing, an ability central to creating a caring environment.

Lastly, there is an absence of collective sharing about climate change and activism among the climate activists in Maine. Both of these absences create knowledge gaps and possible friction in activist groups and thus function as a disruption of care. Through sharing narratives about activism and climate change, activists can learn about each other while finding ways of navigating climate activism.

In short, community care can be revolutionary in that it can transform activists through aspiring to care and thus encourage development caring selves. Through this process, activists position themselves in opposition to the oppressive capitalist system. An aspiration can never be perfect, neither can care.

*Letters 1 – 6*

*To get to know each other and understand what I am trying to do*

~ letter 1 ~

about coming to places I did not know

Dear Reader,

I am writing these letters to you as much as I am writing them to myself. As an activist, and later a person who has decided to research activism as an anthropologist, I also need to remember to uplift community care and its importance. So, I hope I will be able to explain to you why community care is important and how it can transform our activism.

This all started quite a while ago. About half a year after I moved to Waterville, I was biking down Mayflower Hill Drive to my first ever vigil. Since I am not a native English speaker, I wasn't really sure what a vigil was. I just knew it is a kind of protest, and the activists were protesting the Keystone Pipeline. I remember that sunny day pretty well. As I approached the church, I saw a group of around ten people standing on an intersection and holding signs. I was very nervous but I joined them. I was by far the youngest person in the crowd and the most unsure of how to start a conversation. Thankfully, my now-fellow activists were kind enough to include me in their interactions. Little did I know that I will be organizing with them for years to come. Little did I know that they will become one of the communities closest to my heart. This is not to say that it was the first vigil that made me feel like a part of the group. Rather, it was a long and complicated process of getting to know people, understanding the group dynamics, and learning how to organize together.

The activists I joined that Sunday were part of 350 Central Maine, a subgroup, or a nod as they call themselves, of 350 Maine. 350 Maine is an affiliate of 350.org, a group started ten years ago which aims to keep the level of CO<sub>2</sub> in atmosphere under 350 parts per million in order to

prevent human-made climate change. Since its start, 350.org has developed a lot, shifted its focus to the intersection between climate and social justice and, as one of its initiatives, fostered the creation of state and local groups. Three long-term activists, all of whom I had the honor of meeting, started 350 Maine five years ago after they participated in the Occupy movement in Maine. As any group, 350 Maine has changed over the years. In fact, I have seen it evolve quite a bit even in the short time of the past two years. After 350 Maine became well-known, Dick and Linda, the two Waterville organizers for 350 Maine, started 350 Central Maine as a continuation of a green church group. As a local group we have some, limited communication with 350 Maine. Since we are located in Central Maine and many of the state organizers are located in Portland, we only talk on phone and even that we do rarely.

Later in my research, I had the opportunity to spend summer 2015 in Portland, Maine working with 350 Maine and 350 Greater Portland, another nod of this climate activism group. That summer my only job was to organize and think about activism. That summer I would bike from my place to different meetings all over Portland and contribute to planning a direct action on July the 4<sup>th</sup> or a fundraising dinner. That summer I spend countless hours in coffee shops with my mentor getting to know each other, sharing art, and improving our leadership styles. That summer I got to (finally) meet the younger (and smaller) generation of 350 Maine and befriend them.

It was also that summer when I really started focusing on community care in activism. It was that summer when I realized how quickly groups and people change. I realized how many people, I have seen leave for a break, never came back. I have seen people say they will take a week to rest and then come back half a year later. My mentor himself took off in the middle of the summer for two weeks to go into a friend's cottage in the woods and paint because he was burning out. I have also come close to burning out. Consequently, I went to Kyrgyzstan for six months in order to stop organizing and find ways of understanding my activism without seeing it as a burden, while recognizing it does not always need to be fun. While organizing can and should be enjoyable, it is



also a responsibility that needs to be continued even without joy.

As an activist and a student, as a person who plans to continue organizing wherever they go, I started asking myself a very simple, but hard to answer, question: *How do we go on?* Later, as an anthropology undergraduate student, I had the opportunity to do fieldwork, and so I decided to explore the activist groups around me; to explore how we can, collectively, support each other in activism.

~ letter 2 ~

about the differences between community care and self-care

Dear Reader,

when I decided to look at this issue, I had no clue where to start. There are so many ideas both in and outside of academia about different ways of thinking about activism, thinking about climate, and overall thinking about long-term, sustainable activism addressing climate change. The first essay I ever wrote on this topic was about self-care and how people should take care of themselves. However, as I read and talked to people more, I started realizing how complacent in the system self-care can be. Please let me explain.

Firstly, I want to acknowledge that there is nothing wrong with self-care. We all need to find ways of taking care of ourselves. Over the years, since I started organizing, I have had to locate the balance of how many tasks I can take on, what I need to do to relax, and which organizing activities make me exhausted and which energized. My latest attempt to 'self-care' has been to start knitting and it is working. Now, when I sit in meetings that I do not need to facilitate or when I do not have to take notes, I knit. Albeit badly, but I do and it makes me feel kind of accomplished – I am making something. I know we do make changes, little and slightly bigger, with activism, but they are rarely tangible or visible. But knitting, for me, is visible and tangible right away. This example also illustrates the problem with writing about self-care – it is individual and requiring of the

individual. It is individual because it is different for everyone. Maybe I enjoy knitting, but when I told my mom about it, she told me she would probably die of boredom. Her self-care is not knitting for sure.

Self-care also puts the responsibility on the individual. It requires the individual to find ways and time to take care of oneself in order to be able to exist. But that seems impossible – not everyone has the time and resources to 'do' self-care. For example, I would have never started knitting if my friend and I did not have a conversation to help me develop hobbies and if another friend of mine did not drive me to Walmart to buy the yarn and needles. Additionally, yet another friend had to teach me to knit. I am not particularly good with YouTube videos. Even an act of self-care for myself ended up being a collective act.

As I was reading more, I realized that this problematic nature of self-care goes even deeper. In respect of time and space, I will only share two of them; the ones which I found the most helpful. Firstly, James K. Rowe traveled around the United States to interview long-term activist about self-care in social movements, and he came to the conclusion that self-care runs into the “danger...that social movement organizations will see these techniques as temporary fixes that can enable intensified productivity without burnout” (Rowe 2016: 215). This is not necessarily true for self-care in general, but it is accurate for self-care in our particular context – neoliberal capitalism. To understand the relation of care and capitalism, I looked to Nancy Fraser who introduced the concept of 'crisis of care.'

In order to understand Fraser's argument, I first had to comprehend her view of social reproduction. For her, “reproduction is about the creation and maintenance of social bonds” (Leonard 2016: 30). Neoliberal capitalism, and specifically the way it divides and categorizes labor, systematically eradicates our social bonds. In other words, “[t]he current, financialized form of capitalism is systematically consuming our capacities to sustain social bonds [and t]he result is a ‘crisis of care’” (Leonard 2016: 31). Even though capitalism decreases our ability to create and

maintain social bonds, it also relies on them: “capitalism’s economic subsystem depends on social reproductive activities external to it” (Fraser 2016: 101). Specifically care, which reproduces social bonds and thus upholds society, is necessary for capitalism to exist. Yet it is not valued by the system. Thus, caring even if perceivably outside of the market supports the market's ability to operate.

Living in systemic structures and recognizing them is not easy. It feels like we often end up in a dead end that does not allow us to do anything. Looking at neoliberal capitalism, self-care seems to not only uphold the capitalist system but also require the individual rather than the collective to do so. While I believe self-care is important and key for us to survive, be well, and organize, I wanted to explore an alternative that is less individualistic and more collective. And so, I decided to explore community care.

When I started using the term community care, I took it for-granted. The word 'community' is so everyday that I did not attempt to question it. But as everything, there are so many views, so many definitions of what is community. And so before I could move on, I had to explore this concept of community and its relation to activism. The two concepts I explored are: community as a “membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection” (Green and Mercer 2001: 1934) and community as “a *place*, as *social interaction*, and as *social and political responsibility*” (Green and Mercer 2001: 1934, original emphasis). While none of the definitions will be perfect, they share common characteristics. For one, community requires shared knowledge and social bonds and so does activism. Secondly, community is active. Activism is based on collective actions. Thirdly, community is diverse and pluralistic. Since activists often strive to be inclusive in their groups, they think about both diversity and pluralism. Based on the combination of these definitions, I can call an activist group a community, recognizing that this term is always fluid and contextual.

So, I knew activists can create communities. I knew, to an extent, what communities are.

Therefore, I knew that it is possible to look at community care. Importantly, I also knew why I am looking at community care and not self-care. I wanted to find collective ways of being long-term activists together. Perhaps, I hoped that community care itself could become part of the fight.

~ letter 3 ~

about who I am as an activist, an anthropologist, and a person

Dear Reader,

sometimes I find it hard to see myself as an anthropologist, an activist, and a person.

Especially the anthropology part is difficult. Sometimes I sit in anthropology classes or in the evening writing my thesis or fieldnotes, and I wonder what good it does. Couldn't I organize instead? Plan rallies? Talk to people? Be on conference calls? But then I remind myself that I am who I am partially because of what I learned, and that using this access to knowledge can help me develop a better analysis of the world.

After reading Robin D.G. Kelley's articles and his book *Freedom Dreams* (2002), I changed my view of the relation between theory and activism. Kelley highlights the importance of the imagination of alternative worlds, or dreams, through theory. He writes: “[t]he surrealists not only taught me that any serious motion toward freedom must begin in the mind, but they have also given us some of the most imaginative, expansive, and playful dreams of a new world I have ever known” (Kelley 2002: 5). In other words, I have learned how important theory is for us to deconstruct and reconstruct the concepts we have been taught. However, in my love for everyday organizing, sometimes I forget how my own studying challenges me to become a better activist. Would I be able to conceptualize community care without writing this thesis? Maybe I would, but I would not have as much language to describe it and share ideas about community care with others.

I enter activist spaces as an anthropologist, not because I write fieldnotes and memorize people's interactions, but because I come in with a certain analysis. For a long time, I thought that

being an anthropologist means writing ethnographies. Recently, I came to the conclusion that, for me, to be an anthropologist is to come into spaces carefully, analyze them, and understand that my analysis is never entirely true. And so while I don't always write fieldnotes or interview people, I am always aware. I always look for care and social inequalities. Of course, it is not only the anthropologist who does that, many activists do so without being trained in anthropology. I remember last fall, after a New England 350.org climate conference, which brought together climate activists of many generations, a fellow participant wrote me on Facebook:

At an event 350 [place in MA] hung out for this weekend, I had to spend a lot of time explaining to old white men why it's important to do acknowledge gender pronouns during introductions. Like, 5-10 minutes with several different people, at different times. I was keeping myself from rage quitting by channeling the patience and compassion that I have seen radiate from you (Facebook message, 10/21/2015)

From this message, I could see the activist's analysis of the society and inequities in activism. Awareness of gender pronouns and the need to explain it points to knowledge of gender and the problem of the gender binary. Identifying the men as old and white points to racial and generational divides and the consequent lack of understanding of identity politics and its importance. In short, while I have a label and a paper to write, that does not make me any more of an 'anthropologist' than many other activists already are.

Rather, this blend between activism and anthropology allows me to be an activist in my field. I entered my field as an activist learning to think anthropologically. Now, I am entering the same spaces an activist who has a certain understanding of the intersections of everyday life and larger theoretical concepts. With all of this, I am still entering these spaces as an activist. And for me, part of that is organizing, taking up tasks, facilitating, and taking notes. It is staying up and calling people, it is showing up for events, and it is collaborating on smaller projects.

Not surprisingly, the idea of participating in progressive social change while doing ethnographic research has already been explored in anthropology. Maple Razsa introduced me to the idea of militant research as a research where “the researcher both seeks to study as well as

contribute to social struggles” (Razsa 2016: 15). I did not experience any of my informants ever refer to themselves or their work as 'militant,' and so I am hesitant to use this term. Simply, I hope not to exert categories over people if I do not have to, especially if they are categories people do not use on their own. The other word that comes to mind is 'participatory,' but that does not seem enough. Unlike 'participatory,' 'militant' has this connotation of contributing, of organizing, of striving for change. And so, hypocritically, I think about my research as a militant one, though I know the activism we do is not militant as defined by the general public or by our membership.

In all of this theorizing, I sometimes forget that I am a person. I am invested in the groups I am part of and which have become my second home and so there are always emotions intertwined in my research: the happiness of seeing people after a long time, the accomplishment of a well-attended vigil, but also the frustration of people forgetting their tasks and the exhaustion of finishing handouts the night before the action. I am also a person who seeks care, and so there is a sense of urgency to find it before I burn out. Lastly, I am a person who moves in this sociopolitical landscape. In other words, I live on the intersection of my identities and the intersection of this intersection with climate activism in 350 Maine.

As a student from the Czech Republic where understanding our identities is almost nonexistent, being an undergraduate student at a college in the United States challenges me on many levels. Most importantly, I was challenged on my privilege. I learned to understand that my whiteness will always be violent for the people of color around me and that I will always be represented in the mainstream narratives more than they are. In that, I also realized that through this research, where I am talking about white climate activists in Maine, I am contributing yet another white and white-centered narrative. Knowing this, I cannot generalize community care nor do I seek to do so. That is not say that community care cannot work similarly in different communities, but to say that we cannot assume that as a given just because this is a narrative about white people. I also understand how my perceived womanhood, age, and access changes the dynamics in the groups in

which I work. In other words, I am not able to write from any other position than mine. The things I can see and theorize about are things that my identities allow me to see. In short, I am sure I will be missing many things, but highlighting others from my own perspective.

Sometimes, when I think about all these complications, I get discouraged and it seems that nothing is too important to do, given how problematic everything is. But for me part of existing as a politically aware human being is trying to challenge and overcome these boundaries. I know this project will never be perfect, and I know it will be problematic. I know my identities do not allow me to see everything, and so I will omit more than I like to think. But in the end, I try. I try and I hope that regardless of all of this, you, the person who reads it, can find something interesting, affirming, or eye-opening in my ponderings about community care.

~ letter 4 ~

about the climate activists in Maine

Dear Reader,

before I could start looking at community care, I had to ask more questions: who am I studying? What does it mean to be an activist? What does it mean to do activism? I have to admit that, in the beginning of this study, I was quite close minded. I had a very specific idea of activism: it was acting in order to enact change through altering the relations of power. And while it is succinct and sounds nice, I learned that not everyone shares this definition. During my first interview, Peter, the leader of the local Citizens' Climate Lobby (CCL), a group that aims to pass carbon tax legislation through nonpartisan lobbying, challenged my whole understanding of what activism means. I still feel awkward about that whole interview. It was a Saturday afternoon and Peter had just called me that he is coming for the interview without letting me know in advance. I quickly cleaned my room and invited him in. As we were sitting there, Peter explained to me why he is part of Citizens Climate Lobby and not of 350 Central Maine:

“350 does not appeal to me as much as Citizen Climate Lobby....So CCL is involved in something very positive, and by speaking personally to people in congress, we feel as if work could really get done. And it's not opposing anybody.... but, demonstration...I always feel a bit lost in....So personally, I am not a demonstrator. I have done that, but I never feel quite comfortable with it.” (Peter, interview in person, 02/15/2015, Waterville, ME)

For Peter, CCL's tactics were much more acceptable than the ones of 350 Central Maine.

Yet, these tactics did not really fit into my definition of activism. They did not challenge the power dynamic: the constituents did not gain more power by lobbying. Additionally, they were not visible so they did not change the balance of power in the public discourse: they did not change the way we view the government and its position in power hierarchies. Yet, Peter considered himself an activist.

Based on this experience, and many that followed, I decided to let my informants self-identify as activists. Because I already had many relationships within the activist community in Maine, I decided to primarily look at 350 Maine, 350 Central Maine, and 350 Greater Portland. For both, 350 Central Maine and 350 Greater Portland, I have attended numerous meetings over long periods of time and co-organized larger actions as a leader and a participant. I interviewed people from these groups or their email lists. In this way, my informants became self-selected because they had to be somehow associated with 350 Maine for me to be able to reach them.

And while I say that I talk about climate activism in Maine, I have to recognize that I talk about a very certain subset of this activism. 350 Maine is not the sole climate activist group in Maine, and there are many others that do amazing work. My access and familiarity allowed me to study 350 Maine, and I am very grateful to all the people who took the time to partake in this project. They all are amazing climate activists. They also share certain level of understanding of activism that allows them to collaborate together. This, again, makes the community care I will explore even more specific.



## Letter 5

### *The argument of care*

~ letter 5 ~

about care as a practice and care as an aspiration

Dear Reader,

over the past two years I kept asking the same question to myself: *What is care?* And I could not answer it. I could not answer it because none of the answers was comprehensive enough. For me, care could be being held and comforted. But I have friends who do not like to be touched, and so hugging is not an act of care for everyone. Additionally, these actions of care did not seem enough: there was something more about care, something about its intentionality, its way of transforming people. Since I was lost, I turned to theory for answers.

Now, I see care as practice and as an aspiration. Additionally, I see the two as interconnected. By care as a practice I mean the actual acts of care. To practice care is to care for someone. For example, if I were to be sick due to exhaustion from organizing, I know my activist friends would take care of me: they would bring tea and food, give me medicine, suggest movies, and take on my organizing tasks. They would practice care.

Care as an aspiration, then, is thinking about care as a way of living, as a world-view that informs all my interactions with people and non-human beings (plants, animals, rocks, etc.). David Graeber writes that activist spaces are “spaces in which activists can treat one another as they feel people ought to treat each other, and to begin to create something of the social world they wish to bring out” (Graeber 2009: 287). In other words, in activist spaces we can live in the ways we wish to see in the world. We can try to replicate relationships that we imagine to be in a just society. I believe that care is one of them. In this way, care can transform our thinking and the way we relate to each other. It can also transform our bodies because when we take care of each other and

ourselves we transform our physical forms.

Does that make sense? Let me give you an example about the differences and similarities between care as a practice and care as an aspiration. Let us say I am sick and I let two of my friends know. Both are my friends, but I have a different relationship with each of them. With one, we know each other but we never cared for each other before. This friend comes to take care of me and practices care: they bring me food and medicine, yet they do not really know how to comfort me. In this case, they conceptualize this care as something that is additional rather than key to our friendship. With my other friend we have developed a long-term caring relationship. We check in with each other regularly, memorize what each of us finds comforting, and we intentionally focus on these parts of our relationship. My friend also takes care of me, brings food and medicine, and comforts me because they know how. For them, this interaction is yet another way of developing our friendship and a necessary part of our friendship's existence. I am not writing this example to compare my friends, both of them are amazing. What I hope to illustrate is that the first friend only practiced care while the second friend lived it. For the first one care was a practice and for the second one it was practice as we all an aspiration – aspiration for a world where care is part of relationships rather than an addition to it.

In short, care can be an aspiration to create a different connection between people. As I wrote earlier, Fraser argues that capitalism consumes and eradicates our social bonds. Care, on the other hand, is able to create and maintain social bonds based on mutual understanding. Therefore, through care, we can resist capitalism. Care is an aspiration for a world where we can create social bonds without them being taken or commodified by the market. Additionally, we, as persons, are partly created by the social connections we have or do not have, and so care as an aspiration transforms our very selves.

To comprehend how to understand the self in relation to care, I turned to Grace Clement's ethic of care. According to her, the self in ethic of care is

“socially constituted or defined through its relationship to others – all individuals, not just those who accept the ethic of care, are socially constituted – those who follow the ethic experience themselves as socially constituted and because of this experience, feel an obligation to those whom they are connected” (Clement 1996: 17)

I like that through this definition Clement makes the self socially constituted, yet does not take away the entire individual. The author positions the self of ethic of care on a border between the socially constituted self and a self that has to remain an individual in order to have the ability to provide care. She writes that “[c]are and understanding require the sort of distance that is needed in order not to see the other as a projection of the self, or self as a continuation of the other” (Clement 1996: 29), otherwise, one would run into the danger of not being able to “understand the other person’s well-being without thinking about oneself” (Clement 1996: 29). It seems to me that we, as activists, often strive towards a less individualistic approach, yet we struggle to find a way of honoring the individual and recognizing the collective at the same time. This specific relational self allows for honoring both: the socially constituted relational self as well as the boundaries of the individual self. If care is an aspiration of a certain way of living, then care is an aspiration of becoming a relational self. The aspiration to become a person that understands themselves as co-created by their connections with others, while being able to draw the line between the self and the other.

Though I had a better understanding of care by this point in my research, the question remained similar: *How do we get to this kind of self?* Clement talks about a three-stage development of the self in the ethic of care. While I recognize that no development is linear and that no stage is objective, I find it useful to look at these three stages. It helped me understand that moving towards our aspiration is a long and never-ending process. In the first stage of the development of caring self, one only focuses on care for oneself, for one’s own survival. When one recognizes that they are connected to others, that they are a relational self, they “regard the earlier focus on one’s own needs as selfish” (Clement 1996: 36). On the second stage, one does not focus on oneself but rather

solely on the others. By defying their wishes in favor of the wishes of others, they seek to avoid hurting them. The transformation to the third stage of the ethic of care takes place “when one realizes that denying one's own needs is in fact a violation of the responsibility to care” (Clement 1996: 36). As a consequence, one realizes that oneself is “of equal worth to the other. This allows one to conceive responsibility in a new way, recognizing that it is not selfish but responsible to attend to one's own needs, and that selflessness is actually irresponsible” (Clement 1996: 36). Shortly, “care requires that one attends to the needs of both self and other and not one to the exclusion of the other. In attending to one's own needs, one is honest to oneself and thus able to take responsibility for one's decision” (Clement 1996: 36). In addition to providing a possible mental and theoretical path of aspiring to become a caring self, I find Clement's emphasis on recognizing that I, as a person and a self, also need to care from myself key. If I aspire for a better world, I have to aspire for a world that also includes me as a person that is able to exist. As I would wish for any other person to exist, be well, and cared for, I also aspire for myself to be that person. In the just society I imagine, everybody is cared for, and I am part of that 'everybody.' I have to admit, I think I am on the second stage and I have yet to learn to live my aspirations.

If care as an aspiration transforms the self and the way we relate to each other, then living care also transforms the groups we are in. If all the activists in my group were to see care as an aspiration, then we would be able to have a group that is not based on relationship reduced by capitalism, but rather based on long-term, ongoing care that aspires to recreate a different world. Basically, care is part of the world we are fighting for. It is an aspiration to be able to relate, to genuinely care, to transform ourselves, our relationships with others, and thus also other selves. It is an aspiration for transformation through care.

Yet care as an aspiration cannot exist without the practice of care. Part of living care, aspiring to be a caring self, is practicing care and learning how to best provide and receive care. Even though care as an aspiration cannot exist without the practice of care, one can, and many do,

practice care without aspiring for transformation.

I believe that this combination of care as a practice and an aspiration is revolutionary. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, one way of describing revolutionary is as “constituting or bringing about a major or fundamental change” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). Building on this definition, when I say revolutionary, I mean transformative for oneself and the people around the self. I mean transformative in a way that challenges the systems and structures that divide us. In thinking about revolutionary, I think about Michel Foucault and his view of discursive reality. Revolutionary, then, is transformative in a way that challenges the normative and (slightly) changes the direction of bio-power.

To understand bio-power, one has to understand Foucault's view of the organization and disciplining of society. Basically, according to him, state is concerned with “how to introduce the economy of order from the top of the state down through all aspects of social life” (Rainbow 1984: 15). Such economy is achieved through combination of individualization techniques and totalization procedures. The totalization procedures extend “well-governed polity...down through the customs of the people [and] to the environment itself” (Rainbow 1984: 21). The individualization techniques are based on objectification of the subject (that is us, people in the society). Through dividing practices, scientific classification, and subjectification, the state creates an individual, a subject that has two roles: he or she is a subject “to someone else by control and dependence” and also “tied to his [or her] own identity by a conscience of self knowledge” (Rainbow 1984: 21). Thus an individual is created. I am sure that by now you understand that the power in such state is not only repressive, but rather force that “traverses and produces things” (Foucault 1986: 119), a force that affect not only our laws but also how we think about ourselves and what we think is a norm. Does this make sense so far?

Bio-power, then, is not really a power in the sense we know it, rather, it is a regime, one that makes “knowledge-power an agent of the transformation of human life” (Rainbow 1984: 17). Bio-

power has two poles: human species and human body. Human species shifted the political conversation from human body as a juridical entity to a scientific entity, which allowed the state to reconsider how we see the human body and thus control it on scientific bases. In summary, the state disciplines us through individualizing, normalizing, categorizing and thus making us self-aware of our bodies, which gives them bio-power that helps to regulate the population through discipline that is based on control of our bodies and our pleasure and can be altered based on the changing norms. Simply, care can be revolutionary through altering the bio-power from the set, capitalist ways.

This intersection between care as an aspiration and a practice, however, cannot be revolutionary without paying attention to the body. Care does not only transform our understanding and relations, it also changes our bodies and the way they connect to each other. Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi summarized this idea in the concept of social flesh. For them, social flesh “highlights human embodied interdependence and in the process configures a new, more transformative political vision” (Beasley and Bacchi 2007: 279, emphasis added). In this short definition, Beasley and Bacchi point to two very important points. Firstly, care and mutual relationships are not only mental but also corporeal, embodied. Secondly, these relations create new, transformative political visions. They are revolutionary.

Before I move on, I have to mention altruism. When caring, the relationship between the caregiver and the care recipient is often seen as unequal – the care giver only gives and the care recipient only receives, thus the caregiver becomes superior to the care recipient. This relationship is often compared to the relationship between the less and the more fortunate, where the more fortunate engages in altruism and provides care for the less fortunate. In other words, altruism creates a relationship of dependence. However, the conceptualization of care as part of altruism only replicates the larger social structures of inequality. Clements uses the well know example of fish and fishing in order to illustrate the difference: “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day

teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime” (Quote Investigator<sup>1</sup>). In this example, giving a fish is altruism – it creates an unequal relationship where the care giver is superior because they can decide if the care recipient receives care. Furthermore, this relationship is only created in one direction. Teaching man to fish, on the other hand, creates a different relationship that opens a possibility of reciprocal care. Here, perhaps, an act of care could be giving man a fishing net and teaching him how to fish. This action does not create a long term dependency as the care recipient can keep using the fishing net when he learns to fish. Additionally, since there is no long term dependent relationship between the caregiver and the care recipient, the care recipient has the possibility of reciprocating the caring relationship when the time comes. In other words, if one uses only their social privilege (being more fortunate) as a way of caring, it “produces inequitable vulnerability and the associated need for ‘altruism’” (Beasley and Bacchi 2007: 293). Since it produces inequity, it is not part of the aspiration of care nor of the caring relationships. That is not to say that altruism is wrong, in my view, however, it does not belong to care.

Similarly to care as an aspiration, the practice of care does not exist in a vacuum. When I think about the practice of care, I think about it as contextual, temporal, and relational action. It is a contextual practice because it exists in the context of capitalism where, depending on the way one practices care it can either support or question/disrupt the system. It exists in the context of oppression, thus it is gendered and racialized as disproportionate burden of care in this economy fall onto women of color from the Global South. It is also contextual because it differs from movement to movement and from individual to individual. It is temporal because it needs to be practiced again and again. It is temporal because it changes with time. As people and groups change over time, so do their needs, and so does the care they need and are able to give. Care is also relational. Care does not exist within an individual, it is a collective process.

I hope I explained myself well. Care is both a practice and an aspiration. When these two

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<sup>1</sup> The author of this quote is unknown, though it is usually assigned to Anne Isabella, who first wrote it in the Western literature.

combine, care becomes revolutionary because it challenges the capitalist system, systems of inequality, and because it has the possibility of transforming people and communities, moving them closer towards the world we wish to see.



*The carefulness of care in an unequal society*

~ letter 6 ~

about the problematic of care and care as a problematic

Dear Reader,

as I have written before, care does not exist in a vacuum. It is much more complicated than only practices and aspirations. Care is related to the systems of privileges and oppressions in the world we live in and it is important to recognize that. It is important to recognize that because historically the responsibility to care has been put on women, often women of color, often women of color from the Global South. It is also important because people of different identities need different types of care. Historically, whiteness and white people have been the ones who directed the definitions of concepts. Similarly, care and the practices of care are often defined by what white people think care is. This is very visible in the mainstream discourse about self-care. On the CrimethInc website, a loose Internet collective dedicated to anonymous collective action, one of the articles states that “[t]o endorse care as a universal good is to miss the role care also plays in perpetuating the worst aspects of the status quo” (CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective 2013).



Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is to use the image mentioned in this article.

This picture illustrates the mainstream discourse of self-care. Since white people have always dominated the discourse, this is what white people would consider self-care: these are the things they are used to doing. For example, in order for somebody to take a bubble bath as an act of self-care, they have to 1) be comfortable taking a bubble bath, 2) have access to a bathtub, and 3) have access to the special soap that creates the bubbles in the bubble bath. One has to meet these three assumption in order to consider bubble bath as a possibility of self-care. Additionally, these suggestions of care are only practices and not aspirations. In that, they are often used to uphold productivity rather than to challenge the capitalist system. Lastly, the concept of self-care has been developed by queer women of color who have since been omitted from the picture. In the 1980s, when she was struggling with cancer, Audre Lorde asserted that caring for herself was “an act of political warfare” (Lorde 1992). Yet this legacy is forgotten as the word becomes more mainstream. Differently said, self-care and care do not exist in a vacuum, yet they are often seen outside of the structures of oppression and privilege.

Because I am studying a white population of middle class activists in Maine, it is important to anchor my understanding of care in understanding of identities, intersectionality, and the specific ways that care relates to race, gender, class, and the system of neoliberal capitalism. When I think about care as an aspiration, part of the aspiration is having understanding of care in relations to oppression and privilege. Clement writes that “one [creates a] sense of self respect by recognizing the legitimacy of one's own point of view, but also by ensuring the legitimacy of one's own point of view by critically examining it” (Clement 1996: 37). This critical examination is key to understanding care. If care does transform our self-understanding, then part of that transformation has to be our self-understanding as racialized, gendered, and classed selves in the neoliberal capitalist system. In the following letters, I will try to explain what I understand by identities and how I see the intersections between care and race, care and gender, care and class, and care and

capitalism.

~ letter 7 ~

about identities, identity politics, and intersectionality

Dear Reader,

for me, identity has always been a difficult concept and no one definition ever encompassed all there is to say about it. Similarly, this letter will be only a scratch on the surface of understanding identities. I gained parts of such understanding through reading Linda Alcoff. In her writing, she introduces the concept of social horizon and explores why there are so many controversies about identity politics on the left. Though I did not realize it for a long time, gaining an understanding of identity politics was important for me to develop an understanding of how problematic care can be.

But let's start from the beginning. Identity politics is a term that “has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. Rather than organizing solely around belief systems, programmatic manifestos, or party affiliation, identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context” (Heyes 2002). Identity politics emerged from Combahee River Collective, who “believe[ed] that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of [their] own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression” (Alcoff 2005: 15), but not assuming that “identities are always perfectly homogenous or that identity groups are unproblematic” (Alcoff 2005: 15). Basically, identities were important for liberation. However, the idea of the Combahee River Collective was not based only in identity politics, but also in the belief that “overcoming oppression will require a movement of solidarity against capitalism and imperialism” (Alcoff 2005: 15). In short, “the collective was not supportive of a general separatism but simply insisted on the need for specific

analysis” (Alcoff 2005: 15). Such start of identity politics provided a view of identity that was heterogeneous, contextual, and linked to other systems of oppression.

But what exactly is identity? Here is the definition that Alcoff provides:

“I argue that identities are grounded in social locations, and I make use of resources from hermeneutics and phenomenology to explicate the epistemic, the metaphysical, and the politically relevant features of identities that need to be taken into account in both social theory and practice. I make use of the concept of a hermeneutic horizon to suggest a way to visualize the epistemic effects of differences in social location. But hermeneutics tends to underplay the embodied features of subjective experience, and to correct this I use phenomenological accounts to flesh out more fully the ways in which raced and gendered identities are materially manifested.” (Alcoff 2005: 9)

In other words, Alcoff argues that identities are based in social locations, and that “[t]his locality and specificity is necessary because identities are constituted by social contextual conditions of interaction on specific cultures at particular historical periods” (Alcoff 2005: 9), and that they are both societal and contextual as well as embodied. She specifies contextuality not only by geographical location but also by location in economics and colonialism: “many salient features of the current identity formations are the product of...colonialism as well as political and economic disparities between peoples, genders, and races. The difficulty of describing features of current identities is that they are dynamic and that these global economic realities will continue to affect their formation and constrain their transformation. No significant transformation of identities can happen in the absence of redressing the disparities of wealth and resources.” (Alcoff 2005:10). Based on such contextual analysis of identity, Alcoff concludes that identities are not “timeless entities but...temporal, historically and culturally located” (Alcoff 2015:11).

A helpful way of looking at the complexity of identity is through the concept of social horizon. Social horizon is our location in the sociopolitical landscape. Based on our position in this landscape – position that is directed by our own identities and our specific context, we can see a specific horizon. I always imagine walking up a mountain. When you are at the foot of the mountain and you look up, the mountain seems large and steep. When you are in the middle,

perhaps there are trees and it only seems like you are inside a forest that grows on a sloped ground. In both cases it is the same mountain, the same reality, the same systems we live in, yet your position is different and so the place around you looks different. However, because people share identities and people with certain identity share common history and have similar experiences, they are located in similar locations. Obviously, no two experiences are the same, as no two places on the mountains are, but they can be similar. If two people stood at the foot of the mountain one mile from each other and looked up, the largeness and steepness of this mountain would look similar to them because of the similarities in their positions. Analogously, people of the same identity will have similar understanding of the world due to their shared experiences and collective history.

Not only do identities position people in systems of privilege and oppression, the way we understand identities is also informed by these structures. Consequently, it is often the view of white people that is considered as a baseline. In other words, we live in a world where majority of the institutions and ideas of society were created by white people and thus suit the stereotypical white more than any other race. Simply, “whiteness operates as an unmarked, and unremarked upon, center in most whites' lives, and in most white institutions” (Eichstedt 2001: 454). On the institutionalized level, racism is defined as a “system of advantages based on race” (Tatum 2000: 66). Furthermore, race and politics are closely intertwined: “global white supremacy is itself a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, right and duties” (Mills 1997: 3). On the personal level, white racism can be seen as “ritualized behaviors that reproduce racialized social structures, or one that supports and perpetuates a race-based hierarchy” (Jacobs and Taylor 2011: 688). Racial myths, then, “take a form of prejudices, stereotypes, everyday racial frictions, and broader ideologies” (Jacobs and Taylor 2011: 688). Basically, as anything else, the white leftist analysis of identity politics carries assumptions coming from the Western Anglo traditions of thought. Many people, even in progressive

movements, oppose identity politics because they believe that cultural identities will “produce a problem of conflicting loyalties within a larger grouping” (Alcoff 2005: 36) and argue that identity politics within movements “weaken the possibility of coalition and lead to separatism” (Alcoff 2005: 37). This idea, however, lies on the assumption of exclusivity: an assumption that claims that identity always comes with exclusivity to other identities. The second argument of the white left is that identity politics reinforces group identities leading to “conformism, intolerance, and patriarchy” (Alcoff 2005: 37), in other words, to homogenization of groups and the restriction of one's own identity. This idea lies on the “assumption of the highest value being individual freedom” (Alcoff 2005: 38, emphasis added). However, as I wrote before, self is relational and social, and so are identities, thus such idea of individual freedom seems irrelevant. Lastly, many white people on the left think that there is need for distance from identity in order to be rational, since rationality is supposedly the most relevant in the arena of politics. This idea lies on the objectivizing assumption, “follow[ing] from the assumption that identities involve a set of interests, values, beliefs, and practices” (Alcoff 2005: 38). In short, many progressive movements are based on these Anglo Western assumptions and thus push out identity politics as not central and/or important to the cause. However, Alcoff, the Combahee River Collective, and many others point out that identity politics are key for liberation and unity. Without them, somebody will always be overlooked.

Before I relate identity to care, I want to touch upon intersectionality. Kimberle Crenshaw, the scholar who coined the term intersectionality, describes the struggles of women of color in the anti-racist and feminist movements, concluding that it is important to recognize the intersection of both of these identities in looking at oppression within society. Though intersectionality might have its problems in reducing people to their identities, it “might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics” (Crenshaw 1991: 1296). Surya Nayak adds further nuance to this concept, explaining that “[i]ntersectionality goes beyond merely combining inadequate and oppressive socio-economics,

political, and legal structures, and inadequate feminist theories and practices” (Nayak 2015: 88) and that “intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and the oppressions work together in producing injustice.” (Nayak 2015: 89). She also notes the possible dangers of intersectionality: “If we are not careful, the seduction of intersectionality as a solution to confront unified, homogeneous constructions becomes a prior, unified solution itself. ... My argument is that in the primary task of dismantling borders between race, class, gender, age, sexuality and disability, intersectionality performs the solution as the unavailability of unified solution” (Nayak 2015: 100). In other words, intersectionality and identity politics generally run into the danger of making identities more stable and homogeneous without questioning the boundaries between them. Yet, it is exactly this questioning of boundaries that allows transformation.

I am sorry this letter was very dry and full of theory. Often, when I was thinking about writing letters about community care, I was wondering if writing theory is useful for you, the reader. In the end I decided that I am not the one to decide. For me, identity politics theory was incredibly helpful in understanding my own activism and my own position in the world, and so I wanted to give you the opportunity to read it and take whatever you need to develop your own understanding of identity politics and find your own position on the social horizon. I do believe, though, that for us to be able to be caring selves, we have to understand identity politics and how they are affected by the ever-present white supremacy.

~ letter 8 ~

about care and race

Dear Reader,

as I mentioned in my previous letters, my fieldwork did not really allow me to look at race, rather the lack of recognition of our own whiteness pointed to the absence of race in our organizing,

thinking about activism, and thus in our aspiration to care. The critique of whiteness in the environmental movement, which is seen as the umbrella for the climate movement, is twofold: it is “not only the unequal distribution of environmental hazards across lines of race and class, but also the white, middle-class nature of some environmentalism, a broader patterns of marginalization underlying people's opportunities to participate or not” (Gibson-Wood and Wakefield 2013: 641). When white activists realize their privilege, they often experience white guilt. While some find ways of reconciling their privilege and learning more, many become defensive which can then “create barriers to cross-racial communication” (Jacobs and Taylor 2011: 690). Yet other whites live the “effect of the invisibility/denial of whiteness, especially when coupled with well-intentioned, middle-class, liberal desire to 'get beyond race,' is to assert the desirability of colorblindness” (Eichstedt 2001: 452). Given that whiteness is complicated and that it complicates activism and life for many, what should white people do? Understandably, there is not one answer. From the stories of race in activist spaces, though, there are some basic, general ideas:

“Whites...must recognize their position as whites, as whites in a racist system, and ultimately as racist whites. That is, they must embrace the oppressor label at the same time that they challenge the oppressor identity and behavior. To do otherwise, to attempt to disassociate from the racialized group in which one located, is generally seen as impossible and inappropriate” (Eichstedt 2001: 460)

To understand a more phenomenological way in which care and race are experienced in activist spaces, I turned to an article by Jennifer Alzate Gonzálezis, an English Language and Literature Ph.D. student at the University of Michigan. She writes about her experience as a member of the United Coalition for Racial Justice, which helped to organize a 12-hour-long Speak Out! to protest low minority enrollment at the university. Among others, Gonzálezis (2015) talks about her need for self-care during organizing for the speak out:

“In the weeks directly before and after the Speak Out, my schoolwork and personal life took a nosedive as I spiraled into depression and chronic anxiety. In the few moments I could speak to others about those feelings, I heard my story mirrored back to me countless times—of (queer) activists of color unsustainably organizing on adrenaline and stress until their bodies caved in.” (Gonzálezis 2015: 16)



Gonzálezis describes how, in these times of depression and anxiety, she turned to the “Internet activist sheroes” (Gonzálezis 2015: 16). She mentions many examples “[f]rom queer mixed Black femmes like Kim Katrin Milan, to queer Black cripactivists like Eddie Ndopu” (Gonzálezis 2015: 16). For her, turning to feminine-identifying people of color for comfort and advice during a time of crisis was key. Since the experience of white people in the United States is so different due to the systems of privileges and oppression, a white view of self-care would not be helpful and comforting in these moments. Additionally, the origins of these radical ideas of self-care are specifically from “1960s U.S. women of color feminists [who] critiqued a kind of masculinist ethos which precludes the possibility of not just effective and powerful movements, but loving, emotionally fulfilling, self-liberatory movements which build community while enacting social change” (Gonzálezis 2015: 16). In short, the white narratives that are the most visible and go-to for many people as a source of inspiration for care might not be suitable for people of color because white authors often omit other people's experiences. Furthermore, much writing on self-care by people of color is based on analysis tightly intertwined with identity politics, while white authors do not need such analysis in the center of their writing.

Based on Gonzálezis' account of her experiences, I found it useful to explore how race works in our society, and I hope you will find it informative as well. Alcoff writes that “liberal Western societies today maintain a paradoxical position whereby 'race is irrelevant, but all is race'” (Alcoff 2005: 181). In other words: “[t]he legitimacy and moral relevance of racial concepts is officially denied even while race continues to determine job prospects, career possibilities, available places to live, potential friends and lovers, reactions from police, credence from jurors, and the amount of credibility one is given by one's students” (Alcoff 2005: 181). Even though many seem to see race as irrelevant, understanding our society as racialized is key in moving towards liberation. To be able to racial our understanding of society, we need to know what race is. In her book, Alcoff

identifies a contextual definition of race as the one that most fit into the movement politics. In contextualism, “[r]ace is socially constructed, historically malleable, culturally contextual, and reproduced through learned perceptual practices. Whether or not it is valid to use racial concepts and whether or not their use will have positive or negative political effects depends on the context” (Alcoff 2005: 182).

I am sure that you understand that there is very little I can say about race and care from my own experience. I had to turn to books and theories to recognize that care is always racialized and that not everybody can and wants to find comfort in what white people see as care. While not fully developed nor addressed, I hope that this attempt on racializing care can further problematize the notion of generalizable community care in climate activism.

~ letter 9 ~

about care and gender

Dear Reader,

there is so much to say about gender and care, I don't even know where to start. As I mentioned previously, historically, care has been a feminine labor – often overlooked and not valued by the capitalist market. Consequently, women often need to work and take care of their families, friends, and loved ones. In this case, it is expected and therefore not celebrated. This dynamic then makes it harder for women to succeed in the capitalist terms. In other words, women in our society need to be successful in their careers while being good mothers and wives and daughters while taking care of everyone around them.

But let me start from the beginning. It was not only until the 1970s when the ideas of including the analysis women as a part of anthropology emerged (Moore 2012: 1). Since then, gender became one of the main lenses of looking at social interactions. Gender, here, is not understood as a rigid category but rather as category “instituted through the stylization of the body

and, hence...understood as the mundane ways on which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (Butler 1988: 519). Given this definition, gender is often understood in “political and social terms, with reference not to biological constraint but instead to local and specific forms of social relationship and, in particular, of social inequality” (Rosaldo 1980: 400). In short, gender is political and socially constructed category which is constructed and re-constructed through mundane interactions. “If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such act, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversion of that repetitive style” (Butler 1988: 520). Basically, even though gender categories tend to define our lives, because gender is not a stable category, there is a possibility to redefine it.

Gender dynamics are also reflected in community care. Since care is often expected from women, they also tend to care for people in activist spaces. On the other hand, if men care in activist spaces, they are celebrated. Even though written out it seems obvious, these differences are subtle and often invisible. To make it easier for myself, I compiled some of the repeating gendered care. Additionally, you can see other examples of gendered care throughout the fieldnotes in this text. Sometimes, I will point it out; other times, I believe you can find it yourself. Here are some of the most obvious examples of gendered care from my field:

- Women are often on time while men are not, they are excused for it
- Women tend to be silenced by men in the group
- Men interrupt the meeting and/or other people speaking more often than women
- Women often make sure all people have enough information and take care of new members
- Women are often given the mundane tasks while men take on the visible and “more interesting” ones

This is not to say that all women care and none of the men do. What I am trying to say is that women are conditioned to care and they often do so in activism as well. Similarly, men are conditioned not to care which is why their practices of care are celebrated and acknowledged. One of the most stereotypical examples is baking. If a woman brings homemade baked cookies to meeting people will thank her; if a man does so, they will admire his ability to bake and the time he has taken to do so.

I hope people aspire for a world where women are celebrated for caring and men are encouraged to care as well. If care is an aspiration, then, I hope it aspires for a world where genders are equal. To become a caring self, everybody has a different journey to take and exploring one's gender identity is one of them. In aspiring for a caring world and for a world where everyone is encouraged to care, it is important to also think about the gender relations we replicate in our own activist spaces.

I apologize that this version is so simplified, but there is so much to write about everything. I know not everybody identifies as a man or a woman. Gender identity and performance is not a binary. For example, people who perform femininity, regardless of their sex, are expected to care. Yet, some people who are not traditionally expected to perform femininity might need care to reinforce their gender identity or, on the contrary, their care can be devalued because of their sex. Furthermore, sexuality affect how one perceives their gender and changes how they perform femininity or masculinity. I know gender intersects with other identities. But I am sure you can go in depth in this analysis so I can tell you about community care.

Dear Reader,

Care feels so complicated and so embedded into the systems that we live in. I have to admit that sometimes I wonder if it makes sense to get in the little depth I can reach with identity politics. But then I remember my experiences and the experiences of my informants, and I recognize that yes, it is important. It is important to see ourselves reflected in care and it is important for people to feel like they have to self-educate about identities if they do.

To continue writing, specifically about class, I remembered a particular moment between me and my friend after we joined a direct action in Portland, Maine against the Dakota Access Pipeline. It was the end of our fall semester and my friend Jeanné was traveling further down while my destination was Portland, where the action was organized. At least a month before, Maine Students for Climate Justice, Confront Portland, and Mindful Queer Collective got together and started planning a direct action. We all had a very different idea of what radical direct action means: for some it was direct disruption and confrontation with the police, for others it was a peaceful action and leaving before the police came, or really anywhere on that spectrum. It was only the night before the action that we agreed on going into TD Bank and staying inside until the police arrives. The day of the action, on Monday morning, we gathered on Monument Square, the main square in Portland, with banners, amplifier, and a mock pipeline. We silently walked over to the TD Bank headquarters and occupied it for 30 minutes. The action was exciting and afterwards we went to sit in a cafe and talk about our next steps.

Later that night, Jeanné and I were sitting in the apartment in which I was cat sitting, and we talked about activism and traveling. At one point Jeanné asked me: “How do you afford all of this?” And she was right, activism is expensive. Just when I look at that day: I had to come down to Portland, eat, and have the tea with other activists. I spend more money on activism than on

anything else. I haven't been buying textbooks for school for a while, yet when I have to go to Boston for a few days on my own expenses to help organize I will do it without a second thought. Apart from flying home, I think activism is where I spend the most money. Another example is that people who have cars and do a lot of action-hopping spend even more money than me because they must pay for gas and tolls too.

In other words, activism is incompletely accessible and thus classed. Activism is defined by class because one has to have enough time, money, and resources to do it. Activism requires one to be able to go to places, and so one either needs a car or a friend who will give them a ride. The climate activism I have been part of was childless: there has never been a child at any of the 350 Maine meetings. So to fit into this group, one would have to find and/or pay for childcare to be able to join these activists. This is not to say that working class people don't do activism, of course they do. Even further, many activist movements are based on the amazing organizing power of the working class folks – just think about unions and labor campaigns.

It is, however, important to remember that care is also affected by class. As there is a certain level of money required to access activism, so is there a certain level of capital needed to get activist care or be accepted in caring circles. If the activist group is predominantly middle-class, as were the activist groups I studied, then much of the ideas and practices of care are middle class too. To hang out, people go to middle-class oriented cafes with a certain aesthetic where others would not feel comfortable. In that case, it cannot be an aspiration of care because it is not inclusive. Care often requires money. For example, for my mentor over the summer care was to leave for two weeks to paint on an island. This comes with certain abilities – the ability to leave job for two weeks with no consequences, ability to purchase paints and canvases, ability to transport oneself up on the island, ability to stay on the island, ability to learn how to paint and enjoy it as a pleasure activity, and I could go on, but you have the idea.

Class also changes how activists see activism and why they do it. Steve Valocchi explored

how view of activism changes with class:

- “[m]iddle-class activists define their activism as a career, and their narratives depict a sequential and linear path to a new somewhat professionalized identity.
- Working-class activists conceive of their activism as a calling, and their narratives move backwards and forwards to an activism that links to and reinvents their working-class roots.
- Low-income activists make little distinction between their non-activist and activist lives. They regard their activism as a way of life, and their related narratives combine episodes of collective action with stories of economic deprivation” (Valocchi 2012: 169)

The different views of activism further inform how people approach it. If activism is seen as one of careers, then leaving activist circles is just as leaving a job. On the other hand, if one sees activism as a part of life and one of the few ways to improve their conditions, then leaving activism is not an option. Activism becomes incorporated in one's life regardless of how hard it might be.

I do not mean to generalize. I understand that every individual is different and that their perceptions of activism are different as well. But it is also important to understand the larger structures and how they influence us. Self-care, specifically, is often seen as a middle-class phenomenon because middle-class folks have the choice of engaging or disengaging with activism. For them activism is a choice. White, middle-class activists in the United States live comfortable-enough lives to be able to survive well without changing the systemic structures. On the other hand, folks from lower classes struggle, and thus structural change is seen as one of the few ways out. Therefore, for low-income people, if they choose to do activism, it is vital because it can directly change their condition while for middle-class people the change is often more ideological rather than transformative on the level everyday life. Obviously, this very simplified explanation excludes any other identities as well as the instability of being middle class. However, I found it a useful

overarching idea under which I can think about the relation of white, middle-class activists to self-care. Since for them activism is a choice, they feel the need of self-care much more than others who see activism as a necessity. In other words, middle class activists, who will not necessarily experience change based on their activism, have a different sense of urgency and motivation making them more prompt to needing self-care. Again, that does not mean that other people do not need self-care as well, they do. For them, it is just not the indication of staying or leaving the activist fight.

I believe everybody can benefit from creating a more caring environment as long as this environment recognizes and addresses the issues of access and views of activism. There are so many ways to do this – having a collective fund for people to use if need be, organizing in a way that makes it the easier for working class folks to attend, and doing these and many other initiatives while not necessary highlighting the class itself, yet recognizing its presence.

~ letter 11 ~

about care and capitalism

Dear Reader,

I wanted to start this letter by a quote that summarizes capitalism for me. In his interview with the New Yorker, when asked about the money he makes from his street art, Banksy said that he gives as much as possible away. That, however, does not make him any less of a part of the capitalist system. He summarized it by saying: “I love the way capitalism finds a place – even for its enemies” (Collins 2007). And I agree with him, we all have to survive, and we all need financial security in this individualized system where we are taught that it is only us who can take care of ourselves. This tension between becoming part of the capitalist system or not is often present in activism as well. Maple Razsa pointed to this phenomenon when he wrote about two generations of anarchist activists in Croatia. The younger generation did not have stable jobs and tried to resist the



system, while the activists of older generation became part of the NGO industrial complex in order to find certain level of stability.

As I wrote to you in my previous letters, care also has its place in the capitalist system. In Fraser's view it serves as a way of supporting capitalism without being valued by it. Sometimes it seems that there is no way to live outside of the system. Graeber offers perhaps a slightly different point of view: he claims that part of the revolution and transition to another system is people dropping out of the system and creating alternative ones (Graeber 2004: 17 – 18). I don't necessary agree with him just because only certain people – the middle class, the educated, the white – will be able to leave the system and still be fine. But here is where I turn back to care as an aspiration. For me, care is the middle ground. I believe there is a way for care to not be entirely capitalist, yet allowing us to organize within the system against the system. In aspiring to become caring selves while working for change, we can create a revolution.

But before I can explain further, I have got to ask: what is care in relation to the capitalist system? Is it a commodity? Is it a gift? Neither? Both? To better understand all of this, I decided to first find a suitable definition of capitalism based on the writings of Eric R. Wolf. Wolf sees capitalism as “complex hierarchical system controlled by the capitalist mode of production” (Wolf 1982: 296). Wealth, then, is “a strategic financial element combined with other elements: machinery, raw materials, and labor power” (Wolf 1982: 298). If wealth is defined as such, the capitalism is “not universal but particular to a time and place” (Wolf 1982: 298). Capitalism came into existence only when “the conversion of means of production and labor power into factors to be bought and sold created the all-embracing 'self-regulating' market” (Wolf 1982: 298). In other words, “the capitalist mode of produced...a new form of deploying social labor” (Wolf 1982: 298). I am sorry this is not a one sentence definition of a system. However, I found the nuance of understanding that capitalism is bound to time and place and that it created different ways of using social labor really useful. Especially the latter relates back to Fraser's crisis of care and using social labor, in this case care, to

maintain the capitalist system.

What, then, is care in this system? According to Benny Goodman, who studied nursing in the United Kingdom, care is both commodity and a gift. In his view, commodity is “an external object, a thing that through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind” (Goodman 2016: 327), and commodification is the process of “transforming goods and services into commodities which can be bought and sold in a market” (Goodman 2016: 328). Though care itself is not material, the labor of care is part of social reproduction of labor, and thus it can be commodified. Even though care is often commodified, its price does not reflect its value resulting in shortages of appropriate care. However, many nurses enter the workforce with high morals and even though they are exploited they engage in gift economy. They provide more care than is required of them by their employers. In these cases, “care [is] a gift, given freely, over and above paid care work” (Goodman 2016: 330). Goodman argues, based on Mauss’ definition of gift as “part of reciprocal exchange because they are imbued with a ‘spiritual mechanism’” (Goodman 2016: 333), that “[i]t might be that care workers provide gifts of care as part of creating a social bond with an unspoken obligation for reciprocation” (Goodman 2016: 333). In short, because of the closeness of the bodies and the moral discourse around care, nurses conceptualize their workplace similarly to home, which, in turn, encourages them to engage in this kind of gift giving without the expectation of material return. In participating in the gift economy, “many care workers give of themselves and their unpaid overtime to provide care...but in doing so find themselves in subordinate subject positions as a part of the social reproduction of labor in a ‘commodity economy’” (Goodman 2016: 333).

Nursing care and activist care are not one and the same, but there are similarities that can allow us to think about activist community care in similar terms. To an extent, activism and nursing are similar: both require voluntary labor and both often lead to “personal troubles [such as] stress [or] burnout” (Goodman 2016: 327). Thus one might argue that both activists and nurses engage, though differently, in the gift economy. Moreover, both engage in the gift economy on local scale

(maybe on some others as well, but local scale will be my focus here): nurses in hospitals and activists in meeting spaces. As Goodman argues, nurses might provide additional care expecting, in return, familial bonds: a connection to others. Activists work on similar assumption. They do not get compensated for their care, but in turn they expect either care back or a sense of community. This, as problematic as care is, can on a very local level provide a base for creating connections between people who care for each other. Thus, through this local gift economy, activists can illustrate a different way of living within the society. Such view of local care fits into the idea of relational self in ethics of care. Though activists might live in a “gift economy bubble,” as nurses do, they still participate in the commodity economics where care is commodified and used for the benefit of capitalism. As Fraser argues: without care capitalism cannot survive.

When I first learned all of this, I was very disenchanted with the world and care itself. Are we forever going to support the capitalist system through loving acts as care? In search for answers, I looked for different ways of understanding care within the system to justify community care in activism as revolutionary. I did not really find any definite answers, only many different theories that gave me snippets of hope. Hope for care as an aspiration. I will share with you the ones I found the most comforting or challenging, so you can find your own way of contextualizing care in this capitalist system.

In search of these answers, I read “A Household Full of Bodies: Neoliberalism, Care and ‘the Political’” by Hanna-Kaisa Hoppania and Tiina Vaittinen. The main argument of this article claims that care is political, not because practicing care is political, but because neoliberalism does not account for care fully. It creates discrepancies, which then makes the economics political. Unlike Fraser, who focused on the care as labor – a very feminist perspective, Hoppania and Vaittinen chose to build on ethic of care that “perceives care as a moral orientation and a wider set of practices” (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2014: 73), in other words: an aspiration. In this framework, they defined care as “a corporeal relation that derives from the needs of the body” (Hoppania and

Vaittinen 2014: 75). Nor is care peripheral, rather “the living organism of the vulnerable body...makes the labor of care an absolute necessity for human beings as individuals and as a species” (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2014: 74). Care is positioned within other bodies, in collectives of bodies, and historically: “in our body-minds we carry the effects and traces of care we have received and given, as well as the traumas of the absence of care. These embodied traces direct our being in the world, enabling as well as restricting us through our embodied senses” (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2014: 75). All of these facts put care at the center of our lives as “no moment in our lives is independent of care” (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2014: 75). Even though care is defined as such, it does not escape the capitalist system. The commodification of care does not only affect care itself but also the relations people form with each other. Yet care defined through ethic of care allows the possibility of seeing care as anti-capitalist:

“Simply put, to sustain life and avoid neglect and social disintegration, care relations require bodies to move. In capitalist political economy, however, no movement takes place without the political organisation of human and other resources. When the care needs of somebodies requires that resources be reorganised (perhaps at the cost of some other bodies’ needs), the existing order of the ‘household’ is disrupted and exposed to change.” (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2014: 73)

In other words, because care is embedded in our bodies (and we are too), it allows the possibility of care being anti-capitalist. Hoppania and Vaittinen talk about the failure of bodies to move as disturbing capitalism. Similarly, Foucault talks about the categorization and discipline of bodies in order to profit the capitalist system. Relating these two theories, there is perhaps a way to not think about care as part of the capitalist system – capitalism only needs bodies that are helpful to the production of value within the system. Yet, care in activist spaces exists to challenge the system, since we become better organizers and activists through becoming caring selves. In the case of activism, we use care to maintain our bodies without adding value to the capitalist system. Thus care does not have to be capitalist or support capitalism. Yet, it allows us to exist within the system and have certain financial security.

I also turned to Marxism to find a way out of this crisis of care. For many in neoliberal financial capitalism “money signifies a sphere of ‘economic’ relationships which are inherently impersonal, transitory, amoral and calculating” (Sleeboom-Faulker 2014: 324). Gifts in capitalism, then, are seen as “driven by hidden incentives” (Sleeboom-Faulker 2014: 325) and helping “to reproduce the global relation of power” (Sleeboom-Faulker 2014: 325). In short, while such gifts are idealized by the capitalist society as showing “moral responsibility, generosity, and solidarity” (Sleeboom-Faulker 2014: 325), they are criticized for maintaining the system by reinforcing the unequal relations of power. While existing in this system, “Marxian history writings...idealized ideas of gift exchange.... They highlighted that products in capitalism aimed to generate a society of profit and expansion, whereas Mauss’s gift regulations produced a society of solidarity and peaceful coexistence” (Sleeboom-Faulker 2014: 325). In the Marxist (and Maussian) view, gift is seen as social glue, as “the key to long-term social relations marked by balance between generosity and obligation, self-interest and solidarity” (Sleeboom-Faulker 2014: 324). However, some critique this position by exploring how the societies that Mauss studied were organized: “such arrangement of gift relationship also made possible the stabilization of large networks of power, which precluded competitors from overtaking them and causing instability” (Sleeboom-Faulker 2014: 327).

Another way of looking at the distinction between commodity and gift is through fluidity. Meaning that “gift and commodity are not necessarily opposed to one another; instead they are continually reconfigured within an intricately contextual relationship” (Benson and Carter 2008: 1). Regardless, there are certain distinctions between gift and commodity that make them fundamentally different: “while gift exchange works to draw attention to relationships that already exist, in commodity exchange, people are apparent in and of themselves. In other words, gift giving prepares the ground for others to act – through the various obligations that it entails – while in commodity exchange, obligations are not necessary because people act independently” (Benson and Carter 2008: 3). Basically, the relationships formed when gifts are exchanged are different than the

ones when commodities are. Furthermore, it is not the gifts/commodities themselves that determine what is commodity and what is gift, rather, it is the context. That is to say that “objects...at one time adopt the features of the gift, while at other times taking on the characteristic of a commodity.... [s]imilarly, there are also cases where commodity becomes gift by entering social relationships between people” (Benson and Carter 2008: 4).

I recognize that it is important to realize that the way Marxism views the gift might be idealized. It seems, however, unimaginable to go as far as to say that the gift is always also a commodity. For this reason, I like the idea of the gift/commodity distinction being contextual and based on specific relations. Then, if care between activists is based in relations which it creates and re-creates, which, based on my fieldnotes, it does, it can be considered a gift, though still within capitalism. Perhaps, one way of looking at this is that care creates a hole, a bubble in the system that allows for creating relationships that are not based on commodity exchange, that are not intrinsically capitalist. And such relationships can be defined in opposition to capitalism, as anti-capitalist, though they still help to support the system.

I cannot imagine living entirely outside of the system, I cannot even comprehend what it would entail. Regardless, I think it is important to position myself against the capitalist system as an activist. My position might never be perfect, but it might be an attempt to perfection. I know I will never be a perfect caring self. However, that should not stop me from trying to find ways of existing and thinking that allow me to practice care while supporting my fellow activists and without contributing (too much) to neoliberal capitalism.

Dear Reader,

with every word I wrote community care feels more and more complicated. Care is not only practice but also an aspiration. Care is not universal but raced, gendered, and classed. Care is not always what we would consider good but is also a part of and a contribution to the capitalist system. Even with thought-through intentions, care can be exclusive and difficult. But change is also difficult and we still fight for it, and so I want to fight for care. Having understood some of the difficulties and nuances of care, I am excited to finally share with you what I actually studied in the field and what I found. I hope we can both keep in mind the nuances of care as we move forward.

In the beginning, I was not really sure how to 'find' care in my fieldnotes, interviews, and experiences, so I turned back to the distinction between care as a practice and care as an aspiration. I could see the caring practices in the activist meetings, and so I started focusing on them. Then, I tried to find a common denominator between these practices and explore how they are established. I found caring practices in people's interactions, food in activist meetings, and people's spatial orientation. Exploring where such practices came from, I found that for people to practice care, they have to know each other well, understand the group structures, and be comfortable in the group. These are the three prerequisites of care which allow activists to develop a caring environment. Activists 'fulfill' these prerequisites of care through so-called getting-to-know practices. When I understood these connections, I could disentangle the getting-to-know practices that allowed people to learn about each other, the group, and became comfortable. This, consequently, allowed them to be able to meaningfully care for each other in activist meetings.

I know activism is more than meeting each other in classrooms, churches, cafes, and

people's houses. I know activism is more than planning actions. I know it is also protests and vigils and writing articles; it is long phone calls and Google hangouts, it is reading books and thinking. I chose to focus on activist meetings to explore care because they bring people together while working, and because that is where I spent the majority of my fieldwork. I also really enjoy interacting in activist meetings. It does not matter if we do not achieve anything or if we plan things I do not particularly agree with, being with people in one space and sharing the desire to change the future is enough for me to feel community. Of course, I don't only get happy and excited, sometimes I am also frustrated and discouraged, or both, or neither at the same time.

I guess what I am trying to say is that activist meetings for me are places where activism happens, where transformation happens, where change starts. That is why I decided to study care in activist meetings. In the next few letters, I will share with you what I have learned about practices of care, prerequisites of care, and getting-to-know practices.

~ letter 13 ~

about care in everyday interactions

Dear Reader,

as you know, first I looked at practices of care. I am sure you can imagine that this idea did not come just out of the blue, it came through an experience of feeling cared for in so many moments and in so many ways. I lived one of the most memorable moments of care at the end of summer 2015. I spend my summer in Portland organizing with 350 Greater Portland and 350 Maine. I had a really nice time getting to know people, organizing, and biking to a few different direct actions. I made friends with whom I still hangout, I got to spend time with women of all ages, and explore Portland. This is all to say that I felt sentimental about leaving. In mid-August we had our last event of the season, the organizing of which I spearheaded. It was a fundraising dinner. It was a lot of work and cooking, and I was kind of relieved that it worked out well. I was kind of



relieved that the event went well and according to plan, except one big surprise at the end of the dinner:

The church room was large and well lit. We have put the round tables in two rows, placing a variety of colorful tablecloths on them. While Lilli (pseudonym), Julie (pseudonym), and Sukie were in the kitchen, the rest of us carried food out to the main area, putting it on a long table in the corner. We had way too much food – a variety of salads, lasagna, many pastries, and tea and coffee that Lilli got as a donation from the local Coffee by Design Company.

...

In the end of the evening people were tired. It was getting dark outside. We have made it! We went through the program, people shared their opinions, and we ate together. When the program was about to end, Lee stepped up to the front of the stage. As usually, he was smiling. In his typical long-winded speech that always reminded me of the middle school teacher he was, he started talking about how special this day was for the 350 Greater Portland group. He invited the rest of the members up to stage and proceeded to invite me to the front. Unsure but expectant, watched by the people who have finished their dinner and stayed to chat at their respective tables, I walked up to the front of the room.

Lee went back to the group of women and produced a nicely wrapped package with hand-made card featuring a boat on sea with the rising sun, or setting sun, I am not actually quite sure how to recognize these two from each other now that I think about it. I thanked him, smiled, and hugged him. Then other members came to the front as well. Anne was carrying a branch with paper leaves all over it. She publicly thanked me and then explained that her son made the leaves. They send the leaves to all of the members of 350 Greater Portland to write me messages. It was beautiful. The branch was large and so when I received it and put it over my shoulder, my head almost disappeared.

I also publicly thanked everyone. I am a person who rarely cries and so I did not, but I felt very touched and so I held my hand to my heart. After we stood there, not really sure what to do next, we all started packing up. As I was leaving, Michelle who has been taking pictures the whole time stopped me to take a picture with the branch. I left the tree and the package with my mentor from previous job who came to support me and proceeded to help cleaning out. In the process of working together, I would stop my fellow activists or they would stop me and we would thank each other, appreciate each other, and offer future help like staying over in each other's houses and supporting each other in activist actions across the state.

...

After we cleaned, gave out rest of the food, and made sure everything was like we found it, Lee gave me a ride home. One of the last rides together. During the car ride, he asked me to open the package and read the card. I smiled, made a joke as I usually did when talking to Lee, and did as he said. When I carefully unwrapped the paper of the package, I found two very beautiful scarfs in style similar to the ones I wear every day. One of them was bright orange and one dark red. I was so happy. In my teenage years, I started wearing scarf every day, and, even during the warm Portland summer, I made sure to constantly wear a scarf. For some reason I feel too naked without a scarf. Lee asked me if I expected to get a scarf, and I said that yes I did. Funnily, around two weeks before this moment, Lee

and I had a conversation about why I wear scarfs and how I choose the ones I wear. At that time, I became suspicious, but I did not say anything. Lee and I took the long way to my home, reflecting on the dinner and the summer, talking about future plans. Dropping me off, he promised to have one more coffee before the end of the summer.

Walking back into the house I lived in for the summer, I was smiling. I put the branch into the corner of my room, took out the scarfs, re-read the card, and just thought about how successful our event was. I knew I will have to write fieldnotes and so I went down to get some tea.

(fieldnotes, 08/12/2015, Portland, ME)

That particular time, I felt cared for. I felt cared for because I knew somebody took the time to do all of this for me – I mattered enough to be part of the group. I felt cared for because people knew me enough to give me a scarf – I wear a scarf every day regardless of the season. The fact that somebody realized and found out which colors I liked made me feel like I belonged and people accepted me. I felt cared for because the message on each of the paper leaves contained an experience we had together, a memorable interaction, a thing we learned from each other – I knew I was important to people and they were important to me. Reflecting on this event and my fieldnotes, I found that people practice care in interactions, in the food they bring, and in the way they situate each other and themselves in spaces.

Perhaps most noticeable interactions of care were between new and established members. Can you recall the awkwardness of coming to a new group and not really understanding what is happening? For me, when a new member comes to the group which I am part of, it is always difficult to find the balance between filling people in and letting them learn. Regardless of where the balance ends up, it is part of taking care of the new members to make sure that the new member understands what is going on. I have countless examples of small interactions like this. To illustrate my point, I want to share with you two that felt very different yet aimed for the same goal – to make the new member feel included. When I was in Portland, we had new members come in to a few of our meetings. At these particular meetings, Anna (pseudonym) would often stop the meeting to fill new members in on the actions that had already happened or the ones we had been planning.

As usually, Lee took the lead in pushing the action forward. I could understand where he was coming from; the July the 4th direct action we were planning was quickly approaching and we still did not have anything set in stone. As we sat in the circle under the sun on the grass, he gesticulated through all his ideas. Lee often tends to take up a lot of space not necessary always realizing what other people need. In this particular meeting, we also had two new members, and so when Lee took a minute to put his thoughts together, Anna, sitting with Michelle on the same blanket, gently but persistently stopped him to explain the new members what this action is. She would make a specific hand gesture, like a stop sign, and then turn to the new members to ask them if they understood. Lee respected her interruptions and repeatedly let them happen.

(fieldnotes, 06/29/2015, Portland, ME)

In these interactions, Anna took care of the new members and made sure they understood what was happening. Similar and perhaps even more visible care for new members happened in Waterville when I attempted to bring 350 Central Maine members together with the student climate activists at Colby College. Two students, two 350 Central Maine members, and I met in a classroom in our school to chat about possible future collaborations.

It was Thursday, I was so tired from the week, I really did not want to go on. I wanted to sleep. It was 7:05 pm already, 5 minutes after our meeting time. I was hanging out in the hallway of our academic building, sitting on one of the comfy blue couches. After a while Maddie and Sarah came, apologizing for being late. We spent rest of our waiting time talking about the salary of our president and vice president and other really high up people at Colby. Both Dick and Linda were late. As I wondered in the hall, I saw Dick walking from the bathroom.

He had a green hat, his usual gold glasses, beard, kind blue eyes, and brown (maroon?) pullover. He carried a coffee mug in one of his hands. Dick usually smiled when he talked. He came and got seated in our small circle in the middle of the classroom. He had some problems with the table chair, but in the end he managed. He started talking to Maddie and Sarah about our divestment from fossil fuels campaign and what we have been doing recently. I was very happy, I was not the one updating, and I went back to the hallway to watch out for Linda, who came shortly afterwards.

...

After every point on our agenda we discussed, Linda and Dick (Linda especially) got distracted and wanted to fill us in on what exactly was happening. They did not know Sarah or Maddie and so many times they addressed them with detailed stories about the way they got to the point where 350CM is right now. Once, right after we talked about the nice media coverage of the Lac Megantic memorial during this summer (summer 2014), Linda shared a story about her husband and how he views her activism. She talked about how he is not happy with the way she is permanently busy, and he was especially unhappy with the idea that Linda might get arrested for climate change. She continued on to describe her husband's voice and how he sings on demonstrations. Dick added that her husband was the person who sang on the Lac Magantic memorial with him. It was

certainly a nice story, and I was happy to get to know both of these people better. However, we also needed to move on with our agenda because we all were so busy. It was very beautiful to watch how Linda and Dick enjoyed sharing this story – both of them laughed at the end.

At the end of the meeting, I realized that I have become also more inclined to just 'hang out' with 350CM member without any purpose. Linda asked us to like a Waterville environmentally-minded Facebook page she was running and to check out her website, and so I looked it up. I randomly started playing a promotional video where Linda was talking. Suddenly, it occurred to me that every time I saw her she was wearing something purple. Last year, I would have not done anything in that moment. Maybe, I would have made a mental note, remembering that if I ever make a thank you card for Linda it should be purple. But given that I knew her pretty well, I turned to Linda and asked her if her favorite color was purple. And she said yes and then we joked about it for a while before we moved onto another topic that was also not directly important to our agenda.

(fieldnotes, 03/05/2015, Waterville, ME)

At that time, I found the meeting incredibly ineffective, and, unfortunately, this meeting did not result in any collaboration, as the students felt very patronized. Yet from Linda's side, I saw her sharing as an attempt to care for the new members and include them in the group through sharing information. Even though I did not succeed in bringing students and community members together, this meeting was very key for my own involvement in 350 Central Maine. That day, the ice between Linda and I was broken. From that day, we have a running joke about Linda's love for the color purple. Even though the care was not directed to me, because I was able to learn about the group and its members, I could become closer to them. Furthermore, this experience helped me to share about myself in the meetings that followed and thus establish a mutual relationship of care with Linda – a relationship based on knowing enough about each other to be able to care.

Though I was able to develop a closer relationship with Linda, this was also a good example of the refusal or failure, if you will, of care and developing of caring relationships. To this day, I slightly wince when I read my fieldnotes because I remember how uncomfortable I felt during the frictions between the students and community members. Maddie and Sarah periodically mention this meeting and point to its awkwardness. I often think about it when downtown climate activists look at me and ask me who the next person keeping the relationship between Colby students and

350 Central Maine will be, and I have no name to tell them. Reflecting on this, my first thought is to say that Maddie and Sarah did not accept the care that they were offered, and then, perhaps, the point would be that people have to be open to care in order to be able to create a caring environment. Reflecting further, this approach is way too simplistic. While this example does point to the need of shared responsibility of care, it also points to the ways in which care can be extended and caring environments can be created. The space of 350 Central Maine and the space of our campus divestment group are very different. From many other 350 Central Maine meetings, I could see how that kind of care would be appreciated. I can also remember how impatient I get during these meetings. On the other hand, our divestment group has only 30-minute-long meetings which are efficient, partially because we don't necessarily take the time to care for each other. Therefore, such differences in lifestyles points to different understandings of care. For Linda care was spending time together and sharing information. For the students, it was being productive on a meeting and going to finish their homework afterwards. This brings me to another point, a point about expectation. Now that I think about it, the expectations of each party were just very different. Linda, Dick, and I expected creating a long-term relationship and so we hoped to establish a caring environment. The expectations of the students might have been different. Maybe they expected a short-term collaboration or a one-time event. I guess what I am trying to say is that while care can be given and received without conscious intention, creating a caring environment requires the expectation of doing so. Even though people might not have voiced their expectations, the frictions in this meeting illustrate their differences. They show that care is dependent on all the parties involved and their expectations. Furthermore, discrepancies in these expectations can lead to failure to care and the creation of caring environment.

As you can see, in both of the examples, it is the women who care (or attempt to care). Gender was very visible especially in caring interactions. It was often women who took care of new members or made sure that everybody was up to date before we would move on. It was often

women who had to stop the men to make sure everybody can follow. Similarly, Michelle, a long-term 350 Greater Portland activist, and I developed a caring interaction based on the fact that we were both female bodied, young, and aware of identity politics. Often certain men in our group would talk for a long time without staying on topic. In these moments, Michelle and I would exchange a very certain kind of look – a look that affirmed that we both understand how sexism plays into what is happening. For me, this look became a kind of a go-to when I felt too overwhelmed by the group dynamics. In other words, it became a part of care. In this look Michelle and I shared support and care for each other as female-bodied people in a patriarchal system which got replicated in our activist group. I was actually so frustrated with the gender dynamics that, when Lee and I were preparing for the next meeting, we agreed to use a talking stick in order for everyone to be heard. That meeting, we were sharing ideas of what people want to see happen by the end of the summer. When I got the talking stick, I suggested having a men and a women caucus to talk about the gender dynamic. One of the two men at the meeting, Bob, interrupted me and asked me if him and Lee would meet on their own, illustrating exactly what I was hoping to address. In moments like these, when I got overly frustrated with the identity power struggles, sharing looks with Michelle was a way of feeling better, understood, and cared for.

In short, through interactions, climate activists cared for each other in ways that I could observe. Through affirming ourselves in our opinions and making sure that we have enough information, we extended care. By making sure that everybody felt included, informed, and/or understood, we created carrying relationships among each other and the incoming members.

Dear Reader,

perhaps the most visible way of caring for each other is through food. As any subset of anthropological ideas, anthropology of food provides many definitions of what food is, what it does, and how it creates communities. In his book about cooking in Greece, David E. Sutton highlights one of the links between food and connectedness: “Some have suggested that food's distinctiveness lies in its power to cross the boundaries between outside and inside, to begin an external and then become part of 'us' - one of the reasons that food is so tied to notions of kinship and 'shared substances'” (Sutton 2014: 12). Following this line of thought, Janet Carsten writes about the importance of feeding, specifically breastfeeding and to a lesser extent sharing meals, among the Malay people on the island of Langkawi. For them, feeding is “a vital component in the long process of becoming a person and participating fully in social relations” (Carsten 1995: 223). Though in this case feeding refers to mothers feeding their children, “[t]hrough the day to day sharing of meals cooked in the same hearth, those who live together in one house come to have substance in common” (Carsten 1995: 234). In short, one of the ways of looking at food is understanding it as a substance that becomes part of us, and through sharing these substances we become more connected as people.

One example of such creation of community through food is in Jonathan Deutsch's article about firefighters' cooking. Deutsch described a specific firefighter unit where the firefighters get together to plan and share meals creating a food system where people's values and belief systems “become negotiated, most powerfully in the kitchen and at meals” (Deutsch 2005: 91). Basically, through food firefighters were able to learn “one another's cultural tastes and experiences, adapting to each firehouse's meal system, and debriefing from the day, some most typically in the kitchen or at the table” (Deutsch 2005: 94). In these settings food also served as “providing grounds' for the

new recruits” (Deutsch 2005: 94) to become adapted. Here the process of sharing food allowed people to create community through learning about each other's food preferences, stories related to food, and spaces shared around meals. Food fostered community.

We need food to survive, but I don't think anybody goes to the activist meetings I have been to in order to be fed, we are too middle class. Yet, people bring food for themselves and for others to share. Perhaps the most food-based meetings I have ever been to happened in Portland.

Bob brought cherries and he put them in the middle of the table. To my continuous surprise, Bob always eats in meetings. He is vegan, and he cares a lot about what he eats, how he eats, and when he eats.... This particular meeting, River (pseudonym) also had some food with her. While Bob's food looked homemade and vegan, River obviously had a take out from some Asian cuisine that smelled really nice.... Before we officially started the meeting, Bob and Lee were joking about how Bob not only brought cherries but also a spit cup to put the seeds in....

(fieldnotes, 07/09/2015, Portland, ME)

This is a good example of the many functions food has in meetings – it can be sustenance, a signifier of the time of the day when people need to eat (meetings were usually in the evening) and thus a way of saving time, or a marker of care. In this case, Bob and River brought food for themselves in order to maintain a high level of energy. Additionally, Bob brought food for other people to share, create community, and make sure everybody has something to snack on.

Because of the socioeconomic (middle) class background of my informants, it was possible for them to express care through food: making sure that they eat, eat healthy, and eat enough. I was even more intrigued by the food activists shared with each other. It was not only recognition of people's need and desire to eat, but also the thought process behind choosing what people in the group can and want to eat. Over the years with climate activists, I ate different kinds of cakes, a variety of fruits, and occasionally some homemade goods. Bringing food was in itself a way of showing care, of caring enough to take the time of day to bring something for everybody. Further, the types of food that people brought played a significant role as well.



I never got to talk about food with Bob, but there are various ways to think about why he brought cherries. Perhaps he brought cherries because they were cheap and the first thing he thought about. Perhaps he brought cherries because they are a very non-problematic food, they are a gluten free, nut free, lactose free food that almost everybody can eat. Perhaps he brought cherries because they are a seasonal food and we, as climate activists, should care about that. It makes us feel better than eating food which is not seasonal. Perhaps he brought cherries because he knew they were easy to eat and thus it would not be awkward to eat them in activist spaces. Because these are all only possible theories, I decided to explore an example of my own.

The meeting before the 'cherry' one, I was feeling unsure of if we, as a group, can ever create community, and so I decided that I will try to bring together community through sharing food. I decided to bake a cake. However, before I started baking, I had to make sure that everyone could consume and appreciate this cake. I was not sure if anybody had allergy to peanuts, we never had this kind of discussion, but I decided to avoid nuts all together just in case. It would not be nice if not everyone could eat the cake. Differently said, I would not be able to extend care to everyone. I also knew that Bob, who usually comes to all the meetings, is vegan. I wanted Bob to be able to share this food with us and so I decided to make a vegan cake. I also knew many people are careful about how much sugar they eat, and so I looked for a cake with as much natural sugar as possible. After going through this 'checklist,' I decided to make a cocoa-banana vegan cake and bring it to the meeting. Even though I think that my baking could have been better, everybody liked the cake and it was all eaten by the end of the meeting. I was a little bit sad because Bob did not come and so I did not have to bake a vegan cake in the end. But I was also happy because I knew that if he would have come, he could have shared it with us.

I chose to share with you my cake story not because I wanted to share with you how good of a baker I am, but to illustrate that care is more than only remembering to bring food. If I brought a cake with ingredients that would not allow everybody to eat it, then I would not be able to extend

care to all the members. Consequently, having knowledge of people's dietary restrictions was key for me to care for them. Yet, it is often not necessary in activist spaces to know each other's food restriction to organize together. We need to know people's skills and desires and free time to be able to stage actions. In organizing, types of knowledge that do not directly relate to activism do not seem as necessary. It is, however, exactly this knowledge that allows us to care for each other. What I am trying to say is that care cannot happen without certain knowledge about our fellow activists. This knowledge is not what we would consider 'activist knowledge;' it is rather knowledge of each other as friends or colleagues. Therefore, for us to practice care, we have to get to know each other on more than one level.

~ letter 15 ~

about care in physical spaces

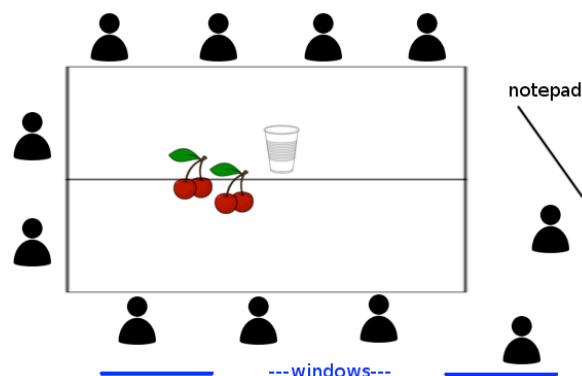
Dear Reader,

please let me start this letter with a few stories:

Michelle, Lee, and Melissa (pseudonym) also arrived shortly after that. Michelle was dressed up in her usual dark purple and we said hi to each other. Lee came to me and asked if I am prepared for this meeting and I excitedly told him that of course I am. Suki decided that we need to change the table arrangement and first proposed that we make a 'T' out of the tables, which we did, but it did not work very well. So, when Bob arrived, he suggested to put the tables next to each other to create one thick table, which worked well.

We all sat around the table. I was sitting next to Lee who was sitting next to River who was kind of facing the place where we put the notepad and where Michelle was about to take notes. Then, Jacqui moved the rocking chair to the corner of the room next to the notepad and she sat there. Sukie was sitting next with the apple laptop, taking computer notes. Then there was Melissa and Michelle. On the other side of the table, there was Bob, sitting and leaning backwards as usually. Next to him was Lilli (pseudonym). Something like this:

(fieldnotes, 07/09/2015, Portland, ME)



We sat down in the couch area. Three Colby students sat on one sofa facing Linda, Bob, and Clara (pseudonym) on another sofa. Dick, Mina (pseudonym), and three other Colby students including me pulled chairs from the table and created a kind of squished semicircle. Robert (pseudonym) disappeared somewhere and returned after a while, creating a second row, sitting behind me and Dick. Linda started the meeting and suggested that we all introduce ourselves.

(fieldnotes, 02/08/2015, Waterville, ME)

I am not really sure how it happens but in meetings we always end up sitting in a way that allows us to face each other. I have been to so many meetings where we changed chairs and tables, tightened or opened circles, or invited people in to make sure we can all see each other and communicate. Making sure that we are all included in the circle, rectangle, square or any other shape we form is part of caring and making sure people are part of the group. In these interactions, members look out for and respect each other's physical comfort. Here care is both based on belonging and on understanding that we all exist as bodies and we have to pay attention to our physical selves.

My other favorite example of such rearrangements is one of the meetings I attended in Portland. That day we met outside on a patch of grass instead of inside and so spatial interactions were much more visible. There were many interactions in many different moments, but I will share just the most illustrative one. Imagine a sunny day, from the grass we can see the ocean and boats on it. The sun is shining and we are slowly gathering together. As usual, mostly women come on time and the men come late. In the end, we all gather in a circle on the side of the road. We form a strange shape – some people sit in the first row of the circle while others are kind of in the back. The people who are just coming form a second row of the circle. Before we start, Sukie asks everyone to come into the circle and we widen it enough for everyone to fit. Three older women in our group come with folding chairs in order to be comfortable. They attempt to sit in the second row of the circle but we invite them to join us in the first row of the circle widening even further. Before the meeting starts, we can all more or less see each other and we all are more or less

comfortable.

These vignettes are a good reminder that we are also bodies and we exist within a physical space. In anthropology, the body gained “political-economic and ideological dimensions of healing and care, as well as suffering, violence, and trauma” (Mascia-Lee 2016: 150). In the mid-1990s, Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret A. Lock introduced the mindful body, which “provided a blueprint for understanding the body as multiple, as consisting of three bodies: the body-self, the social body, and the body politic. This shift allowed anthropologists to look at the body as part of the world and anthropology to shift to a more phenomenological approach” (Mascia-Lee 2016: 151). While there are many important and interesting ways of conceptualizing the body, I found it useful to look at the idea of embodiment. One way of defining embodiment is “our corporeality or bodiliness in relation to the world and other people [and it] privileges embodied experiences as a basic starting point for understanding human culture and life” (Covington-Ward 2015: 4). Following that train of thought, in Yolanda Covington-Ward's view, “the body is not just a means of learning or expressing social norms; it is also means of doing creating, and transforming the world around oneself” (Covington-Ward 2015: 9). Body, then, is part of the physical space. Henri Lefebvre sees space as “a medium...a new sense of our relation to our bodies, world and planets as changing space of distance and difference” (Shields 1998: 147). Everyday interactions, such as care, have a role in space: “[e]veryday routines, the conventions of debate, and interaction, all take place at one or another spatial scale and in space, making their spatial characteristic a crucial issue from Utopian thought and for and attempt to change society” (Shields 1998: 144). Therefore, interactions in space can be both conforming and resisting and thus contributing to care as a practice and an aspiration.

In the examples mentioned above, not only were we able to see each other, we also allowed everyone to be comfortable. The three older women were included even though they needed foldable chairs to be comfortable. This inclusion on its own is a caring practice. Sometimes activists

directly attend to other's physical comfort during meetings. In one of my last fieldwork meetings of 350 Central Maine, Dick, one of the main organizers, cared about my comfort and suggested I change my position when he considered it too uncomfortable for me. We were sitting in one of the downtown churches and talking about the connection between vegetarianism, veganism, and climate change and considering it as a basis for a possible future campaign. We were only four and so we were sitting in a rectangle in a small room with large windows. I was facing one of the windows and, as the time passed, the sun started to shine in my face more and more. It was kind of uncomfortable but not uncomfortable enough for me to move. At one point, however, Dick turned towards me and asked if I wanted to move in order to not face the sun. Gracefully, I accepted Dick's invitation and the offered alternative space. We could still see each other, but now we were also all comfortable in our positions. In this small interaction, Dick practiced care. He was attentive enough to recognize that I might be uncomfortable and cared enough to attempt to change my condition. Similarly, Sukie in the first example was attentive enough to recognize that some people were excluded from the circle and thus not visible to everyone and cared enough to ask these people to join us.

In short, by making sure people can see each other and are comfortable, recognizing when it is not the case, and addressing it in a gentle way, activists practiced community care. To be able to do so, similarly to food, they needed to know what people's different levels of comfort. In other words, care required and requires knowledge of the people in our groups.

~ letter 16 ~

about the prerequisites of care

Dear Reader,

I find it fascinating how complicated it is to create caring environments. I knew that care is practiced in interactions, sharing of food, and positioning in space. Moreover, through exploring

these examples, I learned that for this kind of care to happen, people have to know each other not only as activists but also as people. For example, knowing what Bob thinks about fossil fuel industries would not help me determine which food he does or does not like. Or knowing how Michelle conceptualizes climate change and social justice would not help me in understanding what makes her body comfortable. Similarly, understanding that Crystal (pseudonym) is really good in making banners does not provide me enough information to know if she needs or does not need background on our upcoming actions. As I was developing my argument, I started thinking about this particular knowledge as the 'prerequisites of care.'

Here, by prerequisites of care I mean knowledge that enables people to take meaningful care of each other. I added the word meaningful because people can attempt to take care without actually being able to perform effective care. For example, if you would bring me a steak as a comfort food, I would appreciate it and tell you that I have been a vegetarian for around six years by now and politely refuse. In my view, this instance would be an attempt to care rather than a practice of care. For us to practice care, we have to know how to care for each other. For us to practice care, we have to know each other well.

Thinking about many examples of practices of care, I came up with three main prerequisites of care: knowledge of people, understanding of the group structures, and comfort in the group. I feel like I have talked enough about knowledge of people for you to understand, so I will focus on the latter two. I think people need to understand, to an extent, how the group functions in order to take care of each other. Let's take the example of Anna making sure that newcomers know what is happening. In this case, Anna knew how the group works – she knew that certain members do not stop to explain, she knew there is usually little to no time for questions, she knew that people liked to move forward as quickly as possible. Simultaneously, she understood how to address these issues in the group: she understood that if she jumps in, she will be listened to and that such practices are socially accepted in the group. All of this allowed her to stop the conversation when she felt that the

new members needed more context. However, without such knowledge her care would not have been as effective. Perhaps, she could assume that there will be time for questions in the end, which would stop her from taking care of the new members. Or she could think that gesticulating to the facilitator about the lack of context would be a good way of taking care of the newcomers. However, the facilitator of the day was not very attentive to people's body language and so Anna would probably not be noticed and thus she could not take care of the new members. I could continue and write out each possible scenario I could think of, but I believe you get the idea. We need to know how the group works in order to take care of each other.

Lastly, people have to be comfortable in the group in order to take care of each other. Many of the examples I have described above included disrupting the order as it was. Sukie delayed the meeting start to make sure everybody was included in the circle. Dick stopped the meeting to make sure I was comfortable. Linda interrupted the meeting to fill us in. To make these little disruption, people have to feel comfortable enough to make them.

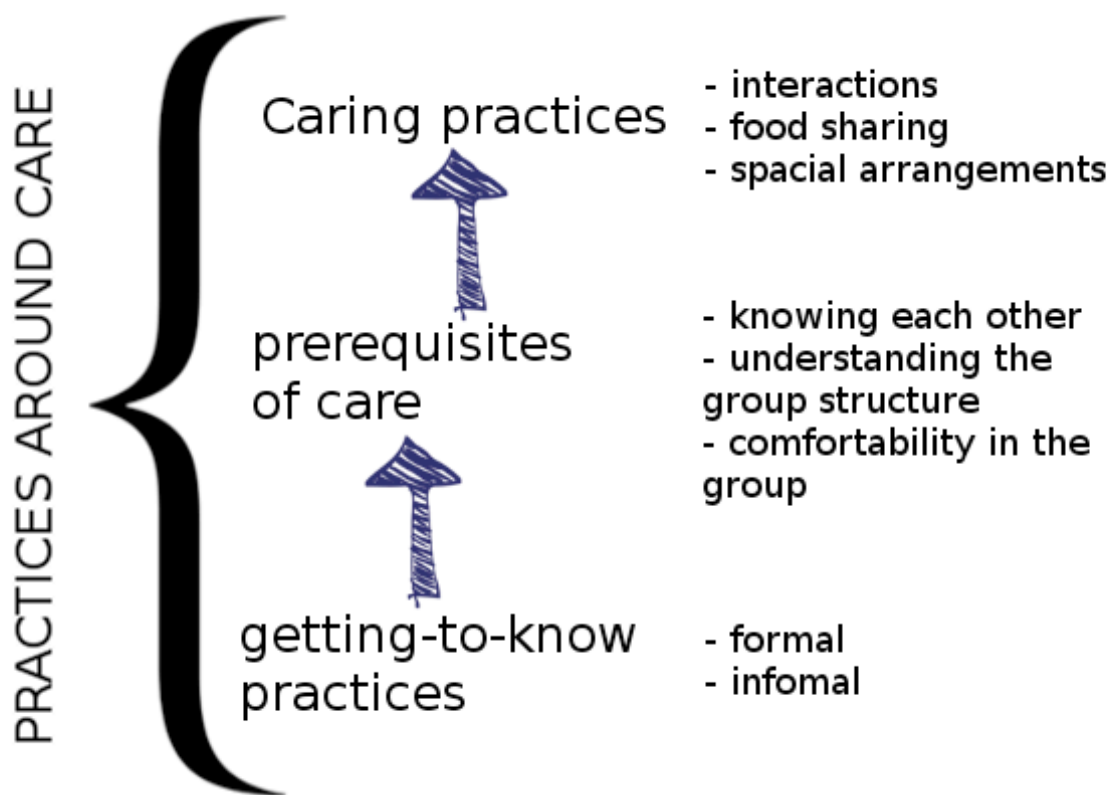
Obviously, these three prerequisites of care are interconnected – the more I know people the more comfortable I feel. The longer I am in a group, and thus getting to know people, the better I understand the particular group structure. The better I understand the group structure, the more comfortable I feel. The more comfortable I feel, the more likely I am to ask people about themselves and thus get to know them better, and so on.

In short, to be able to care for each other, we have to fulfill the prerequisites of care, but how do we do that?

about getting-to-know practices

Dear Reader,

I feel a little bit like digging a treasure out of the ground. Every time I uncover a new layer, there is another one just underneath. To find community care in activist meetings, I first looked at the overt practices of community care and found them in interactions, food, and spatial arrangements. These practices were built on prerequisites of care such as knowledge of each other, understanding of group dynamics, and comfort in the group. In order to complete this journey of finding community care, I had to find how we fulfill these prerequisites of care. I am a visual learner and so below, I have illustrated for you the relationship between caring practices, prerequisites of care, and getting-to-know practices, or practices that allow us to build caring environments:





So, how do we get to know each other in activist spaces? For me personally, this answer was very easy as all my friends are activists and the majority of the activists I know are my friends. However, this is not true for everyone. Through my interviews I found out that the majority of people do not engage with each other outside of activist meetings and actions. Therefore, I had to look for the getting-to-know practices, practices that allow us to get to know each other, in activist spaces. During activist meetings, I found many small practices that allowed people to share information about themselves while also acquiring information about others.

My favorite example of such practice is check-ins and introductions. In the beginning of almost every meeting, we go around a circle and share our names, gender pronouns, how we are, and one thing about ourselves. In some groups, even if we all know each other, we still do introductions every single time. In other groups when there are no new members, we usually skip this exercise. This exercise helps us make sure that we know each other's names and gender pronouns. It further allows people to develop as individuals – we sometimes change our names or our pronouns and introduction give us space to announce this change to others without drawing too much attention to ourselves. Additionally, we get to share how we are at the moment and why. This part of sharing allows others to know why, for example, someone not smiling that day – it is not because of what is happening within the group but perhaps because of the argument with a roommate. Sharing a little anecdote from our lives then provides people with more information about ourselves and thus they can get to know us better. Lastly, the question of the day gives us an opportunity to learn even more about each other. Of course, not every question or answer provides new information, but even seemingly mundane questions can provide new information. In one of our recent meetings, our introduction topic question was: “What soup would you be and why?” Even though in the beginning I was not sure how we were supposed to learn anything about each other through this question, I was amazed. People shared stories of their childhoods and favorite soups or the way they related to vegetables and their own personality characteristics. This is to say

that getting to know each other is a two-way street, so to speak. As a listener, I could just dismiss the question not giving it full attention or remembering people's answers. However, as a person who aspires to care, I listened and learned about people being sure to remember the facts that they shared. Perhaps, I will never use them, who knows. Maybe next time when they are sick I know which soup, or which ingredients in a soup, I can use to make them feel at least slightly better.

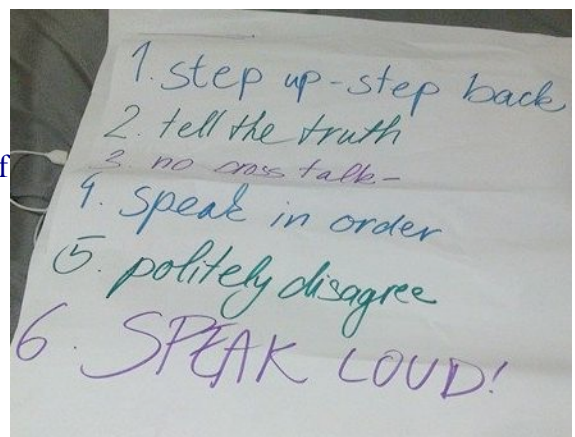
Doing introductions is not only important because it allows us to center ourselves within our own lives, but also because it allows us to share with each other. When I re-read my fieldnotes, I found many more sharing practices that allowed people to get to know each other and the group structures, and thus become more comfortable with both. Throughout my fieldnotes, I kept stumbling upon two main ways of sharing practices. Some, like introductions, were structured, meaning that they were part of the agenda and something that was planned. Other ways were unstructured. Or, in other words, they happened within the unorganized time. I found it useful to divide these into the two categories so I can better incorporate them into my future meetings.

## **Structured sharing practices**

### Setting up rules of the space

[During our 350 Central Maine-organized potluck] I checked in with Linda to see how we are doing on time, and then around 6/6:10 pm we decided to end the food part, bring dishes to the back, and start the discussion. Linda stood on a chair and very specifically explained how people need to fold the tables, where to put the table cloths, and how to make a circle from the square. Her years of teaching were pretty visible at that moment :). Everybody did what they were told and people ended up in a circle that was kind of more like an oval. There were some pillars that interrupted the circle but otherwise it was nice. When everybody settled down, I did the rules of the space. Doing rules of the space with this group was hard, partially probably I did not explain them really well. However, in the end, we had a list of rules that seemed pretty helpful. I put them up on one of the movable walls.

(fieldnotes, 12/16/2016, Waterville, ME)



Even though this is not the best example of stating the rules of the space, I find it quite important as it highlights that sharing rituals does not always work, that people have to get used to them and understand them, and that it is important to try even if it does not seem particularly feasible. Setting up rules of the space basically means collectively deciding what people should and should not do so that everybody gets to be heard within a safe space. I think about them as a collective consensus about what is and is not kind to other people in the group. While rules of the space are common in larger conferences and state-wide group meetings, we rarely do them in our everyday organizing, they became assumed.

I think that setting rules of the space can really help to create a caring environment. Many of the interactions I have written were not verbally recognized. Given that everybody interprets situations and interactions differently, writing down rules of the space can help people understand what it means to respect each other. Additionally, during setting up rules, some people have the inclination to explain why the rule is important for them, thus sharing information about themselves and therefore contributing to the sharing practices that can lead to practices of care.

### Introductions

We started out saying our names and one thing that we are happy about this week. Almost everybody, apart for Lena (pseudonym) and Melissa knew each other, but it was a good review. That was the first time I felt comfortable enough to say that I actually prefer to go by Es (not Ester, my actual name), and the reaction was wonderful. People laughed and asked me why I did not tell them earlier, and all of them tried very hard to refer to me as to Es. Now, I don't understand why I was so scared.

(fieldnotes, 07/09/2015, Portland, ME)

I already wrote a lot about introductions, and so you understand the basic premise. I find this vignette interesting because it shows the transformation through introductions. Through being part of introductions, I was able to share a piece of information that was important to me

without it feeling out of place. I was only able to do so because we did introductions in a meeting when I already felt comfortable. All in all, I really like introductions and I think they are incredibly important.

#### Sharing when taking up tasks and/or stating peoples roles

...and in that time I have started realizing that some participants (especially men) started to speak more than everybody else, and so I started to facilitate more to make sure that everybody got enough space to express themselves. At one point, I had to stop John (pseudonym) and ask him to wait until Jane (pseudonym) finished her point. Every time we finished a topic, I kind of summarized what happened and asked people how they felt looking at everybody really directly, trying to figure out how they really are. When we finally agreed on what will happen, Barry (pseudonym) decided to call out proposed speaker at the moment leaving the conversation. In that time Dick intervened making sure that everybody expressed their opinion and calling out Sara (pseudonym) asking her how she feels. Sara and I talked about this before and she said she would prefer to step back which is why I did not call her out and she reiterated similar point to Dick.

(fieldnotes, 12/04/2017, Waterville, ME)

When dividing tasks for the next action, some activists would state where they are at with their work, personal life, or skillsets to justify taking and/or refusing a task. Sara is a good example of this. When she was directly asked to share her opinion, she stated her position in the group as a new member and her level of comfort, preferring to be the person who steps back. Consequently, I respected that decision and did not directly call her out. The knowledge of her position helped me understand how I can navigate the group considering where Sara was at. Through these small interactions, people are able to share something about themselves and thus contribute to the caring environment. Furthermore, because this information was mentioned right before taking a task, they link the need for sharing/knowning information about each other to the ability to determine who is able and willing to do this task.

### Emotional check-ins

Emotions are one of the central parts of the movement but are not always addressed due to the macho gendered, emotionless culture in mainstream activism and therefore, “creating space for emotional reflexivity within activist spaces can contribute to making our individual and collective engagements in activism and resistance more sustainable over time” (Brown and Pickerill 2009: 25). Activists would use this tool of emotional reflexivity to “reflect on their emotional needs and commitments, and find means of negotiating these alongside on-going resistance and involvement in social movements” (Brown and Pickerill 2009: 25). Emotional reflexivity is not an addition to activism, rather, activists can “sustain activism through emotional reflexivity, building sustaining spaces to create space for emotion in activism” (Brown and Pickerill 2009: 25). Alternatively, it is a tool that allows activists to visibly acknowledge and work through emotions in activist spaces.

I haven't been part of many reflexive emotional practices, we never had time to perform them properly, and when we did, it was only because we were at point of such disagreement that there was no other way out. I guess I slightly romanticize emotional reflexivity practices because I have seen groups at various conferences and actions whose core was sharing emotions and who appeared very cohesive and organized from the outside. The point being, part of sharing is also sharing emotions, of course to the level people are comfortable doing so. Through sharing we can help create caring environments and care for each other better.

### Sharing circles

At this point, Donna came in, saying that she has not read her emails properly and that she came to the school (where the meetings were previously) instead of the church. She was self-reflexive about it and apologized for coming late and sat down next to Sukie at the front of the table. She had her usually short blond hair, expensive glasses, and semi-business formal clothes. Lee moved us along to talk about the David Solnit workshop. We did a circular debrief, which I think many people found helpful. I personally really like circular debriefs because it gives an opportunity to everybody to talk without them having to try to step up if they are having hard time doing so.

...

This was a very interesting discussion, lot of people like me or Michelle did not really speak up and some people, like Bob who did not actually attend the action, talked a lot. Also, Anne, unexperienced with how meetings go, tried to push people to decide on next steps at the beginning, which was greatly ignored, but I think it was very brave of her.

(fieldnotes, 07/23/2015, Portland, ME)

I found sharing circles about anything very useful as they allowed everybody to speak and at least tried to balance the dynamic of some people being more dominant than other. Again, sharing circles allowed people to reflect and in the reflection share their point of view, their emotional experiences, their personal experiences, thus sharing knowledge that could potentially contribute to care – obviously, only if the other people listen.

### **Unstructured sharing practices**

#### Through breaks, during waiting periods, on protests and travels together

On Saturday morning, feeling sick and overwhelmed with work, I decided not to go to the Bangor solidarity event unless somebody shows up. I was actually quite looking forward to skipping it, especially because I had quite some schoolwork to finish...As I made up my mind, people started answering and confirming their attendance and suddenly I felt like I did not have a choice and I had to go.

...

In the car we had the classic, kind of awkward college introductory conversations. We shared each other majors, classes, aspirations, where we live, and so on. Everybody approached the conversation differently depending on their personality. Katie was very self-confident asked many questions and was not scared to politely interrupt, Anna answered questions with many opinions, Jeanné and I were quieter. After a while, the car fell silent just with music playing in the background. Jeanné was sleeping, Anna was playing music, and Katie was driving. The rain was not getting any less heavy.

....

I am used to marching alone and I like it because I can feel the community and see people, but this time it was different. Katie, Jeanné, and I actually talked for the whole time about why we took which decisions, why we decided to do activism, and so on. It was not forced or anything, it was just nice. Yes, maybe we did not feel the march as much but we got to know each other pretty well. The march went slowly and it often stopped at different places as we were waiting for cars to let us go. After the marching ended, we found Anna at a bench waiting for us, and though the program continued, we decided to head home.

On our way we waved to the Bowdoin students. Everybody was tired, hungry, wet, but really happy. People felt accomplished. Anna and Katie were bringing posters home to put them on their walls. Jeanné and I (we both sat on the back seat) talked for a long time about living, leaving, future, society, kids, and many other things. It was not like acquaintances but like friends, and in the end, I have decided to join her club in solidarity, but also to get to know her better.

In the end, we had Thai food together and we came back to campus at 7 pm, all of us going to our respective dorms to do our homework.

I know I did not want to go, but it was worth it :)

(fieldnotes, 09/11/2016, Bangor, ME)

Even though this vignette says otherwise, I am really bad at hanging out. Generally, protests spaces such as vigils and marches allow people to hang out together without working. While some certainly use protests spaces to be able to check in with people about their next action, debrief the last meeting, or discuss how a group should move forward, I have also listened to countless protest conversations that did not relate directly to activism.

In short, being part of this rally gave us space and time to get to know each while doing activism. Recognizing that not everyone can always show up and that the organizers of the rallies don't always have the same experience as the participants, protests can give people spaces to get to know each other and thus have the possibility to develop knowledge about each other in order to be able to care.

Additionally, shared protest spaces also give the activist a connection of having experienced something together and thus a place to start conversation and an experience to remember. Through collective reminiscing of past events, activists can also recall the emotions that they have experienced during the protests, similarly to cultural materials and rituals.

~ letter 18 ~

about the importance of marking care

Dear Reader,

I am still thinking about this check in exercise and how it relates to my theories. I always

need to tie everything back together before I can move on and so I hope you will allow me to flesh out my thoughts on paper. Okay, so I know that community care in activist meetings can happen only if we know each other, understand the group, and feel comfortable. In order to do so we incorporate getting-to-know practices into our meeting spaces. These practices allow us to fill the prerequisites of care and thus, make caring for each other possible. This practices of care are then visible in people's interactions, food-sharing, and orientation is space. Having established this, I still have two questions: why do we need to talk about community care if it seems that we are already doing it? How does the aspiration of care fit in?

The thing that perhaps amazed me the most after I finished this part of my research was that many of the getting-to-know practices were already happening. We already check-in, share agendas, and state who we are and what we do and do not like to do. But we do not see these practices as care. They remain unmarked as care. Other times, such practices are seen as an addition to rather than a part of activism. Because we do not see these practices as care, groups often forget to do them, decide not to do them, or do not put enough importance and intention into them. Let me explain on the examples of introductions.

The majority of the 350 Maine nodes did not do introductions unless a new member showed up. I remember my first meeting with the 350 Greater Portland activists. My mentor, Lee, drove me to a nearby restaurant where we all sat around a table. People prepared for introductions with their names and the town where they are from. Since I was just fresh out of an activist training, I asked them to also share their favorite activist story. Later I learned through interviews that these activists did not know each other's activist stories and that they appreciated knowing them. For this group, because introductions were understood only as a way of introducing new members rather than a way of getting to know each other, they were often overlooked or forgotten all together.

Thus even though getting to know practices happen in groups already, when they are not understood as the basis of care, they are not given enough attention. If activists seek to replicate the



world they want to see and if care is part of that world, then care-related practices and creating caring environments are parts of, rather than an addition to activism. If activists understand the importance these practices have for the caring environment and thus sustainable long-term activism, then they will make sure to practice them and do so intentionally, when both the one who share and the one who listens understand the importance of creating this connection. This is why I believe care and practices related to care (a.k.a care practices and getting-to-know practices) should be marked in activist spaces.

Markedness and unmarkedness point to the idea of what we do and do not consider normal or status quo. For example, in her article about white nerds, Mary Bucholtz talks about how important it is to mark language that is usually unmarked in the academia: “It is not the concept of racial unmarkedness itself that creates the problem but rather the common scholarly misperceptions that the unmarked states of whiteness are impervious to history, culture, or other local origins” (Bucholtz 2001: 84). In her article, she claims that even though white (mainstream, accepted) language is seen as unmarked, or standard, and thus required of everyone, this language is not standard. Rather, it is exactly the fact that this type of language is unmarked that makes it standard. Somewhat similarly, practices related to care are unmarked and thus considered standard for only for certain areas of activism. For example, because introductions are unmarked as care, they are only considered a practice of introducing new members to the group. However, through marking, this practice would gain visibility and thus understating from activists as a practice of care. Furthermore, the way people would look at and engage with introductions would change.

This idea of marking also allows me to link the practices related to care to the aspiration of care. If aspiration of care is a way of living, of becoming a caring self, then marking the practices related to care can help us to become more intentional about our personal transformations. Aspiration of care, then, would be a way of approaching the practices related to care with intentionality, allowing us to be good listeners and good sharers, making sure that we include these

practices and that they are seen as part of rather than an addition to activism. In short, an aspiration of care in activist meetings is walking into the meeting ready to share and be shared with, ready to remember and extend care when needed, and ready to appreciate the practices around care and other people's care for you and others. The aspiration of care is consciously seeking to fulfill the prerequisites of care and care in appropriate moments to the best of your knowledge and ability.

Lastly, it is important that practices around care, the caring practices, prerequisites of care, and getting-to-know practices, are not one size fits all. Some people become comfortable easily, while others need time. Not everybody likes to share and it is a skill that people often need to learn. When I advocate for marking practices around care, I am not advocating for pushing people into these practices. Rather, I seek to provide structure for people to be able to share and care when they are ready.

*Letters 19 – 21*

*Community care and public events*

~ letter 19 ~

about public events and collective identity

Dear Reader,

to write about activism and community care and only write about activist meetings is like making salad and using only lettuce. It is possible and sometimes true, but salad, like activism, is composed of more than one part. I chose to specifically write about community care in activist meetings because I suspected that long-term community care could be created there. That does not mean that other parts of activism are left out of community care entirely. Previously, I mentioned that protests and vigils, generally public activist spaces, are sites for activist to get know each other better. But after reflecting, talking to my professors, and interviewing people about their experiences at public events, I realized that the connection is much deeper.

Public events might not directly contribute to long-term community care, however, they create spaces for sharing and mirroring getting-to-know practices. For example, protest speakers who share their own activist narrative model sharing thus normalizing such behavior as part of activism. Additionally, these practices help people to find ways of thinking about activism and climate change. Furthermore, public spaces establish symbols, which are linked to the feeling of community and collective identity during public events. These symbols can be replicated in activist meetings to evoke a similar sense of community and collective identity. In all of these ways, public events indirectly contribute to community care.

I am so excited to share these ideas with you through describing one of my favorite vigils that took place on November the 15<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 pm in Waterville. Dick, Linda, and I started planning this vigil months in advance. Following a nationwide campaign, we put together an event in

solidarity with the Standing Rock against the Dakota Access Pipeline. By November, we knew each other well enough to organize only over emails and know it would go well. The day of the vigil, I, as usual, woke up slightly concerned that nothing would work out and it would be only the three of us and went about my day. Everything was already prepared – we printed out the handouts, organized car rides, and developed an agenda. At 4:00 pm, I started sending people down in cars. More and more students were coming out. My expectations of three to ten people were exceeded within minutes. In the end we had 120 people, the most attended vigil in Waterville I have ever been to.

[4:30 pm] It was already dark which I was happy for because we were planning to have candles, and they look better in the dark.... As I was walking towards the vigil, I saw Bob from 350 Maine talking to the crowd. He looked so similar to how he used to look when I worked with him over the summer, colorful shirt and everything. I came to say hi and jokingly told him to stop co-opting Waterville's vigil, he smiled at me and continued. They brought quite a few posters from Portland which was nice.

....

It was a beautiful scene. People stood in a V-shape around the edge of the grass on the intersection. They created a long line, holding posters and facing to the road for the cars. In the middle there was professor Leonard on her stool singing with a few older folks. People were slowly coming. Some of them I went to greet and have a polite chat to others I just nodded.

....

At 5 pm, I started asking people to gather in a circle. It was hard because people did not hear me, and I also think my accent did not help. Bob, of course, helped me with his voice and when almost everybody gathered, I asked people to ask the other people to come as well. I stood on this rock and people created a multi-layered circle. The circle had space in the middle. I was expecting 20 people so we did not really care about an amplifier, but having 120 people made it a little bit harder. I stood on the rock and introduced myself and Linda and Dick and explained what will happen. I was not ready and I do not like public speaking but I tried to explain why community is important and why being in circle is important and to be honest I used a lot of anthro jargon.

....

Then we did a call and response song. We learned the first and then the second part and then when I wanted to already do it, somebody screamed that we should repeat it. We did so, and then we sang together. It worked and people sang strong and loud. Then Linda read her part but we could not hear her so we had to borrow Dick's microphone...Harry sang this originally Native American song that had some problematic parts and Jeanné and I looked at each other knowing what we are thinking, but people sang along.

....

Overall I had a good time and I think other people also did. And we sang together and we shared and I think it gave many people hope. This is the email I got from Linda after following up with the email list:

*Es,*

*As you may know, I am isolated in my office. Consequently, I have been feeling down with no one to talk to about the election results. The turnout for the vigil buoyed my spirits. Being around so many like-minded people rejuvenated me. Thank you for all you did to make this happen.*

*One of the women in my asked for info about Amnesty International. Can you find out who wants to know that? I have an answer.*

*I look forward to doing more things with you in the future.*

(fieldnotes, 11/15/2017, Waterville, ME)

This vigil is important for me for many reasons. Firstly, it was important to join a national call for solidarity. Secondly, it was wonderful to bring so many people together. Thirdly, I got to organize it with my friends. Lastly, I had the opportunity to design this vigil in ways that I know build collective identity and interview people afterwards to learn what they remembered and how they felt.

Collective identity is important for people to feel comfortable in the group. In some instances, collective identity brings a sense of community and closeness to people. Feeling collective identity can help people feel more comfortable in groups, and thus fulfill one of the prerequisites of care. But what is collective identity? As with anything in anthropology, there is no one answer to this question. In their article about collective identity in social movements, Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper define of collective identity as:

“an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional *connection* (1) with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is *distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity* (2). A collective identity may have been first constructed by outsiders (for example, as in the case of "Hispanics" in this country), who may still enforce it, but it depends on some acceptance by those to whom it is applied. Collective identities are expressed in *cultural materials* (3)-names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on-but not all cultural materials express collective identities. Collective identity does not imply the rational calculus for evaluating choices that "interest" does. And unlike ideology, collective identity carries with it *positive feelings*

(4) for other members of the group.” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 285, emphasis and numbering added)

I think that such a definition of collective identity is useful for thinking about activism and public events, and their possible connection to community care. Firstly, collective identity is defined as a connection to broader community, which could point to a relational self. Following Clement's ethic of care, relational self is necessary for care to occur. Based on this, a certain level of shared collective identity can be a good starting point to think about community care in climate and climate justice activism. Secondly, collective identity allows for both communality and individuality. In other words, because collective identity and personal identity are different yet similar enough, they can be part of each other; a level of sharedness or belonging is allowed without the need of losing the individual. Such distinction provides a helpful way of thinking about groups that allow a feeling of belonging and mutual aid with understanding that people bring different identity alignments and thus, they have different needs as well as capacities to care for others. This also links back to thinking about care within capitalism. Since such understanding focuses on the specific need of each individual, it can be seen as oppositional to capitalism which aims to standardize everything. Thirdly, collective identity manifests itself in cultural materials. Additionally, it provides a space to think about how, if these cultural materials are shifted, they might shift collective identity. Lastly, collective identity is not necessarily only experienced by analyzing, but it is also experienced through our emotions. Emotions are certainly part of why activists might struggle and part of feeling community care and relatedness to each other. Moreover, collective identity can be transformed into movement identity: “collective identity based on shared membership in a movement” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 289), which further emphasizes the points made above, as they exemplify the potential meaning of community care in the movements as well as the possibility of transformation of this movement identity.

For every movement and every event, the collective identity and the emotions associated

with them are different. After this particular vigil, I interviewed twenty participants to find out how they felt, a reflection of collective identity, and here are the words I compiled from them.

This compilation illustrates the ideas of collective identity very well. For one, it is not unified and people have different experiences ranging from “angsty” to “energized” or from “frustration” to “nervous.” Yet, as with collective identity, there were overarching issues. The main three I identified through listening to all my interviews and looking at all these words were emotionality, sense of community, and positive experience. Emotionality is represented by words such as “upset,” “happy,” or “nervous.” Sense of community was slightly less direct. Many people talked

about other people and being happy to be with other people, for example: “really happy so many people.” Additionally, some of the people I interviewed mentioned direct feeling words such as “connected” or “not isolated.” Lastly, words such as “nice” or “good” were very common, thus people presumably had a good experience.

Obviously, this is only twenty people out of hundred and twenty and they were interviewed by me, a person who co-organized the vigil, and so these answers are not entirely representative. However, they are a good way of understanding what aspects of the created collective identity and this particular public event people appreciated: the emotionality, sense of community, and positive experience.

about the transmission from public events to meetings

Dear Reader,

understanding collective identities did not help me to grasp how these emotions carry over to activist meetings. Following Polletta and Jasper further, I learned that “changing identities is often a primary movement goal” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 296). To say it differently, activist identities change as they enter the movement while also changing the movement identity itself. The movement identity is maintained and reflected in certain cultural materials such as rituals or symbols. Hence, personal identities developed through participation in a specific movement might spill over to either other movements or a broader collective identity. If public events mirror the getting-to-know practices in activist meetings and if both collective and personal identities change through public events, then activists can be transformed through these events in order to be more inclined to participate in the practices around care. Additionally, the cultural materials that Polletta and Jasper mention can help remind activists in activist meetings of the emotions and experiences during public events and thus recall the emotionality, the sense of community, and the positive experience during meetings. Such experience can make everyone more comfortable, one of the prerequisites of care. To understand this transmitting of cultural materials, I turned to classical anthropological theories of rituals and symbolism.

Victor Turner provides a helpful description of rituals and symbols and their interaction in his studies of the Ndembu of Zambia. Turner defines ritual as “prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers” (Turner 1967: 19). It is not that activists necessarily believe in mystical beings (the way we would define them nowadays), however they do have a belief system their rituals revolve around. Such belief system could be described by the belief in, for example, direct democracy or equality or the evil of capitalism. Consequently, symbol is defined as “the smallest unit of ritual which still



retains the specific properties of ritual behavior” (Turner 1967: 19). Symbols can be “objects, activities, relationships, events, gestures, and spatial units in a ritual situation” (Turner 1967: 19).

In the case of this solidarity vigil, one of the symbols of activism is the spatial orientation of being in a circle. Circle, then, was a part of the ritual of this particular vigil and outside of its context, arranging ourselves in a circle can carry the symbolic meaning of the vigil even after its end. Since there was an overwhelming sense of community in the second part of the vigil, when we stood in a circle, this circular arrangement reminds people of the activity they have experienced together (or perhaps on a variety of protests which included a circular arrangement) evoking sense of shared community even outside of the event. Thus being in circle becomes a symbol, or, in other words, a part of activism.

Turner doesn't see symbols as static, but rather as “involved in social processes” (Turner 1967: 20), a dynamic entity, an agent of change. These ritual symbols are then divided into dominant and supplementary ones. Dominant symbols “are regarded not merely as means to the fulfillment of the avowed purposes of a given ritual, but also more importantly refer to values that are regarded as ends in themselves, that is, to axiomatic values” (Turner 1967: 20). A special circular arrangement, then, is a dominant symbol as it carries the message of the ritual. It is the dominant symbol because it is recognized by many, even people outside of the ritual, as part of activism, and it is replicated in a variety of activist spaces.

There are also supplementary symbols, that might not have a meaning on their own. These could be, for example, shoes that an activist wore to the protests that, outside the context of the protest, lose their activist symbolism (in a simplified reality, of course). Thus, at a level of abstraction, the circle does not only stand for the feelings and memories of a protest, but also for the values that the protest represents such as climate justice. Alternatively said, “symbols might themselves be symbols” (Turner 1967: 21).

Dominant symbols have three properties 1) condensation 2) unification of disparate

significata, which are “interconnected by virtue of their common possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought” (Turner 1967: 28) and 3) polarization of meaning. In Turner's writing, all symbols have two distinct poles of meaning: ideological and sensory. The ideological pole refers “to the norms and values inherent in structural relationships” (Turner 1967: 28). On the contrary, the sensory pole signifies the “natural and physiological phenomena and processes” (Turner 1967: 28). Through the polarization of meaning, “the meaning content is closely related to the outward form of the symbol” (Turner 1967: 28). Through this, the symbol becomes a stimulus of emotion (Turner 1967: 29). Thus it is not only the circular arrangement that symbolizes social justice but also the memories of the corporeal and emotional experiences that a protester goes through while being in the circle. Based on the interview then, the circular arrangement not only symbolized social justice, but also emotionality, the sense of community, and the positive experience. Additionally, the idea of climate justice is also linked to the experienced community evoked by the circle.

To look at a cultural material, I explored the meaning of candle, as it was often mentioned in the interviews. The emotions that the activist felt during the protests are linked to the candle through the polarization of meaning. Thus, when the protester looks at a candle, it evokes the feeling the protester had during the protest. It is not only about the activist who held the candle, but also about any activist who has been to a protest with candles.

In short, symbols are part of rituals, which are vehicles of societal meaning and in the case of activism, a vehicle for aligning collective and personal identity. Furthermore, symbols connect emotionally with what the symbol symbolizes, thus not only creating a symbolic meaning, but also an emotional response to certain types of values. Following this train of thought, a circle of people might evoke the emotions one has during a public event and these emotions then connect to what the circle symbolizes through symbolizing the protest: climate justice.

I am not suggesting that we have to light candles on each of our meetings in order to evoke

the atmosphere of a vigil. But some symbols and cultural materials, like standing in circles or bringing banners into meetings can be useful in evoking this kind of community. In my fieldwork it was often singing which got replicated during vigils and meetings. Usually, we would have a few songs we sang during the vigil. Sometimes, during meetings to have a break or to start or finish a task, we would sing the same songs. For me personally, these were the moments when I felt the most connected to people.

~ letter 21 ~

about the normalizing performances on public events

Dear Reader,

when I first moved to the United States, I generally found two very contradicting social interactions. In everyday life, I had to always be 'fine,' whatever that means, while in activist space I was required to share genuinely. Being a foreigner, I never quite learned to navigate these two spaces and put them together. The point is, I found it hard to share and I have heard it from many other people as well: we are not taught to share, we are insecure about how to share, and we feel awkward doing so.

Public activist events are often seen as spaces of performance for the outside world. They can also be spaces of performance for the activist themselves. During public events, we perform behavior we wish to see in the world. Speakers at such events often perform sharing. I can recall many examples of climate rallies when the speakers started by stating their name, affiliation, and why they care about climate. I recall people who stated how they feel about a cause. I recall people who talked about their understanding of activism and how they became an activist. Many speakers whom I have heard at public events shared parts of themselves. In that, they modeled the behavior for other people as well.

Through sharing during public events, speakers allow us to normalize sharing as part of

activism. Additionally, these speakers help us create frameworks and ways of sharing our own story. In other words, the speakers create and normalize activist narratives about how they are, where they are at, and what they are aiming for.

Narrative “is a fundamental means of making sense of experience” and it “provides tellers with an opportunity...to create continuity between past, present, and imagined worlds” (Ochs and Capps 1996: 19). It also shapes our emotions about the experiences, and through narrative one can connect themselves to the society. Thus, narrative constitutes “a crucial resource for socializing emotions, attitudes, and identities, developing interpersonal relationships, and constituting membership in a community” (Ochs and Capps 1996: 19). As everything, narratives exist within the larger structures of oppression. For example, emotional language is often downplayed and associated with women in this patriarchal society<sup>2</sup>. Among others, activists use narratives to “align their personal identities with larger conceptions of group identity” and to “frame uniqueness of personal experience.... that sustains their activism” (Ruiz-Junco 2011: 713).

Narratives, the way we speak about ourselves, are central to our activism and sharing with each other. Speakers during public events model these narratives for us. They also help us with finding words and expressions that can unite us through the common understanding of terms like climate change, social justice, protest, and many more.

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<sup>2</sup> Associating women with emotional language is, of course, not natural but cultural: “The links between gender, status, and linguistic practices are not ‘natural’ but culturally constructed” (Gal 2001: 421). Thus, not only are certain narratives accepted by certain groups, the larger power structures define which narratives we deem as more reliable. For example, less emotional, scientific narratives are preferred in the United States.

*The absence of activism and climate in our narratives*

~ letter 22 ~

about the things we are missing

Dear Reader,

I did not want to exclude public events from my thinking about community care and I hope I did them justice. While I do not see them as key in building long-term community care, public events play an important role in creating and replicating collective identity and normalizing the performances of sharing. Through recreating collective identities in activist meetings, we evoke sense of comfort which is one of the prerequisites of care. Furthermore, though normalizing sharing behavior through narratives, we provide people with skills to share about themselves and their activism, thus allowing them to get to know each other better.

As I was starting to write this letter, I also started realizing that there is something missing in my analysis. Throughout my whole fieldnotes, I did not talk about climate change or activism. Going back through my them, I realized that my informants also rarely talked about activism or climate change to each other. But that does not mean that it was not important for them. In interviews, much of our time together was spent by talking about people's views of climate change and activism and their connection, yet there was an absence of collective sharing these ideas. In other words, somehow we, as climate activists, forgot to talk about climate change and activism when we were together.

Looking even closer, I realized that these absences played out, in part, in failures to communicate and sometimes in failures of meaningful care. For example, after the direct action in TD bank which I attended with Jeanné, I was really excited and hoping to replicate this action in Waterville. I wrote an email to Dick and Linda that night, but even week after there was no answer.

I followed up with another email thinking that perhaps they have missed the previous one. To this email, I got an answer from Dick saying: “I don’t know what to think. It would make me pretty uncomfortable to do something in the bank like they did in Portland, but it might get more attention. I’m not very confrontational, I’m afraid.” (email conversation, 12/21/2016). Until that time, around three years after we started organizing together, I did not know where Dick's level of comfort is regarding direct actions. This, as a moment without context, does not seem to relate to care. However, I can recall moments when I was frustrated with our 350 Central Maine group for we were not radical or forceful enough. In these moments, there was a gap between me and the rest of the group, kind of a knowledge gap, because we did not know our activist tactics. In those moments we could not care for each other because there the was not enough understanding.

Even though it might not seem so, understanding each other’s tactics and activism is important. For example, movements might “develop collective identities based on...tactical tastes” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 293). Furthermore, tactics (co-)create certain types of public spaces. These spaces, then, create different possibilities for public mirroring of community care. Tactics, as anything else, cannot be seen in vacuum. Through history, certain tactics were associated with certain identities. For example, “collectivist styles of organization came to be seen in the 1970s as feminist in a way that made their adoption by new feminist groups a matter of common sense. Earlier, the same forms had come to be seen as white in the southern civil rights movement and, for that reason, had become increasingly unappealing to African Americans” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 296). Tactics proved to be the divisive factor in the history of 350 Maine as well.

When I joined 350 Maine and got more closely affiliated with the statewide leadership, I learned that the history of 350 Maine was not always smooth. In the beginning, I was too scared to ask anybody, and even as I am writing this, I consider it a very delicate topic. Below, I am going to write one way of looking at a snippet of 350 Maine history. In order to understand what has happened, I reached out to all three founders of 350 Maine – Heidi, Reed, and Bob. Bob is still a

part of 350 Maine while Heidi and Read have since moved to Colorado. Before writing this, I want to recognize that this is only one way of looking at the history and I do not claim the truth. Rather, I chose this particular part of the history to illustrate why it is important to talk about our tactics and our views of activism.

Basically, what has happened is that few years after 350 Maine was founded, specifically in November 2015, 350 Waldo, one of the first 350 Maine nodes and the base location of part of the 350 Maine leadership, decided to split from 350 Maine based on ideological disagreements. Even as I was interviewing the three founders of 350 Maine, I realized that everybody is very careful to not say anything incorrect and not entirely clear on how this split happened.

“I am still not sure about it all, Ester” (Read, phone interview, 01/15/2017)

What I understand is that there have been complications in communication and worldviews since the beginning. According to the founders, some of these complications were geographical while others were based on ideology:

“that was very hard and it was difficult to work through this separation ideologically through this geographical separation” (Heidi, phone interview, 01/12/2017)

“[it] definitely was the division between north and south and rural and the city and not really being able to put a finger on what it all meant” (Read, phone interview, 01/15/2017)

“I think we just had different perspectives and different styles” (Bob, phone interview, 02/07/2017)

These ideological differences became so central to the organization that it was not possible anymore for people to organize together. Read's example of the ski resort helped me understand what the ideological difference was:

“An indication of what was to cause difficulties later...ahmmm...was [name] ski resort approached 350 Maine and wanted to...ahmmm...we would encourage people to ski at [the resort] they would give us money, we would get a kind of...ahmmm...if somebody came in and went to the parking lot and said 350 Maine send them, they would give us a certain amount of the money that went to the parking. And that just did not wash well with a lot of us, and it ended up being discussed for like six months. It seems probably in retrospect it might have only been three months, but every week we would talk about this and, you know, a lot of people felt that skiing destroys the environment, why are we doing this?

Skiing takes up a lot of water they have to constantly you know building snow, and is skiing really something we wanna support? Whether other people were saying [the ski resort] is really working on being a green ski resort and we should support that. And it was like: why are we...why are we dealing with this? This is not something we wanna deal with. And it went on and on..." (Read, phone interview, 01/15/2017)

"...also okay this is a big problem that we had and it became you know a profound ideological difference and we lost a lot of trust in the leadership as a result" (Heidi, phone interview, 01/12/2017)

In short, since the 350 Maine leaders did not really know and understand each other's tactics and did not talk about them until the gap between their tactics became unbearable for the group, 350 Maine had to split. This is not to say that if they shared their activist views they would have saved 350 Maine, but to say that knowing out activist tactics is important in understanding each other and thus being able to care. As Bob said in the end of our interview: "part of the problem [was] that we did not have any kind of relationship at all" (Bob, phone interview, 02/07/2017).

On both personal and group level, it is important for us to understand each other's tactics. We do not have to share them, right, Dick and I can still organize together even though our approaches to direct actions are very different. But we do have to know them in order to understand where people are coming from and prevent large, often-unnecessary disputes. As any knowledge, knowledge about our comfort and preference of tactics can help us to better care for each other. For example, since I know that Dick does not like confrontation, then I will not ask him to help with a sit in, but rather to participate in the solidarity rally.

~ letter 23 ~

about climate change and climate activists

Dear Reader,

perhaps ironically, in one of the last letters I will turn to the reason we organize: climate change. Looking at the absence of activism helped me to understand how people can become frustrated, connections lost, and groups divided. I found talking about climate change very different.



When I talked to people about climate change, they responded with emotions, sadness, and hopelessness. Many of them also referred me to a specific book by Joanna Macy. In her book, Macy argues that it is important for us to share how scared we are of the future facing climate change and how this sharing will help us create deeper connections with ourselves and each other. While I do not agree with Macy in many points, we align on this one. I found that listening to people's emotions and ideas about climate change got us closer. I could understand their despair and their approach to sustainability in their everyday life better.

You know we fight climate change, we read about climate change, and climate change is part of the United States' political agenda in one way or the other, but what does it really mean to be a climate activist? I know, climate change, as well as its magnitude, consequences, and solutions is comprehended differently by every person. Naomi Klein, in her book about capitalism and climate change, described the magnitude of climate change and its scariness in an understandable, broad way. She frames fear of climate change and its consequences in the discourse of denial. Not denial of seeing climate change as a hoax, rather, denial of climate change action in one's life:

“A great many of us engage in this kind of climate denial. We look for a split second and then we look away. Or we look but then turn it into a joke.... Which is another way of looking away.

Or we look but tell ourselves comforting stories about how humans are clever and will come up with a technological miracle....

Or we look but try to be hyper-rational about it....

Or we look but tell ourselves we are too busy to care about something so distant and abstract....

Or we look but tell ourselves that all we can do is focus on ourselves. Meditate and shop at farmer's markets and stop driving – but forget trying to actually change the systems that are making the crisis inevitable because that's too much ‘bad energy’ and it will never work....

Or maybe we do look – really look – but then, inevitably, we seem to forget”

(Klein 2014: 4-5)

After finishing Klein's (quite depressing) book, I asked myself: how can there be climate activists? How do they manage to fight against something so big and scary? In their article about climate camp in Australia, Rebecca Pearse, Jason Goodman, and Stuart Rosewarne explored the

same questions. They say that if we accept that “[g]lobal warming poses very directly the question of human agency” (Pearse et al. 2010: 76), then one way of looking at climate activism is through understanding it as a part of social agency. The connection between social agency, involvement, and detachment is as follows: “Social agency is by necessity caught between involvement in the daily troubles of society and the need to gain an external perspective, in order to act on it.

Involvement is necessary for the insights it allows into social experiences; detachment is necessary to acquire a perspective on these experiences, to enable social agency” (Pearse et al. 2010: 76).

Thus, in order to be part of climate activism, one has to be involved, yet not entirely (emotionally, perhaps) invested for otherwise one would not have a perspective that would lead to social agency.

Climate activism (and other forms of activism as well) “bridge[s] these worlds to create the imagination needed for transformative agendas and visions, enabling us to become the subjects of history, rather than its object” (Pearse et al. 2010: 76). This bridge, praxis, “is an important site in the production of emancipatory knowledge to transform social relations” (Pearse et al. 2010: 76).

Other way of looking at climate activism is look at “climate crisis and climate agency [as] locked into a dialectical struggle. This characterization is particularly evident where we distinguish crisis as a product of the internal contradictions of society from an externally imposed catastrophe. Global warming is a product of human society; in its current capitalist model it is not an accident of natural history. Society causes warming, and as such society can solve it” (Pearse et al. 2010: 77). Additionally, “there is a strong tendency to configure climate action as being first and foremost grounded in science, rather than in values or political ideologies. This rationalist bent runs the risk of missing the generative potential of affect, values, norms and of political vision in the process of collective mobilization” (Pearse et al. 2010: 77). Shortly, it is not only that climate change is a large and difficult issue to address, the way we conceptualize climate action – as scientific rather than political – creates a different, and perhaps less welcoming, possibilities of creating a large movement.

Very shortly, climate change is complicated and so is fighting against it. Additionally, each of us has to find a way to navigate the hugeness of climate change and the smallness of our human actions. To what extent we come into peace with this division reflects in our activism – the way we approach our tasks and the way we navigate activist spaces. Imagine, it is very different to not believe in the activism, but organize only because one does not know any better way and to organize and believe that we can actually change something. One might behave in a similar way, but their motivation and emotional energy will be different. This, then, reflects in one's relations to other people and thus in their possibilities to care.

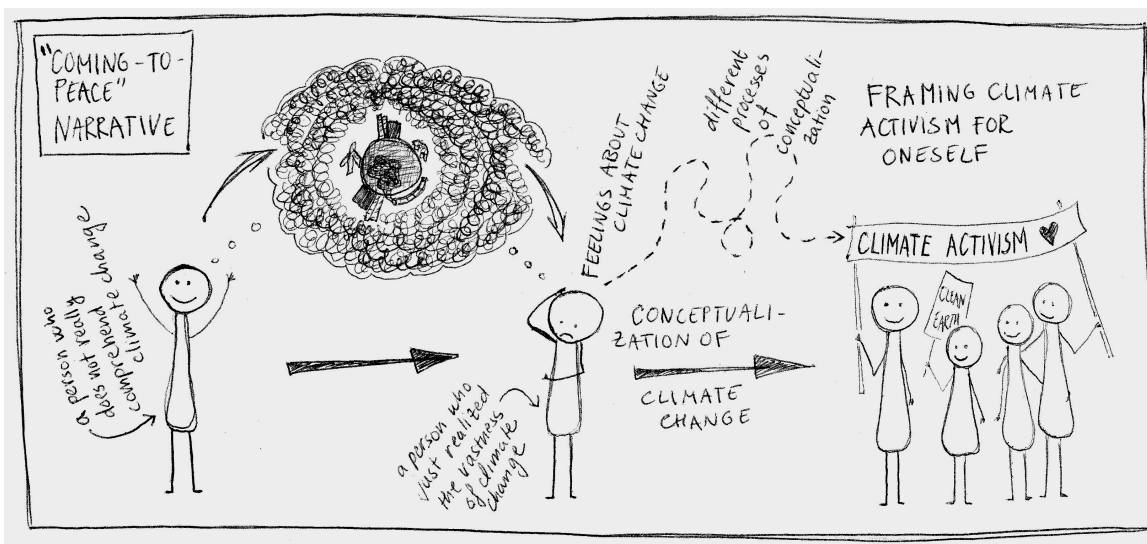
As I was listening to my activist friends during interviews, I realized that they share a common structure of their narrative about climate change. Hunt and Benford identified six accounts of identity tales: “associational declaration, disillusionment anecdotes, atrocity tales, ‘personal is political’ reports, guide narratives, and war stories” (Hunt and Benford 1994: 493-4). I would add another one called coming-to-peace narratives, or, in other words, narratives that talk about how people came or are coming into peace with the vastness of climate change and the extent of their organizing. My favorite coming to peace narratives in Dick's.

The first time I met Dick I was quite unsure what to tell him. That day, I biked down to the Unilateralist Unitarian church in Waterville to join a local vigil. Dick welcomed me, asking about my studies and my interests. By now, I got used to Dick's way of talking in a slow-paced, calm way, his specific laughter, and the way he approaches people. Then, I was just awkward, and I could not imagine that we would organize together for years. It was also beyond my imagination that he would share with me his “coming-to-peace” narrative, one that I have been thinking about since I heard it:

D: one night I was just lying in bed trying to come to peace with the issue and I had this image of...an ocean liner or like a warship going down s-sinking and I was thinking you know the captain stays on board not out of some kind of misguided nobility but because he is making sure that everyone gets into the lifeboats. So it is a very meaningful thing and I was thinking so if we blow ourselves up you know I can't have very much influence over

that but I can do my part, so I can have meaning in my own life and that is enough (Dick, in-person interview, 03/15/15, Waterville, ME)

Later, many other activists shared similar stories. Though each narrative is different, there are common threads among them. For one, activists need them in order to normalize climate change, to find this balance between involvement and detachment. Additionally, while the content of the narratives differs, they have a common overarching structure. In simplification, an activist goes through three stages in their narrative. First, they learn about climate change. Then, they find a way to normalize their understanding of climate change in relation to activism. Lastly, they find a temporary equilibrium that informs their connection to activism as well as associations with climate change. Obviously, this is a simplified view that puts scattered events into linear narrative form. Additionally, it can be a continuous process. Michelle, a climate activist and a very good friend of mine, talked about her experience of recognizing the vastness of climate change in waves: “I go in wave like yeah I am gonna be okay with it and no I am not gonna be okay with it.” (Michelle, in-person interview, 07/17/15, Portland, ME). I visually imagine it like this:



Through hearing these narratives, I was able to understand my fellow activists better. I understood that Dick has a set view of climate change and thus changes in policies or politicians will not get him out of balance. I was proven right after Donald Trump was elected. When we had

our next 350 Central Maine meeting, Dick was disappointed but determined to continue in the way we have done before. On the other hand, when I send a message to Michelle to support her ongoing organizing efforts in the time of the Trump presidency, she responded sharing how much harder it is for her to continue organizing. Obviously this was not only about climate change. However, understanding how these two activists understood climate change helped me to guess how they would react and who could use care. Which is also why I send a message to Michelle to support her activism, but I did not feel the need to send one to Dick.

Since I have learned about the absence of climate change in our climate activist circles, I made the note to do more climate change exercises on different conferences and workshop. Here is my favorite one:

### How to start thinking and feeling about climate change

Prompt: Due to its largeness and scariness, we often fail to realize how urgent the issue of climate change is. We do not feel that we are in crisis and thus we fail to act with enough weight in order to stop the crisis. Often, we focus on individual issues, which, while useful for campaign purposes, do not necessary motivate people in the long run, failing to make them understand the importance of climate and climate justice activism.

#### Exercise:

Time: around 5 minutes with explanations

- << It is good to start with a short story (around 1 min) about how you feel when you think about climate change and give a visual example of what you imagine our planet will look like in 50 years to set up the atmosphere >> (30 s)  
Explanation of what we are doing and why it is important (see the prompt)
  - Acknowledging that it might be awkward and that we are not used to sharing so much about ourselves
  - Highlighting why this exercise can be useful:
    - We will get to know each other better and thus strengthen our group
    - We will be better at solidarity
    - Due to feeling the weight of climate change, we can collectively become more effective
- (30 s) Find a pair, do a hand hug, and share three random facts about each other – for people who



know each other, share facts that the other person likely does not know, not organizing facts (!), life facts

- (30 s) Silently visualize climate change and how the Earth is going to look like in 50 years, if climate change continues 4. (30 s) One person shares their visual and how they feel about it/what the visual makes them feel while the other ONLY listens
- (30 s) the roles switch
- (30 s or more) sing a song/do a chant/something else to unify people together and give them hope and a positive attitude

**Notes:**

- it is good to remind people of their time 10 s before ending and 5 s before ending

- if people seem to get engaged, you can give them more time.

<< *When I was doing it, I gave in the end 45 s to each to share, but I just pretended it was 30 s* >>

- it is good to have the song lyrics written up or have another exercise prepared

~ letter 24 ~

about the importance of narratives

Dear Reader,

this is my second to last letter and I am becoming sentimental. I tried to write a long-winded narrative about care and so it feels appropriate to talk about narratives here. Both the absence of climate change and activism in our everyday organizing and sharing are detrimental to care. The created knowledge gaps in case of activism and emotional gaps in case of climate change do not allow us to get to know each other fully. Additionally, our lack of understanding each other's activism leads to frustrations and problems. Our lack of understanding where we are at in understanding climate change can lead to emotional distance and inability to know when and how to support each other. In short, I wish we would talk more often about these things collectively.

As I mentioned earlier, narratives help us make sense of our experiences and shape them. They can also help us create common narrative of climate change and activism, or common enough for us to operate as a cohesive group. Just imagine that a group of climate activists, who always organize and feel the urgency of needing to do more, sits down in a circle and takes the time to listen to each other. It could help us create better conditions for community care. Firstly, it could help all the group members with conceptualizing climate change. Though sharing knowledge across

experiences, we would give everybody the space to reflect on their own activism and develop better understanding of themselves. Secondly, it could facilitate a more nuanced understanding of each other. Which, in turn, would help us know how to address each other's needs. Thirdly, though sharing we would create a common discourse about climate change, which could create a shared understanding of the struggle and a sense of belonging. Lastly, we would establish 'climate change' as a connecting word, a symbol with attached meanings and emotions.

As beautiful as it sounds, it also sounds possibly dangerous. In thinking about narratives, it is important to recognize that they can go both ways: they can create a tighter community or silence people who feel differently. When I think about sharing “coming-to-peace” narratives and narratives about activism, I also think about the carefulness that goes with it. When we share, we need to make sure that we do not silence different experiences or lack of (stereotypically recognized) experiences. We need to make sure that we embrace the different ways in which people think about climate change and their climate activism rather than silencing them for the sole purpose of group cohesiveness. On the other hand, group has a level of shared identity that helps activists to collaborate and fosters a feeling of community. Both of them are important. Hopefully, we can live on intersections.

## *Letter 25*

### *Last thoughts and goodbyes*

~ letter 25 ~

goodbye

Dear Reader,

this is my last letter. Thank you for going with me through this journey of exploring community care. It took me two years to come to conclusions that perhaps seem intuitive and mundane. But I am not sure I was seeking for anything groundbreaking. I learned to recognize care in activism. That is important for me because I can celebrate the people who care and who I care for. I can find ways to create more caring environments through introducing getting-to-know practices, filling the prerequisites of care, and then engaging in caring practices. I also recognize that care will always be problematic because we exist in a capitalist system full of oppressions and privileges that are replicated in caring. Because of this, care can sometimes be more harmful than helpful. I know I have to be careful when I care.

I have always wanted to be a caring self, but I never quite knew how to aspire to be one. I know I will never be perfect, but now that I know about community care, I know how to aspire. And these aspirations are exactly in the mundane interactions and details of everyday organizing. Next time I hear introductions on a conference call, I will listen and learn. Next time I organize a vigil; I will make sure to include singing. Next time I bring food to a meeting, I will make sure to learn everybody's dietary restrictions. But part of aspiring to care is also allowing others to care for me. So the journey ahead of me is also to learn to share. As an organizer, I have been trained to always appear put together because other people depend on me. Now I know that fellow activists need me to share for us to develop caring relationships.

Dear Reader, whoever you are, thank you for allowing me to write these letters and reflect



on community care. I probably do not recognize it right now, as I am writing these last lines, but I have learned a lot through this journey. Thanks to you. Thanks to all my informants who have supported me and allowed me to observe them and understand them better. Thanks to my thesis advisor professor Tate who guided me through this long process and professor Besteman who gave me feedback when needed. Thanks to professor Razsa, professor Halvorson, and professor Mills for the conversations that helped me strengthen my argument. Thanks to the parents of Eitan Shalom Green whose contribution allowed me to travel across Maine and attend actions. And thanks to my own activist mentors who taught me much of what I know about organizing and questioned why I spend so much time writing about activism instead of doing it. And also thanks to all my friends who read my drafts, gave me ideas, and listened to me whine about this whole process.

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