

Corona, Care and Political Masculinity. Gender-Critical Perspectives on Governing the Covid
Pandemic in Austria

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1. Introduction¹

The outbreak of the Covid pandemic in early 2020 has posed serious challenges for governments across the globe, resulting in a set of unprecedented measures of government-mandated social distancing rules, lockdown of the economy, border closures, and travel restrictions to curb the spread of the virus. The Austrian government has followed a similar course in managing the crisis by strategically shutting down and ramping up social life against the background of fluctuating infection rates. Given the urgency of the matter, the government diverted public resources into key sectors such as public health and the labor market while transferring even a greater share of caring responsibilities to individuals and families to care for themselves and others (e.g., social distancing rules, introduction of home office, temporary closure of kindergartens and schools). During the Covid pandemic, the imperative nature of care became clear to an extent that even state actors had to revise their otherwise *careless* discourses and acknowledge its life-serving purpose though without challenging the secondary importance attached to care work (Lichtenberger and Wöhl 2020). Public discourses which accompanied and served to underpin the “Corona measures” were thus positioned somewhere between solidarity and social cohesion, on one hand, and individual self-responsibility and self-care, on the other hand, as evidenced by the government’s flagship campaign “Look after yourself, look after me” (*Schau auf dich, schau auf mich*) and were affectively and emotionally charged.²

While the Austrian government made a sharp U-turn in fiscal policy, increased state debts and invested billions of Euros to support the economy, at the same time it assumed as a matter of course that the “private” sphere will be a main site of crisis management. The population, especially its feminized and ethnicized segments (Wöhl 2020), had to rely on their reproductive capacities to help themselves and others get through the crisis as evidenced in the overall increase in women’s unpaid and underpaid care work since the outbreak of the pandemic (Mader et al. 2020). As with other structural crises of capitalism, the government processed the Covid pandemic by further externalizing care work — a key capitalist-patriarchal trait (Fraser 2016). In the context of the current crisis, European, including Austrian, governments have followed a similar strategy of tacit reliance on women’s unpaid care work to “fix” the current crisis (Dowling 2021) without social redistribution — a strategy known to

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² We use emotions and affects synonymously to avoid any distinction between social emotions and “asocial” affects (Ahmed 2004; Bargetz and Sauer 2015).

perpetuate class, gender, and race privileges of dominant social groups at the expense of those who are already marginalized (Dowling 2021; Emejulu and Bassel 2017).

The question our article wishes to address arises from a particular ambivalence: On the one hand, care has been publicly acknowledged as essential work during the Covid pandemic while, on the other hand, the Austrian government's response to the pandemic has been far from challenging the capitalist-patriarchal compromise which devaluates care and renders it invisible. To sustain this ambivalence and thus the hegemonic governing of care and social reproduction, as we assume, government actors had to reframe care in the new context of the pandemic. Since state governing has historically been tied to masculinity generally characterized as rational and emotionless, we are interested in which role state and political masculinity and affects have played in reframing care during the pandemic in Austria. Therefore, we ask (1) which discourses employed by the government have served to normalize and generate societal consensus over its *careless* crisis management and (2) which role political masculinity and affects have played therein. We contend that the introduction of a specific mode of masculinity embodied by government members, policymakers, and experts, which we call "rational-affective masculinity", was integral to the reframing of care by the government in its attempt to govern the pandemic

Austria offers an insightful case for studying the role of political masculinity and affects in governing social reproduction for at least two reasons. First, Austria's mode of social reproduction is typically labelled as "male breadwinner" model where women are primarily responsabilized for care work. Although this model has eroded due to the integration of women into wage labour and public investment in childcare in the last four decades, it continues to exist due to the prevalence of a gendered division of labour as well as the flexibilization of the labour market and the feminization of part-time work (Gresch and Sauer 2018). Emerging gaps in familial and institutional care structures are commonly patched through "care extractivism" (Wichterich 2016), i.e. through "live-in care" and "migrant-in-a-family" models where migrant workers, mostly women, are hired for care work (Aulenbacher, Bachinger and Décieux 2015). Second, the ruling Christian-democratic Austrian People's Party (*Österreichische Volkspartei*, ÖVP) (currently in a coalition with the Greens) has traditionally defended hierarchical and heteronormative gender roles but has refashioned itself as a more dynamic and innovative party under the leadership of the current Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. Nevertheless, the ÖVP and Kurz did not abolish the "brotherhood-breadwinner" structure (Marx Ferree 2020, 3) nor the masculinist foundation of the Austrian state (Kreisky 1995). Kurz, to the contrary, has adopted "a calm, reasonable and clean-hands style of populism, and triggered symbolic violence by activating the ideal of the masculine subject who is able to act autonomously and to control the effects of his action" (Löffler 2020, 21).

To explore the reframing of care during the Covid pandemic in Austria and the role of political masculinity and affects therein, we analyze the press conferences held by the Austrian government during the early days of the first lockdown in the aftermath of March 10, 2020 when the government officially announced a set of “Corona measures”. In these press conferences, political masculinity is performed, embodied, and constructed by several political actors, more specifically government members and social partners. Two distinct sets of discourses can be identified in the selected press conferences which addressed (1) risks, challenges, and ensuing measures as well as the economy and (2) solidarity, self-responsibility, and caring for others (e.g., the older, the vulnerable). We will argue that these seemingly opposing and at times disconnected discourses are bundled through rational-affective masculinity. Rational-affective masculinity helps, as we will show, first, to appeal to people’s reason and hearts at once and, second, to (re-)draw the boundaries between public (i.e., state responsibility, institutionalized, paid) and “private” (i.e., individual responsibility, informal, familiarized, unpaid) – aiming to leave the gendered division of labor untouched.

In the following, we define the research gap that our study aims to fill (section 2). We then sketch a theoretical framework which tackles masculinity and affects as specific forms of governing the pandemic (section 3). Then, we discuss our methodological considerations on affective governance and political masculinity and present our data (section 4). In the next step, we discuss our main findings (section 5) and finish by drawing a few forward-looking conclusions based on our analysis (section 6).

2. State of Research: Taking *care* of structural crises

Critical scholarship establishes that crises are structural rather than incidental in capitalist societies (Demirović et al. 2011). Feminist conceptualizations of structural crises center around social reproduction — i.e., work “that takes place mainly at the household level (e.g. caring for children, the elderly, the sick, everyday housework)” (Bakker and Gill 2019, 507). Feminists have characterized the systematic externalization of reproductive costs by the capital to generate value as a key contradiction of capitalist-patriarchal societies which consequently undermines the material conditions under which the labor force is reproduced (Federici 2012; Fraser 2016; Winker 2015). This structural *carelessness* (Aulenbacher, Bachinger and Décieux 2015) culminates, in Silvia Federici’s words, in a “permanent reproductive crisis” (Vishmidt 2013, Federici-Interview) which intensifies as it interlocks with other distinct though structurally related — e.g., financial, ecological — crises (Brand 2009; Fraser 2016). The crisis of reproduction is further aggravated as governments draw on women’s care capacities to process the crises in other fields. It is observed that during economic crises women’s and girls’ unpaid care work in the households as well as their underpaid care work in informalized sectors grow substantially (Elson 2012). For instance, the public management of the economic and financial crises of 2008 has indeed displayed a recurring strategy of seeking to mitigate, at least temporarily, the

effects of the crises by further resorting to women's unpaid care work (Lang and Sauer 2015; Young 2003). However, "[i]f pressure is put upon the domestic sector to provide unpaid care work to make up for deficiencies elsewhere, the result may be a depletion of human capabilities" (Elson, quoted in Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas 2010, 2) to an extent that people become unable to reproduce themselves and others due to missing resources such as time and money (Dowling 2021).

Scholars have made similar observations during the current crisis of the Covid pandemic. A time survey conducted in Austria during the first lockdown shows that women, mothers in particular, were disproportionately burdened by the closing of schools and kindergartens, some women even noting that they would need 36 hours a day to be able to juggle home office, home schooling and other caring tasks (Mader et al. 2020). In heterosexual families where men are usually the main breadwinners and women are part-time workers, the gender care gap has grown during the Covid pandemic: women worked about 14 hours, eight of them unpaid, while men work about 13 hours, only seven of them unpaid (Mader et al. 2020). Similarly, others have noted that care work has been re-traditionalized — i.e., privatized and feminized — during the Covid pandemic (Derndorfer et al. 2020; Lichtenberger and Wöhl 2020).

We contribute to this scholarship by focusing on the gendered aspects of governing the crisis of the Covid pandemic with a focus on care work. This is important as government discourses and policies set political norms and priorities and prescribe a code of conduct for the population in times of condensed and interlocking crises. These norms and practices that serve to navigate a specific population through a crisis are not reinvented anew but draw on and reinforce existing social relations, as research on the growing gender care gap during a crisis shows. However, revisions and reallocations can also be part of governing a crisis, for example when the existing social norms fall short of accommodating a new situation as reflected in the symbolic revaluation of some caring professions and reallocation of public resources to some caring sectors during the Covid pandemic. Our interest is to study how these continuities or discontinuities are communicated and legitimized as part of the political strategy to govern the current crisis. More precisely, the current article studies *how* the Austrian government re-signified care to handle the intensified crisis of social reproduction during the pandemic and which political masculinities and affects were employed to this end. In which ways is the Austrian population invoked to take over care? Which rational and affective convictions does the government employ? To what extent are they gendered and which possible effects do they have? Answering these questions, our research should allow a deeper understanding of the gendered governing of the Covid pandemic and overall contributes to our understanding of how political actors govern governing capitalist-patriarchal crises not only in rational, but also in affective ways.

3. Theoretical considerations: Neoliberal transformations of political masculinity, affectivity and biopolitics

Masculinity studies have shown that masculinities are multiple and subject to constant transformation because manifestations of male power and dominance change as gender and other social power relations and structures change (Kreisky 2014, 15). The specific formation of masculinities — and femininities — is thus interwoven with historically evolving struggles and social conditions (Connell 1995, 79). With the emergence of the nation state, the capitalist accumulation regime and the bourgeois society in the 18th century, masculinity started being associated with the public sphere — i.e., politics and the state — while femininity started being associated with the “private” sphere (Lang 2004). Parallel to this, hegemonic masculinity started being tied to the ideal of rationality while emotionality was considered rationality’s feminized “Other” and banned from the emerging public sphere.

This public vs. private and rational vs. emotional distinction, also called the “liberal emotion dispositive” (Bargetz and Sauer 2015, 95), has served as a marker of bodily, sexual, and emotional “difference” and as the ideational ground for the gendered division of labor and (liberal) biopolitics, i.e. the governing of the population (Foucault 1978/79). Biopolitics assigns to women caring tasks of reproducing the population (through generativity), the work force (through care work that is restoring the workers, like cooking and cleaning) and the rules and norms of the society (through child rearing) which are essential for the generation of surplus value for capitalist accumulation (Federici 2006). In short, this includes the notion of the “caring housewife” and “loving mother” who cares “out of love” (Bock and Duden 1977).

These common dichotomies — public vs. private, rationality vs. emotionality, production vs. reproduction — are constitutive of modern statehood and integral to the governing of patriarchal-capitalist societies (Ludwig 2016; Sauer 2001). The modern state is masculinist and has been constructed as rational and emotionless (Sauer 2016). Accordingly, political masculinity, that is “any kind of masculinity [...] constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by ‘political players’” — embodied by men or women (Starck and Sauer 2014, 6) — characterizes both the capacity to exercise state power, express competence to govern and to make binding decisions and thus has to perform rationally and in a non-affective way. While the image of this ideal political and state masculinity changed, for example from martial to bureaucratic and managerial masculinity in the 20th century (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), its foundations have remained relatively stable over time.

These dichotomies have been blurred in the course of the neoliberal restructuring of the state and societies of the Global North. The flexibilization of labor from the 1970s on resulted in the decline of family wages and thus of the “male breadwinner” model, leading to the integration of women into the

labor market, mostly as part-time workers (Weiß 2012). In line with these developments, social reproduction needed to be restructured as *some* caring tasks formerly carried out by familiarized women were gradually reallocated to public, private, and non-profit sectors. These processes were accompanied by a “common trend towards increasing emphasis on individual responsibility for, and informalization of, social reproduction” (Bakker and Silvey 2008, 8), drawing on the care capacities of poorly paid migrant women from the Global South (Isaksen et al. 2008; Lutz 2016; Wichterich 2016).

The erosion of the once distinct separation between the public and “private” spheres has constituted a new hegemonic masculinity in Western Europe.³ It led to the emergence of “new modes of male subjectivation and new techniques of male self-governance” (Sauer 2014, 86). Neoliberal masculinity is characterized as “risk-taking”, “market-related” and “financialized” masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 851) and became particularly apparent during the public management of the 2008 financial crisis (Sauer 2014).

Parallel to the shifting boundaries of public vs. private, affects and emotions have become an important part of public life and a new form of capital as well as a means of neoliberal governance (Penz and Sauer 2020). Affective skills which were traditionally considered as feminine affective capital like friendliness, compassion, empathy, and patience have become important to improve efficiency and productivity in labor market areas typically associated with men. However, so far, the adaptation of feminized affects by men has not resulted in the depletion of the patriarchal gender regime but has rather contributed to its normalization (Sauer 2014, 90f.). Likewise, it has not resolved the structural carelessness of capitalist economies. In its neoliberal construction, hegemonic masculinity draws on the ideal of the “strong” and “rational” man *and* on his ability to use his affective capital and emotions in a senseful way to touch and move others. Affective governing succeeds through gendered processes, not least through the masculinization of emotions (Penz and Sauer 2020, 135).

This neoliberal transformation of affects and masculinity has impacted politics and governing. Affective political masculinity complements rational political masculinity to govern a population in line with societal norms and ideals that still serve the capitalist-patriarchal structure of societies. This combination of political affectivity and rationality is furthermore part of the neoliberal biopolitical masculinist governing of the population and its reproductive relations. Rather than setting strict rules, neoliberal biopolitics targets the subjectivities and bodies of people leading them to use their affective capital to optimally persist in the public and the “private” sphere (Foucault 1978/1979).

³ In this article, we focus on Western Europe; however, hegemonic masculinities vary in different regions of the world.

4. Considerations on methodology and methods

The key institutional medium of political communication during the Covid pandemic have been the government press conferences through which political actors assessed the situation, announced official measures, and provided incentives for the population to behave in certain ways during the crisis. Press conferences served to centralize and control political communication and content such as statistical information (e.g., infection, death, and recovery rates, occupancy rate of intensive care units), code of conduct (e.g., social distancing, wearing a mask, home office), and priorities (e.g., protecting vulnerable groups, saving jobs).

The public Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) broadcasted all government press conferences on Covid measures at noon or in the evening at primetime. We selected five public press conferences which were held on March 10th, 13th, 14th, 16th and 18th, 2020 and announced and addressed key "Corona measures" pertaining to the introduction of a lockdown, closure of shops and borders, restrictions on going out, short-time work and teleworking, distance learning, and financial aid for businesses. Speakers at the selected press conferences were Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP) (March 10th, 13th, 14th and 18th), Vice Chancellor Werner Kogler (Grüne) (March 13th, 14th, 18th), then Health Minister Rudolf Anschober (Grüne)⁴ (March 10th, 13th, 14th, 18th), Interior Minister Karl Nehammer (ÖVP) (March 10th, 13th, 14th), Minister of Finance Gernot Blümel (ÖVP) (March 13th, 14th, 16th, 18th), Minister of Economy Margarete Schramböck (ÖVP) (March 14th), Governor of Austria's Central Bank (OeNB) Robert Holzmann (March 16th), OeNB Vice-Governor Gottfried Haber (March 16th), President of the Austrian Economic Chamber (WKO) Harald Mahrer (March 14th), Andreas Treichl (WKO) (March 16th), and President of the Austrian Federation of Trade Unions (ÖGB) Wolfgang Katzian (March 14th). Transcripts of the five selected press conferences were made available by the ORF as well as videos of four of the press conferences.

To reconstruct which affects and modes of political masculinities were deployed in combination with which social issues and policy areas, we based our qualitative content analysis on the transcripts and video sequences of selected press conferences. To analyse the transcripts of the press conferences, we used Philipp Mayring's method of qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2015: 11; 33; 51). First, we descriptively identified which issues and themes were addressed in the press conferences. Following Mayring we structured the issues presented at the press conferences along different aspects of care-taking. The topics addressed included information pertaining to current trends regarding the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g., the spread of the virus in Austria, situation in neighbouring Italy), health and economic risks arising from it (e.g., economic downturn), public measures to curb the spread of the virus (e.g.,

⁴ Anschober resigned from office on April, 13, 2021.

lockdown, closing of schools and kindergartens, mandatory masks in shops and public transport), public measures to keep the population and the economy alive (e.g., securing basic supply, financial support for companies, short-time work, rent deferrals) as well as recommendations and codes of conduct (e.g., social distancing, washing hands, staying at home, looking after each other, especially after vulnerable groups).

In a second step, we analyzed which affects and feelings political actors deployed both in their verbal and body language while addressing the issues and themes of political action we had identified beforehand. We paid attention to the language used in combination with a specific issue and studied which topics are governed by an affective language (e.g., talking warm and friendly about solidarity, togetherness, empathy) and which ones by a rational language (e.g., talking certain and stern about the economy and the health-care-system) (Flam and Kleres 2015). Matching the spoken words with their bodily representation in the videos, we analyzed the setting, facial expressions, gestures, style of speech, tonality and atmospheres (Argyle 1975; Knudsen and Stage 2015). Affective expressions of sternness, determination, strictness and feelings of risk and danger were coded as indicators for rationality while performed empathy, softness and feelings of solidarity and togetherness suggest care and affectivity.

In a last step, based on the issues and themes we had previously identified (step one) and the affects through which they were communicated in word and manner (step two), we identified political masculinity of male and female politicians constructed at the intersection between affects and rationality. We did not distinguish between male and female politicians because the rational-affective masculinity is constructed and performed independently from the biological sex of individuals. We defined rational political masculinity as being composed of a set of policy issues and specific affects. Whenever political actors communicated notions and invoked feelings of danger and risk, talked about topics such as caring for the economy, and exuded political competence and authority over these matters, we considered these as practices of rational political masculinity. We identified three thematic subcategories through which rational masculinity was constructed: (1) economy and work, (2) challenges and risks, and (3) anti-pandemic measures. Sternness, determination, strictness and feelings of risk and danger displayed in words, gestures and facial expressions were coded as indicators for political rationality.

Affective political masculinity is defined as a combination of affects and issues like solidarity, responsibility and a "we". Whenever political actors – male and female – communicated notions and feelings of solidarity, responsibility and empathy, availed themselves of imageries of a national "we", and softened their position of political authority while reinforcing paternalism, we considered these practices of affective political masculinity and identified the following thematic subcategories: (1)

“Austrians”, “Team Austria”, “We”, (2) solidarity, (self-)responsibility, individual contribution, and (3) protecting the older and the population. Here, too, we traced the physical embodiment of affective political masculinity by analyzing video segments.

5. Governing the Covid pandemic in Austria: Ambivalent care between rational-affective political masculinity

In this section we present our findings and show how rational-affective political masculinity is communicated and performed in the press conferences of the Austrian Government in March 2020 and how this particular political masculinity helped re-define the scope and content of care in governing the pandemic. We find that rational-affective political masculinity builds on a set of discourses which, on one hand, address issues pertaining to the economy, wage labor, risks, challenges, and government measures. On the other hand, rational-affective masculinity makes propositions about a common national identity (Austrians, Team Austria, We), solidarity, (self-)responsibility, and protection of the population, especially vulnerable groups such as the older. We observe that these distinct yet concurrent sets of rationalized (economy, wage labor, risks, challenges and measures) and affective discourses (national identity, solidarity and (self-)responsibility, protecting the vulnerable) serve to further consolidate the public vs. private and thus the production vs. social reproduction divide by ascribing different, even opposing rationalities to the management of each sphere. Our analysis finds that, in its political communication, the Austrian government asks for resilience, patience, and sacrifices when addressing issues related to care. When addressing the economy, wage labor, risks, challenges and measures the government representatives claim immediate action and money. However, we also notice a certain spillover in situations when the government asks employers and self-employed persons for resilience, understanding, and patience. We also observe that this rational-affective mode of political masculinity holds true across the political spectrum, including social partners and organized labor. Not least, we notice that the demonstrated rational-affective political masculinity is part of the biopolitical governing of the crisis through redefining care as caring for the economy rather than caring for the people.

5.1. Risks, challenges and caring for the economy

Our data shows that one key function of rational-affective political masculinity is to discursively and affectively reflect and construct situations and scenarios of risk and challenge that serve to rationalize state measures and incentivize compliance among the population. Feelings of immediate risk and threat are mediated during the press conferences through statements such as: “We are currently

experiencing a challenging time”⁵ (Sebastian Kurz/SK, 13.03.2020) or that mortality rates in case of Covid are 10 to 30 times higher than a regular flu “as has always been feared” (SK, 10.03.2020). Risk and danger are moreover invoked by citing hard facts such as infection rates and pointing to the alarming situation in the neighboring state of Italy where “in a prospering region like Lombardei parts of hospital infrastructure are no longer functional and what this means for individual people, one can hardly imagine in this very minute” and that the news coming from the region “reads like war reporting” (Rudolf Anschober/RA, 13.03.2020). These statements underline the worrisome developments against whose backdrop drastic “Corona measures” must be taken, at times accompanied by the acknowledgement that “the steps we are taking are severe limitations” (SK, 13.03.2020). Through rational claims these measures are presented as inevitable to “at least slow down the spread of the virus in Austria” (SK, 13.03.2020) and to prevent a similar course “as in our Southern neighbor [Italy] which many [Austrians] love” (RA, 13.03.2020). Constant risk assessment (“We must evaluate the situation on a daily basis”; SK, 13.03.2020) is thus integral to managing the Covid pandemic and to rational masculinity. Risk assessment is often tied to an affective appeal to self-responsibility and solidarity in helping contain the spread of the virus — “every single one of us, we must be aware, has a responsibility” (SK, 13.03.2020) — which will require a “general change of behavior” (RA, 10.03.2020). Change of conduct is not only requested from the population but also from companies as illustrated in Chancellor Kurz’s statement: “This is only a request, but nevertheless a request with emphasis: I ask Austrian companies to grant teleworking to employees where possible” (SK, 10.03.2020).

Policymakers and experts tie pandemic-related risks and ensuing measures economic and financial risks. Chancellor Kurz speaks of “massive economic effects” of the anti-Covid measures (SK, 14.03.2020) but promises that the federal government will tackle the question “very intensively” as to what “we can do to best support employees but also businesses in this difficult phase”, noting that safeguarding jobs in most affected sectors will be a priority (SK, 14.03.2020). Similarly, a representative of the Austrian Economic Chamber (WKO) assures the population that all measures will be taken to bring Austrian companies safely through the crisis and that this is “our obligation, [...] our mission, this is what we are here for and this we will do” (Andreas Treichl/AT, 16.03.2020). Vice-Chancellor Werner Kogler (Greens) prepares the population for the “dramatic impact” of the “Corona measures” on the Austrian economy and employees and but also gives hope that the public financial aid will help maintain the “cycle of the economy” and provide the “economic body with fresh blood” (WK, 14.03.2020) – comparing the economy to a sick body. Finance Minister Gernot Blümel (ÖVP) and social partners introduce the short-time work model that shall secure jobs (Gernot Blümel/GB, 14.03.2020)

⁵ All quotes are translated from German into English by the authors of the article.

while Minister of Economy Margarete Schramböck (ÖVP) announces that the “Corona short-time work” model will be allocated 400 million EUR, that it will be organized in a less bureaucratic way and will offer broader coverage than the existing short-time work model (Margarete Schramböck/MS, 14.03.2020). Schramböck emphasizes that the “economy is based on trust” and confidence that “when I leave my house in the morning, that I can buy myself a coffee [and] *Kipferl* [Croissant] at the bakery, that there are contracts for businesses which assure that the salaries can be paid, that the rent can be paid, that the business can go on” (MS, 14.03.2020). Sebastian Kurz underlines that “our approach is clear, we want to do everything humanly possible to prevent unemployment and insolvency in companies. Our approach is, whatever the cost, to save Austrian jobs” (SK, 18.03.2020). To this end, the government launched a “Corona crisis fund” of four billion EUR, including liquidity aid through loan guarantees, bridging loans, and tax deferrals, and additional support for individual and family firms and businesses from disproportionately affected sectors such as tourism, gastronomy, and culture.

Overall, we observe that policymakers, the representative of the Economic Chamber (WKO) and the Federation of Trade Unions (ÖGB) who normally represent conflicting and contradictory interests give a harmonious impression during the press conferences. The ÖGB President notes that trade unions and the Chamber of Labor (AK) are ready to cooperate and to look for solutions in order to minimize the impact of the crisis on workers. They appeal to businessmen and businesswomen to make use of the Corona short-time work instead of putting people “out on to the streets” because “we will need all workers after this crisis [...] to get started” (Wolfgang Katzian/WK, 14.03.2020). During his speech, the President of the Economic Chamber Mahrer thanks the presidents of ÖGB and AK for their cooperation, noting that it has been “unprecedented” how quickly and easily the social partners — the government, WKO, ÖGB, AK — were able to agree on the Corona short-time work model and on the allocation of 400 million EUR for its implementation (Harald Mahrer/HM, 14.03.2020). Overall, the government and the social partners signal competence, mutual trust, and unity, noting that the government and the social partners were “thankfully” able to draft “a very attractive and flexible short-time work model” (GB, 16.03.2020). The emphasis on the importance of a “healthy” – to stay with the body metaphor – economy, the promise of immediate financial help and recovery, and the demonstration of good cooperation help political representatives present themselves as carers of Austrian jobs and people, stating that they “do not leave anybody behind and do not leave anybody alone” (WK, 18.03.2020). The ambivalence of rational-affective masculinity allows the government to emphasize that “the virus threatens what is most important for us all, our health” (SK, 18.03.2020), but to also associate the task of caring for a population and its health with taking care of the economy and wage labor as demonstrated in Vice-Chancellor’s analogy of supplying the “economic body with fresh blood” (WK, 14.03.2020), referring to the public financial aid for businesses and employers.

“Corona measures” announced by the government are rationalized against these risks and challenges many of which are related though not limited to the economy and wage labor. Measures taken in March 2020 include quarantining a number of municipalities in Tyrol and self-isolation of 14 days for persons who have recently been to these municipalities or had contact to people who did. Furthermore, they include restrictions on social contacts, introduction of home-office or tele-working, closing restaurants, bars, cafes after 3 pm, closing shops except for pharmacies, banks, post offices, supermarkets, and pet food shops, suspending flights to risk zones, reducing hospital visits to the pediatric and palliative stations, and closing of schools. The announcement of the measures was often accompanied by a call to act responsibly and in solidarity with the vulnerable groups: “And the last point from my point of view is very, very important, let's pay special attention to the most vulnerable in this situation. That is also our responsibility” (RA, 10.03.2020). Only through these measures, Ansober continues, can “we protect ourselves and protect also the others. That is cohesion as we need it, cohesion that currently works” (RA, 10.03.2020). This quote shows that solidarity, community and togetherness is demanded while solidarity in this case simply means to obey the “Corona measures” and is emptied of its meaning of mutual care and responsibility. To give another example for this form of responsabilized solidarity: “If everyone makes their reflections, so to speak, at home this evening, that would be fantastic. What can I do, do I have to go shopping every day in the supermarket? Is every third day enough? A very simple example” (RA, 10.03.2020). Next to what political actors say, *how* they say it — i.e., bodily appearance and performance — is an important aspect of rational-affective political masculinity. All but one person (the female Minister of Economy Schramböck⁶) talking during the selected press conferences are men. The men look neat and tidy in their dark suits and with their confident demeanor, determination, and leadership to navigate the population through the current crisis. Chancellor Kurz's face is almost free of expression and his mouth, eyebrows and cheeks hardly move as he speaks. His characteristic hair is perfectly smooth and gelled backwards and the suit fits him like a glove. During his addresses at the press conferences, the camera is pointed at him frontally and the frame ends in the middle of his upper body so that his hands or gestures can hardly be seen. The background is always white while the flag of the Republic of Austria is occasionally visible. This setting mediates an appearance of strength, calmness, purposefulness, and national togetherness. Kurz speaks in a calm and determined fashion without much intonation. He rarely looks down onto his script which conveys a sense of preparedness and control. The whole picture can be interpreted as a perfect example for a political masculinity that aims to mediate professionalism, control, efficiency, and thus rationality in a serious and worrying situation. Minister of the Interior Nehammer (ÖVP) performs in a similar way though he does not seem as disciplined and

⁶ Unfortunately the video of the press conference with minister Schramböck is unavailable; we only had access to the transcripts.

distanced as Kurz as he moves more frequently, this tongue slips occasionally, and he displays more facial expressions. By contrast, then Health Minister Anschober (Grüne) seems relatively casual as his hair and body moves while talking and his speech sounds melodic. He looks more worried and softer compared to the stern looks of Kurz and Nehammer. Hence, we may distinguish two types of rational-affective masculinities – Kurz and Nehammer more on the “rational” side, Anschober more on the “affective” side. Still, all three display a form of rational-affective political masculinity, but due to their different positions in governing the crisis (Kurz as chancellor, Nehammer as interior minister responsible for national security, and Anschober as health minister), they work with different expressions of rationality and affect to reach the population.

Talking about economic risks, challenges, and measures the policymakers further intensify their rationalized-masculine political appearance. At a press conference about the financial situation and the financial support package for companies, for example, Sebastian Kurz points out that the government will “do everything humanly possible to prevent mass unemployment in Austria” (SK, 18.03.2020), while simultaneously throwing a focused and stern look into the camera accompanied by a determined gesture that stresses obligation to take care of the economy and jobs. In a capitalist market logic, taking care for the Austrian population demands first of all taking care of businesses. Hence, care for the economy is presented as the rational solution to the pandemic crisis. This combination of market-related discourses and appearances on the one hand and their contextualization in terms of care and concern on the other hand shows exactly the ambivalence of neoliberal rational-affective political masculinity.

To sum up, rational political masculinity which works with “hard facts” such as infection numbers and trends, threat scenarios, and a set of rationalized measures focusing on the support of capitalist market economy and the labor market, is often communicated by using a terminology of finance. This rational political masculinity is buttressed through facial expression and gestures that express firmness and leadership. Even though the rational aspects of masculinity are more pronounced in context of wage labor, the capitalist market, risks and measures, they are also accompanied by discursive and performative strategies that appeal to the hearts and emotions of the population and communicate a sense of care. Taking care of the economy is lent an actual caring touch through the display of empathy for the population’s (and economy’s) vulnerability in the face of risks and measures. Nevertheless, care-taking in the mode of rational-affective political masculinity leads to a hetero-patriarchal re-negotiation of social reproduction as taking care is mainly focused on the running of capitalist economy and thus re-establishes the “privatization” of care work.

5.2. Solidarity, responsibility and caring for each other

The more caring and affective expressions of rational-affective political masculinity seek to strike a balance to the technical and financial aspects of the crisis and repressive measures to tackle it by communicating feelings of solidarity, compassion, and gratitude. The aim is to generate feelings of safety and being cared for among the population and, hence create a 'We' and feelings of belonging. We observe that ÖVP actors such as Sebastian Kurz and Karl Nehammer often resort to notions and feelings of an exclusive identity-based community by referring to the audience as "Dear Austrians". Differently, Rudolf Anschober from the Green Party refers to the audience as "citizens", referring to a political group. The President of the Economic Chamber Mahrer (WKO) reinterprets the economic aid package as a "red-white-red security network worth of four billion Euros" (HM, 14.03.2020)⁷ by referencing the Austrian flag to evoke feelings of national belonging.

The press conferences establish solidarity, (self-)responsibility, and individual contributions, i.e. of self-care and care for others during the crisis, as the main task of the "Austrians" and "Team Austria". The sports metaphor "Team Austria" is often used by policymakers to generate a sense of interdependence and mutuality with a view to a common goal – the victory over the virus. Sebastian Kurz invokes a national community by noting that during this time the citizens shall "stand together" and "make individual contributions" so that "we as a Republic but also as a population get through the crisis" (SK, 14.03.2020). Kurz further stresses that "we all need to make a contribution to defend our health" (SK, 14.03.2020). Vice-Chancellor Kogler thanks the population but also all political parties in the parliament for joining the government in its efforts to curb the pandemic (WK, 14.03.2020). Minister of Finance Blümel similarly argues that "we will demonstrate a path of how we will together manage the crisis" (GB, 14.03.2020). The Minister of Economy Schramböck thanks all employees who "are out there, who make an effort day after day, who work overtime, who make sure that we are [sufficiently] supplied" (MS, 14.03.2020). ÖGB President Katzian stresses that the goal of the ÖGB and AK while negotiating the terms of the Corona short-time work model was that "no one is left behind" (WK ÖGB, 14.03.2020). He critically remarks that he hopes that those who are currently not "on the sunny side of life" due to their professions, but who have attracted much public attention during the crisis because they worked with "every fiber of their hearts" – he indirectly refers to public health workers – will not be forgotten after the crisis (WK ÖGB, 14.03.2020). The WKO President thanks all social partners for their "willingness to cooperate" (HM, 14.03.2020).

These statements of mutual gratitude among political actors are complemented with affects of concern and care for the safety of the population, especially for "vulnerable groups" and "the older" (SK, 13.03.2020). Sebastian Kurz talks about defending the health of the population and protecting

⁷ Red-white-red are the colors of the Austrian flag.

especially the older persons in “our country” (SK, 14.03.2020). He draws a dark and dramatic picture when he emphasizes that “this crisis will mean disease [and] suffering for the many and also death for some”. Stressing that the government needs to do everything in its power (SK, 14.03.2020) is at the same time connected to fear and relief through the government. ÖGB President Katzian notes that currently the main political concern cannot be to find compromises that are convenient for all parties since this time it is about “fates” and “existences” (WK ÖGB, 14.03.2020). He adds that while the motto of the financial crisis (2007/2008) was “too big to fail”, the motto of the current crisis is “too many to fail” (WK ÖGB, 14.03.2020). Similar to Kogler’s “liquidity and fresh blood” metaphor, WKO President Mahrer states that “for us the health of humans is as important as the health of the Austrian economic motor because we need both: employees for companies [and] their families” (MH, 14.03.2020). Addressing care as health care and caring for each other thus still serves to invoke feelings of (self-)responsibility to save the Austrian economy.

We observe that even Chancellor Kurz empathetically shakes his head when talking about “solidarity” and “protection of the older persons” (SK, 13.03. 2020; 14.03.2020). He lifts his eyebrows or uses gentle hand movements when thanking doctors, the police, and supermarket and public transportation employees (SK, 14.03.2020). Then Minister of Health Anschober makes a sad face when talking about “the older, but also those with pre-existing diseases” (RA, 17.03.2020). He constantly swings with his body which makes him seem not as stern as and more approachable than Kurz and Nehammer and appears to be moved or even insecure. He uses gentle hand gestures more frequently when communicating affective content such as “Team Austria” and “shared responsibility” (RA, 17.03.2020).

These facial expressions and gestures like his speeches help buttress and transmit an affective mode of political masculinity which, next to cold-blooded “rational” decisions, is capable of empathy and care. The communication of these sentiments and gestures of care, togetherness, and solidarity conveys an image of empathetic political leaders who are human and “close to the population” and who jointly and unanimously agree to the anti-Covid measures. The aim is to create a (national) “We”, a caring community and at the same time to construct care in a double sense: as a fact that does not need financial support but is something altruistic that everybody does “out of solidarity” and “out of love” for each other in times of crisis, and financial care for the economy. Hence, re-negotiating care through affective political masculinity aims at creating “bonds of love” with the national community. However, this sense of care is based on the sacrifices and self-responsibility of people, especially of those working in so-called “system-relevant” professions such as public health or retail. Caring in this sense is seen as “common sense” to self-sacrifice in order to care. Through their affective performance, the ministers act as “carers of the nation”. But while care in one sense is associated with the economy,

caring tasks in the “private” sphere are considered as conditions for life that happen “naturally” in a solidaristic and morally “good” population. Caring political masculinity as rational-affective masculinity therefore rationalizes the carelessness of capitalism even during the Covid pandemic.

6. Who Cares? Conclusions

In this article, we argued that a re-definition of care to govern social reproduction during the crisis was achieved through the discursive and performative deployment of a hybrid mode of rational-affective political masculinity. This mode of governing helped ensure the stability of neoliberal capitalist-patriarchal hegemony by re-interpreting care first and foremost as health care and caring for the economy or care for the population, i.e. biopolitics. The capitalist-patriarchal state has been characterized by careless masculinity but due to the pandemic this masculinity also had to become caring to stay hegemonic. However, this did not entail any significant symbolic or material redistribution to reevaluate privatized care work by women or feminized people in direction of a caring capitalism. Rather, in the case of the Austrian government and social partners, a rational but also empathetic masculinity to generate consent not only via rationalized measures to counter the pandemic (or the lack therefore in important social realms such as care) as “common sense”. These measures were counterbalanced through the invocation of emotions – the “private” side of politicians –, like feelings of empathy, responsibility and solidarity as well as self-representations as “carers for the nation” themselves. Governing the crisis aimed at evoking feelings of belonging, solidarity, and responsibility to render the population more governable. While rational political masculinity communicates, both verbally and bodily, authority, determination and rationality, affective political masculinity is empathetic in a paternalistic and patronizing way that promises to supply the population with safety, trust and optimism and regulate their conduct during the crisis. We observed that the government representatives and social partners jointly construct a feeling of urgency to which they respond with immediate measures many of which concern economic stability, financial liquidity, and saving jobs. We observed actors across the political spectrum seal a “Corona pact” which prioritizes businesses and wage labor while life-serving care work is once again left to the purview of the housewives, mothers, care workers, and other women or feminized persons. Traditional gender roles are consolidated in this process as are the boundaries between “the public” and “the private”. It is this structural implicitness that this article has sought to de-naturalize by disclosing the rational-affective masculinity as the mode of governing the current crisis.

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