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Glued on for the grandkids: The gendered politics of care in the global environmental movement

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Abstract

This paper explores the gendered politics of care in global environmental activism. Drawing on interviews with 96 Extinction Rebellion activists worldwide and a close analysis of 10 older women within this dataset, we contend that 'care' both replicated and contradicted the patriarchal order. Older women in Extinction Rebellion have often been relied upon to take on much of the caring labour involved in the maintenance of the movement at local and national levels. However, care also involved these women undertaking powerful—and empowering—forms of political action, often grounded in their knowledge and experience of organising social justice movements over decades. In contrast to prior research in the area, we found that women's participation in leadership roles within the movement against climate change appears to have increased over time. Using Sara Ahmed's (2004) concept of affective economies, we argue that the emotion of care came to be accumulated and attached to older women within Extinction Rebellion, producing inequalities in expectations for who would 'care for the movement' while also opening up opportunities for empowerment.

KEYWORDS
age, climate change, emotion, environmental sociology, feminism, gender, social movements

1 | INTRODUCTION

In March 2021, Extinction Rebellion staged a protest in central Adelaide outside the headquarters of Santos, one of Australia's largest oil and gas companies. Along with banner drops, signs spray painted across the facade of the Santos building, and speeches via megaphone, four old/er women formed a roadblock by gluing their hands to the tarmac. Each wore placards, two of which read "Glued on for the Grandkids" (Wick, 2021). Just as a generation of mothers had joined demonstrations opposing nuclear proliferation in the '70s and '80s worried that billions would lose their lives due to nuclear war, that same generation, many of whom are now grandmothers, have been central to a movement protesting against the continued extraction of fossil fuels which now threatens not only their own grandchildren but billions of other people across the world.

Extinction Rebellion is one of the most prominent transnational environmental movements of the 21st century (Berglund & Schmidt, 2020). It emerged in the south of England in 2018, demanding that the UK government and media tell the truth about the severity of climate change, that the government take immediate action to reduce carbon emissions in line with climate science, and that a citizens' assembly be established to decide a route forward for climate policy. It spread quickly across the world, with local Extinction Rebellion chapters being formed in more than 80 countries across all seven continents (Gardner et al., 2022; XR, 2023). The movement is structured as a collective of self-organising, autonomous local chapters, with national chapters that aim to act as unifying forces and support the coordination of national-level protests.

This paper analyses the roles played by older women in the global environmental movement through the prism of care. Drawing on interviews with 96 Extinction Rebellion activists worldwide and a close analysis of 10 older women in Canada, the US, the UK, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, we contend that 'care' both replicated and contradicted the patriarchal order. On the one hand, older women have often been relied upon to take on the burden of care for the movement, including performing much of the caring labour involved in its maintenance at local and national levels. On the other, these roles have also tended to involve powerful—and empowering—political action, grounded in a wealth of knowledge and experience gained over decades. The paper addresses a lacuna in the literature by examining the gendered and aged politics of care in social movements, building on prior arguments in feminist research that counter victimhood-empowerment binaries when discussing women's roles in other sectors (see, for example, Butler, 2004; Gámez Fuentes, 2021; Pedwell, 2011; Sloan & Wahab, 2000).

An emerging body of literature centres on the role of age in the global environmental movement, largely focused on youth participation (see, for example, Macdonald, 2022; Pickard, 2020; Zamponi et al., 2022). This scholarship has noted the tendency for young people in the movement to be outward-focused in the forms of "care" they exhibit (Pickard, 2020). However, the research on older activists remains sparse. In this paper, we hone in on the inward-focused forms of care played by older women in environmental activism.

The paper contains five sections. After first discussing the literature on gender and social movements, we outline the theoretical framework in relation to care. The third section briefly summarises the research methods used. In the fourth section, we detail our findings, divided into two themes: first, how the burden of care for the movement replicates the patriarchal and ageist order and, second, how care for the movement counters this order through empowering action. We conclude by discussing further the ways in which care work within the environmental movement reflects both ageist-patriarchal and empowering dynamics, drawing on Ahmed's (2004) concept of affective economies.

2 | GENDER AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Social movement studies has long underrepresented or obscured entirely women's roles in social movement organisations, from their membership and leadership to their contribution to ideas, strategies and goals (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Stewart et al., 1998; Zemlinskaya, 2010). This is also the case for environmental movements, despite women being

well-represented in practice (Tindall, Davies and Maboules, 2003). From environmentalism's early formation, women have been a driving force in grassroots organising (Zelezny & Bailey, 2006). With male domination in the academy and the frames of reference for scholarship in the field, women, and gender more generally, have been historically under-researched (Jasper, 2011; Polletta & Jasper, 2001), including questions of how gender intersects with age, race, and class (Hill-Collins, 2000, p. 18). Early researchers iterated on collective behaviour and "crowd theory", pathologising protest activity as mindless behaviour devoid of rational thought (Jasper, 2011; McPhail, 1991). Subsequently, social movement studies replaced conceptualisations of emotionally crazed mobs with emotionless rational actors driven not by care or emotion but self-interest. Both approaches share a latent gender "blindness". The shift in the field away from such approaches to examine not *how* but *why* social movements mobilise opened up the space for a greater focus on gender (McAdam, 1992; Moss & Snow, 2016). This was further buttressed by the study of New Social Movements, with its particular focus on the representation of identities such as race, gender and sexuality (Taylor, 1999). Since the mid-1980s, the study of gender in social movements has increased and now represents an established subfield (Reger, 2021).

Applying a gendered lens is crucial when reconsidering aspects of social movements such as mobilisation, participation and internal hierarchies (McAdam, 1992; Zemlinskaya, 2010). For example, examining social movements with a focus on gender demonstrates that patriarchal biases within society are often present in social movements, regardless of how 'progressive' the organisation is. Across a broad range of multi-gender movements, Zemlinskaya (2010: 635) found that:

> women tend to be allocated auxiliary, stereotypically women's roles aside male leadership. The internal dynamics within social movements seems to reproduce the sexist social norms even in progressive movements working on issues of social justice where women are at the forefront, initiating and organising grassroots activities.

Even in cases where women were the movement's initiators, men tended to take on leadership roles as the movement expanded and diffused, pushing women 'to the sidelines' (ibid.: 635). As we outline below, our data suggest that this was not the case for Extinction Rebellion in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand, with older women actually being more likely to be in leadership roles as the movement progressed.

Alongside inequalities in involvement and access to leadership positions, the literature points to a range of other ways in which gender influences participation in social movements. Scholars assessing the opportunities and time women have to participate in social movements have highlighted gendered barriers, such as uneven levels of labour and responsibilities which suppress or prevent women's participation (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; McAdam, 1992). Meanwhile, sexism within social movements has been found to be an important cause of burnout, resulting in women being more at risk of dropping out of social movement engagement (Gorski, 2019).

Social movement studies research suggests that gender demographics also affect the protest repertoires adopted. Liddington's (1989) study of the Greenham Common Peace Camp showed that initially, when the camp comprised both women and men (albeit 50 women and 10 men), the repertoires employed were primarily "maternalist" in content, such as hanging babies' booties and nappies on the perimeter fence of the airbase (see also Reger, 2021). However, after its leaders decided to make the camp a women-only space, there was a shift away from such themes of motherhood towards more critical feminist repertoires linking nuclear proliferation, militarism and masculinity. According to Roseneil (1995: 63), "Greenham was not feminist because it was women-only but became women-only as it was becoming feminist". At its peak, the camp attracted 30,000 women, who symbolically embraced the camp by holding hands and encircling the nine miles of the perimeter fence (Laware, 2004). Throughout the 12 years during which the camp was in place, the movement was beset by schisms between those who embraced 'maternalist' repertoires and those who rejected such framing as fundamentally patriarchal (Liddington, 1989; Roseneil, 1995).

As noted, scholarship on gender in social movements has been increasing since the mid-1980s (McAdam, 1992; Reger, 2021; Stacey & Thorne, 1985), much of which has been explicitly feminist in approach. Yet, there remains a

dearth of research on the gendered politics of care in the field. This is surprising, in light of the notable body of feminist work on the topic of care. In fact, through our review of the social movement studies literature, we were unable to find any research that focused on this issue. Santos (2020: 128) similarly suggests that the "ethics of care have received little attention in social movement studies". In this paper, we develop this literature further by focusing on the dynamics of care at the intersection of age and gender in the global environmental movement. Before doing so, however, we first place our study in the context of feminist scholarship on care.

3 | THEORISING CARE

In feminist thought, ethical caring has been defined as a feeling of "I must" and a moral obligation that goes beyond "the natural impulse to act on behalf of the present other" (Noddings, 1984, pp. 79–81). Feminist ethics of care theory emerged with the idea that deontological, utilitarian, and justice moral theories have been grounded in masculinised experiences and socio-economic structures (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). Subsequently, feminists called for a moving away from ethics theories based on competition and domination towards adopting more (feminised) compassionate foundations for human interactions; an ethics of care (Held, 2005; Kittay, 1999; Tronto, 1993). Care, as an ethical standpoint, foregrounds emotion as a crucial component of both theory and praxis, as opposed to rationalistic approaches to justice (Pulcini, 2017, p. 64).

Feminist scholarship has developed an expansive conceptual view of care; shaped by patriarchy (James, 1992; Manne, 2020) and ranging from individual feelings to the broad range of care work, both formal and informal, paid and unpaid (Bowlby et al., 1997; Folbre, 2006; James, 1992). Indeed, Duncombe and Marsden (1995) famously highlighted that women often work a 'triple shift' of productive, reproductive, and community labour, for all of which care is central. Care is thus not just one form of labour but contains a variety of others, including organisational, physical, and emotional labour (James, 1992). Such expectations of women to care across all areas of life impact women's emotional and physical lives as they age, particularly their relationships with themselves and others (Butler, 2004; Lorde, 1984; Swail, 2020). Care therefore encompasses a variety of phenomena, each shaped by patriarchal divisions in labour which intersect with age, race, and class (Graham, 2007; hooks, 2000) in what Hill-Collins (2000, p. 18) calls the "matrix of domination".

Care has also been conceptualised in different collective action, such as mobilisation through care work and the power of a 'caring democracy' (Diz et al., 2023; Santos, 2020). A particularly productive account of care in the context of social movements is provided by Santos (2020, pp. 129–130), who defines it as involving (1) emotional care, whereby emotions foster social networks; (2) identity care, which describes the dynamics and relationships in the movement that change people's identities - including empowerment for members and the community; and (3) participatory care, which removes barriers to participation in the movement, such as providing skills and knowledge to new members. This suggests that care is not an inherently selfless or passive act, but a potentially empowering one (Pettersen, 2012). This also allows us to acknowledge that care is shaped by patriarchy but avoid the traditional association of care "with an agapic and purely altruistic love that implies asymmetry and self-denial" (Pulcini, 2017, p. 66).

Drawing upon Ahmed's (2004) concept of affective economies, we view care as a communal and socially produced act. Thus, within the context of this paper, care is consideration for, and active participation in, looking after both people and the movement. According to Ahmed (2004, p. 117), emotions function like capital, accumulating in places that come to be imbued with affective value in "affective economies". Feelings circulating through the affective economy become attached to objects, bodies and symbols in ways that "bind subjects together" (2004: 119). In opposition to conceptualisations of emotion as a feature of personal psychology that resides within the individual, Ahmed views affect as socially accomplished. She writes:

> emotions *do things*, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments. Rather than seeing emotions as psychological

> dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective. (2004: 119, her emphasis)

In this sense, care is a social product and a social force. Ahmed describes how different emotions are tied to a passion for community, labelling this passion as 'love' (ibid.), however, this could be extended to incorporate care. Although care and love are distinct emotions, they overlap in various ways, with both being derived from passion, or—as Pulcini (2017, p. 66) puts it—'care out of love'. In the affective economy of the global environmental movement, the emotion of care—for the planet, for "the grandkids", for the movement itself—appears to be attached to particular bodies; specifically, the older activist woman. This involves both gender-based inequalities and opens up space for forms of empowerment.

Caring for others and building communities through affective economies can have an empowering effect on both those being cared for and the person caring (Miller & Stiver, 1993; Santos, 2023). As Stall and Stoecker (1998, p. 730) emphasise, communities are what form, sustain, and reproduce social movements, but "these communities do not just happen". Rather, they have to be organised, and this labour is often invisibilised and done by women, yet centres empowerment as "a developmental process that includes building skills through repetitive cycles of action and reflection that evoke new skills and understandings, and in turn provoke new and more effective actions" (Stall and Stoecker: 741). Empowerment can therefore come from bringing people and communities together in collective action (ibid.), via affective economies (Ahmed, 2004).

In this paper, we build upon this rethinking of care, away from solely altruistic notions and towards the passing on of crucial emotional cultural politics to the next generation of environmental activists (Swail, 2020). This can be an empowering process in affirming the value of experience, and creating new skills, identities, and forms of fulfilment, whether receiving or passing on knowledge (Garner, 1999). However, we understand this alongside the idea that older women in Extinction Rebellion were also subject to patriarchal-ageist expectations, including this transmission of 'wisdom' (ibid.). Hence, we argue that the contours of the gendered politics of care in the global environmental movement ought to be considered both a product of patriarchy and a conduit for empowerment.

4 | METHODS

This paper draws upon a dataset of 88 semi-structured interviews with 96 Extinction Rebellion activists worldwide. At the time of data collection, the interviewees were active in the movement in the UK (8), US (23), Canada (8), Australia (20), Aotearoa New Zealand (2), Spain (8), Portugal (1), Italy (2), Ireland (2), Czech Republic (1), Norway (5), The Gambia (2), Nigeria (3), Uganda (1), Mexico (3), Israel (3), and India (5). Although a range of activists were included, most had founded a local group and/or been an instigator in building the movement in their country. All interviews took place online, each lasted around 75 min, and all were audio-recorded and fully transcribed. 16 of the 96 interviewees included in the study were interviewed in pairs. In each country bar the UK, invitations to participate in the research were sent to all local groups registered for the country on the Extinction Rebellion global website (rebellion.global) at the point of data collection and all responders were given the opportunity to be interviewed. As a result of the UK's notably high number of local chapters (more than 420 at the time of data collection), local groups were invited to participate on the basis of random sampling, stratified by an aim of achieving geographical representation from southern and northern England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This process continued to the point of data saturation. Data collection took place between December 2020 and July 2023, with the majority of interviews undertaken between April and August 2022. The project received ethical approval from the University of York prior to commencement and informed consent was provided by all participants.

The analysis was completed in two stages. First, the whole dataset was analysed to assess the gendered and age-related dynamics at play within the movement. In this initial stage, we found that caring for the movement was

TABLE 1 The 10 activists selected for close analysis.

	Pseudonym	Country	Prior activist experience
1	Mary	Australia	• "Decades" of activist experience • Green party member and organiser • Early 2010s, environmental social movements
2	Dorothy	Australia	• Late 1960s–80s, Radical feminist social movement. • Vegetation restoration volunteer organisation.
3	Helen	Aotearoa New Zealand	• 1970s–80s, Peace movement • 1990s–2000s, Movements opposing neoliberalism and economic inequalities.
4	Margaret	United Kingdom	• 1968 Student activist, Vietnam war protests. • 1980s–90s, Greenham common peace camp, miners strikes, campaign for nuclear disarmament (CND)
5	Betty	United Kingdom	• Communist party member. • 1960s–80s, Anti-apartheid, miners strikes, hunt saboteurs association.
6	Ruth	United Kingdom	• Attended student protest.
7	Mildred	Canada	• Student activism. • Various US-based social movements. • Anti-nuclear reactor activism • Since 2006, environmental social movements.
8	Virginia	Canada	• Ad hoc demonstration attendance.
9	Frances	Canada	• 2000s–2010s, urban ecology social movement. • 2011–12 Occupy movement.
10	Elizabeth	United States	• Longstanding active member of environmental/climate social movements. • Democratic party member and organiser.

disproportionately taken on by older women in the movement within the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand. This dynamic was not evident in our data for the other states included in the study. In the second stage, we undertook a close analysis of 10 interviews with older women activists based in these countries (see Table 1). The selection criteria for the 10 interviews in this paper are: (a) that all interviewees are older women activists and (b) their capacity to provide different insights into experiences of care in the movement. By "older women", we mean those around or above retirement age; however, self-identification also played a role, as many of the women included in this study described themselves in this way. All 10 women were in the mid-60s to mid-80s age range. Although not part of the selection criteria, all 10 were white and most identified as middle-class. We then undertook a close thematic analysis of each interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2022). Although the findings presented in this paper concentrate on these 10 interviews, we draw on our analysis of the broader dataset to contextualise and ground these points.

The data was analysed using a mixture of deductive and inductive approaches. Informed by both early coding and themes deduced from our research aims, two themes were identified as the basis for the analysis: (1) care as a product of patriarchy, and (2) care as empowerment. Alongside this deductive analytical framework, the data was also analysed inductively, allowing us to consider any other forms that the politics of care took. "Care" is context-specific, taking on a variety of meanings across time, space and identity. Hence, the interpretation of care taken in this paper—including features such as the passing on of wisdom and adopting roles that help to maintain the movement—reflects both our own and our interviewee's positionalities.

5 | FINDINGS

In this section, we outline the findings from our thematic analysis. First, we address the ways in which patriarchy functioned within the movement in ways that placed the primary burden of care on older women. Second, we contend that the politics of care in Extinction Rebellion frequently challenged patriarchal and ageist assumptions, with older women taking on powerful and empowering roles within the movement.

In our analysis of the dataset as a whole, we noted that it was common to find older women to be notably represented in caring roles in the movement within the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand. To be sure, the movement contains a mix of ages and genders across all countries included in the study, and older women were far from the only ones to take on these roles. These dynamics were also not homogenous across local groups within countries, with different age and gender profiles found across the full spectrum of roles in the movement. However, in the five anglophone cases listed above, we noted a particular propensity for formally established and informal caring roles to be performed by older women to an extent not found in our other case study countries. This may in part be a result of the smaller sample sizes for other countries included in the study. However, in many of these cases, we observed rather different age and gender dynamics: in India, intergenerational divisions and different priorities meant that Extinction Rebellion groups were "younger in nature" (Rajesh, India); and in Spain, no older women responded to our invitations to participate and none were mentioned in interviewee accounts of the movement there.

A range of ages and genders were represented among the 61 interviewees from Extinction Rebellion groups in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand, most of whom had taken on various roles within the movement. Although not the only ones to adopt caring-related positions, the older women interviewed described doing so notably more than those of different age and gender profiles. It was also common for other participants in these countries to make reference to older women having taken on these roles.

Before continuing, we note that race and class, while not the focus of this paper, are important for understanding the dynamics of care in the movement. While there were Extinction Rebellion activists in the dataset from different racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds, the 10 older women focused on in this paper were predominantly white and middle-class. More broadly, prior research suggests that the environmental movement is perceived as exclusionary of racialised and working-class communities, centring white and middle-class interests and vantage points (Bell & Bevan, 2021). Consequently, our findings regarding the intersection of gender, age and care in Extinction Rebellion may reflect not only those who have the time, capacity, and resources to 'care' (McMullin, 2000), but also those who might feel it is their place to do so.

5.1 | The burden of care

As we outline in more detail below, the older women we interviewed were assertive and effective organisers, passionate about building a constructive movement centred on climate change. Nevertheless, many of our interviewees stepped up to take on roles within the movement that they may not otherwise have chosen, often as a result of other activists either assuming they would do so or failing to take on these roles themselves. For some, this meant being "propelled into a leadership role … doing anything that nobody else is doing until somebody else takes it on, to make things happen" (Helen, Aotearoa New Zealand) or simply "left carrying the can for all the organisation" (Dorothy, Australia). This dynamic tended to exacerbate over time, with younger activists getting "sort of diverted by new jobs or new babies" (Margaret, UK). Although many within the movement—including older women themselves—have been keen to engage in public-facing forms of protest, older women often undertook "backbone" tasks: "doing the boring bits, because some of these boring bits have to be done" (Mary, Australia).

Interviewees reported that they—or other older women they were aware of in the movement—often had to fill in the gaps in the organisational structure. One activist in Canada recalled a situation in which a call was put out for activists to participate in a rural protest event. Members of the community where the event was to take place

had informed Extinction Rebellion activists that the presence of "outsiders" at demonstrations was useful, as strong relational ties made it harder for locals to be taken seriously. As a result, the Extinction Rebellion chapter attempted to recruit activists from elsewhere in the province to participate. Those that showed up to the event were "all … retired women who didn't know anybody" but who were experienced activists (Mildred, Canada). For Mildred, the contribution of these activists was undervalued. At times, filling-in-the-gaps involved older women activists taking on roles they felt unsuited for. Mildred adopted the role of managing communications for her local chapter, which she described as "sort of a joke because I can barely keep my email organised". Ruth regularly contributed "face-to-face little video clips" for social media, despite being "definitely an introvert".

Through 2020 and 2021, as governments globally enacted restrictions on social interaction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, local Extinction Rebellion chapters not only faced limitations on engaging in public protest but also in the running of regular face-to-face meetings. For most representatives of local chapters we interviewed around the world, this presented a considerable challenge for the maintenance of these groups. Especially in the country contexts focused on in this paper, often it was older women who took up the mantle, "holding it together" (Mary, Australia), "hanging on" (Elizabeth, USA), and preventing local - or, at times, national - groups from "starting to unravel" (Frances, Canada). Helen recalled her experience of trying to maintain the national level group at the height of the pandemic:

> So I put out the word: "hey, we are not meeting—we should meet up". Who responded? Old activists. You know? We have got a group of about six late-70s/early-80s women who, with me—and I am early 70s—held it together. We met. We had minutes. We shared it around.

Our evidence suggests that, from late 2018 to early 2020, older women were already being disproportionately relied on to undertake the "boring bits" (Mary, Australia) of the movement's organisation. Hence, it is perhaps unsurprising that this same cohort was overrepresented among those who kept these groups going when only the "boring bits" remained during the pandemic. Some were simply assumed to be in leadership positions by others within the movement, irrespective of whether they had taken on such a role. Before the pandemic, Ruth had been a core activist within her local chapter; however, by 2022 she was being treated as a regional leader, despite not having put herself forward for the role, as other activists "were asking [her] questions as if [she] was the leader" (Ruth, United Kingdom). This differs notably from prior research findings: rather than becoming progressively more marginalised from leadership roles (Zemlinskaya, 2010), older women in Extinction Rebellion were increasingly adopting such roles over time.

Alongside leadership and day-to-day organisational roles, 'caring for the movement' also involved the provision of support for individual activists and relationships within Extinction Rebellion. Older women in particular reported taking the time to counsel new potential members who were interested in getting involved but who found the climate crisis "emotionally overwhelming" and "couldn't handle it" (Mildred, Canada). It was often the same cohort who undertook hand-holding of new activists—sometimes literally—through their first experience of engaging in nonviolent direct action. As Mary (Australia) put it, "beginners turn up and they go, 'I've never done this before, I'm really scared', [to which she responds] 'stand next to me, you'll be alright'". Similarly, Mildred described a situation where a "20-year-old" activist decided to pitch a tent to maintain a forest blockade, and she did the same to provide support ("not by yourself you're not … I'll camp too"). Others spoke about caring for other rebels in everyday life, from painting fences to helping them move house; however, such acts were described as developing out of a sense of deep collective solidarity and friendship rather than obligation.

Older women tended to be relied upon to manage interpersonal conflict. Across our entire interview dataset, this was often implicit, with older women referencing in passing that they were core mediators for internal disputes. For Mary, this became frequent at times, with activists across the country calling her to adjudicate local disputes, sometimes "in the middle of the night":

> Two key organisers had a falling-out. They disagreed about whether to … wave signs at [a political candidate] in the car park or whether to have a meditation retreat. And they couldn't agree. So there

> were two warring camps … And they were both ringing me up. And I said, 'Start two groups. … You guys want to do *that* and you guys want to do *that*: you do that.' … The same thing happened [elsewhere]. … And that has been my_ Everyone is ringing me up! 'They're fighting and they're arguing in meetings, and they're wasting a lot of time arguing in the meetings"—I say: "start your own group!" (Mary, Australia)

Mary's fatigue from the constant requests to mediate interpersonal disputes was palpable; however, she nevertheless continued to offer guidance and support.

Interviewees occasionally described more problematic experiences related to men and forms of toxic masculinity within the movement. Some participants reported that, especially in the initial phase of Extinction Rebellion's development, younger men would arrive at meetings full of revolutionary fervour but lacking interest in completing the mundane, day-to-day organisational tasks required for the movement to function. Others reported more explicit sexist behaviours within meetings, as Helen outlined:

> I think at first, in fact, some of the meetings I went to the way they were run was just incredibly appalling. I think it was too … influenced by trade unionism. (Laughs) And I saw some men in particular, very excitedly—not realising—but they were [talking over] women. A woman had started talking and they would just come in on top of it. Which, God, we struggled for that back in the 1970s. What the fuck are we doing?

Although such cases were rarely reported in our interviews, they are illustrative of the fact that direct forms of sexist discrimination continue to take place even within progressive social movement organisations. Overall, it is clear from our data that Extinction Rebellion is not immune from the patriarchal forces present in wider society, with gender and age influencing not only social interactions within the movement, but also the distribution of organisational roles, both formal and informal.

5.2 | Care as empowerment

For all 10 interviewees, it was clear that involvement in Extinction Rebellion had been empowering to a significant degree. Whether national leaders or part of a local chapter, they understood themselves to be at the fore of a powerful global movement that was leading opposition to a world "heading for extinction" (XR, 2018). Although they were disproportionately relied upon to pick up the slack in the movement, as outlined above, this taking on of the "boring bits" of the movement was not demonstrative of a lack of agency. On the contrary, their decision-making was informed by both a deeply-felt sense of care for the movement and a wealth of experience in community organising. The older women we spoke to were determined and empowered social actors who drew strategically on their knowledge, experience, and identities in their attempt to achieve systemic change in response to the climate and ecological emergency.

Although not all interviewees had a background in social movement organising, each contributed a wealth of expertise in running meetings, events and institutions. Some spoke of how these skills were developed through their careers, many of whom had recently retired from senior leadership roles. Outside of employment, several had been actively involved in civil society organisations (such as Greenpeace) and political parties (see Table 1). Beyond this, those who had previously been part of social movements usually had a long and rich history in this regard. Overall, these interviewees had impressive résumés related to community organising and, hence, considerable expertise in the area. As a result, these interviewees reported being able to perceive organisational gaps in ways that others in the movement could not.

Despite being highly driven and capable actors in the public sphere, older women in Extinction Rebellion frequently utilised the presumptions made about their identity by the state, the media, and the general public to

further the group's goals. Mildred described "the frailest fucking, you know, old woman with a cane" putting themselves forward to be one of the first arrestees at a protest event as a way of optimising the event's optics. Similarly, the "Knitting Nanas"—a group affiliated with Extinction Rebellion Australia—routinely use their identities to support their nonviolent direct action:

> So now the Knitting Nanas … are this group in New South Wales. … They sit outside their MP's office and knit and crochet and stuff. And the police sometimes try to move them on and they're like, 'No, I'm a very old lady, I can't possibly get up out of my chair—I'm just sitting here, knitting'. … But [as a result of recent laws restricting public protest], the Knitting Nanas are now being threatened … So the disproportionate response—Knitting Nanas being hassled by the cops—is very, very, very bad PR: these lovely old ladies, knitting, being hassled by police with guns. (Mary, Australia)

Similar examples of older women in Extinction Rebellion using the expectations of patriarchal ageism against the system were found throughout the dataset. Often this meant being able to adopt radical roles or forms of action, since observers and police forces didn't expect such behaviour from older women.

In the previous section, we outlined a variety of ways in which older women were relied upon to hold the movement together. Although age and gender clearly shaped the burden of care within Extinction Rebellion, the roles older women have held are also empowering. Especially between late 2018 and early 2020, each of the 10 interviewees reported positive results emerging out of their activities, from the creation of well-functioning groups to effective and large-scale protest events. Their actions have precipitated reactions from political elites, the media, and the general public, and even led to policy changes. In British Colombia, Virginia saw her local chapter develop into a force that was able to challenge both local and national governments on their environmental policymaking. In London, Margaret and Betty coordinated an array of local chapters, establishing and running meetings, engaging in people management, and "a lot of rustling people up to make sure we've got enough people for actions" (Margaret, UK). Meanwhile, Mary played a core role in the creation and evolution of Extinction Rebellion in Australia, leading to wide-ranging political and societal outcomes. In this sense, and in contrast to the caring duties traditionally apportioned to older women, 'caring for the movement' involved these activists having powerful public roles.

Furthermore, there is some indication in our data that involvement in Extinction Rebellion led to increased engagement in other areas of political life. Ruth (UK) gradually became part of local government in England, while Elizabeth (USA) was "more involved with the Democratic Party than [she's] ever been—and actually being actively involved". Others reported increased involvement in electioneering. While this would appear to indicate that empowerment within Extinction Rebellion has positively impacted civic engagement more broadly, further research is needed to confirm that this is the case.

As we outlined above, older women were frequently involved in taking care of other activists. However, care practices within Extinction Rebellion were also not one-way in this regard, as the movement itself offered a space in which the interviewees themselves felt nurtured and cared for. On one level, most described the experience of having an effective outlet for taking action as personally beneficial. As Frances put it, "mentally it's really a big, big help to be able to do something" in response to the climate crisis. Many reported experiencing various other personal benefits. Ruth outlined her experience of Extinction Rebellion retreats as "very nurturing", protest events as "very slow, very quiet, very peaceful", and other forms of engagement as generally empowering. Most interviewees described having built strong friendships in Extinction Rebellion that continued to build in everyday life. In this way, older women were not only carers for the movement, but also among those cared for by the movement.

Overall, while it is clear that older women appear to have borne the greatest burden of care within Extinction Rebellion, many of the roles this involved have also been politically empowering in practice. These activists were also not unwitting victims of patriarchal structures, but dynamic actors, drawing on a wealth of knowledge and experience in community organising, and consciously taking responsibility to make the movement work. In this way, the politics of care in Extinction Rebellion works to both reproduce and oppose age- and gender-based inequalities.

6 | CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined the politics of care in the experiences of older women in the global environmental movement, focusing in particular on the UK, US, Canada, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Our analysis suggests that caring for the movement involves a tension between burden and empowerment. Situating our analysis within a feminist ethics of care and affective economies framework, we have demonstrated how older women in Extinction Rebellion were relied upon to hold their communities together through care, whether this involved caring for new rebels, resolving conflict, or indeed creating new groups altogether. In line with prior research on progressive social movements (Reger, 2021; Zemlinskaya, 2010), it is clear that Extinction Rebellion is similarly impacted by patriarchal structures, particularly at the intersection of ageist and gendered norms and associated expectations in the division of labour. On the other hand, in contrast to prior research in the area that found women to be pushed to the sidelines as the movement grew (Zemlinskaya, 2010), it would appear that the opposite was true of Extinction Rebellion over time. Yet, our findings do not concur with conceptualisations of social movements as spaces of uncompromising empowerment either (Hurwitz and Crossley, 2018).

As our data illustrates, both patriarchal norms and empowering action were present in older women activists' experiences, existing not as distinct phenomena but as a messy blurring. In this way, we avoid absolutist conceptions of women in the environmental movement as victims of sexism or as purely emancipated agents. Hence, both patriarchal and anti-patriarchal elements coexist within the politics of caring for movements. It was clear that older women undertook the largest proportion of both formal and informal care work, including organisational, physical and emotional labour; a social movement-related 'triple shift' of sorts (Duncombe & Marsden, 1995; James, 1992). At the same time, older women also found empowerment through the roles adopted, used their identities in opposition to patriarchal and ageist assumptions, and engaged in forms of contentious politics that disrupted the status quo. Conceptualising care as part of an affective economy within the movement (Ahmed, 2004), we suggest that care comes to be accumulated and attached to older women in the movement. The emotion of care circulating through the 'economy' of Extinction Rebellion was accrued by these activists, producing both problematic and productive outcomes. Having a higher 'value' of care resulted in being apportioned a higher burden of care for the movement. However, by the same measure, the forms of empowerment that this care resulted in have also impacted the affective economy in other ways; positively affecting the contours of the movement, holding the potential to influence a generation of activists for whom Extinction Rebellion represented their first foray into activism.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest is reported by the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The dataset used for this paper is not yet publicly available.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee at the University of York.

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