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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Economic Anthropology

"Jobbos" and the "wageless life": Exploring work and responsibility in the anti-fracking movement in Lancashire, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on ethnographic research at an anti-fracking encampment at Preston New Road (PNR) in Lancashire, England, this article explores activists' perceptions of work and responsibility. I examine their protest activities and explore how work is understood, disrupted, and contested; what this means for my interlocutors' engagement with monetary compensation; and how this is reinforced by the extractive nature of the activity they are contesting. I show how through protesting, monitoring, and maintaining a presence on site, interlocutors worked to ethically and materially disentangle themselves from the reality fueled by hydrocarbon extraction. While paid work was deemed ethically problematic in this context, at stake for my interlocutors was the web of relationships in which financial and practical support was received and shared. By drawing on research on activism and dynamics of prefiguration, I show how the work of activism at PNR was predicated on balancing agency with responsibility in a complex and powerful web of responsible relationships. Reconciling agency and responsibility was integral to the ethical orientations on which the anti-fracking community was built and the realities it aspired to create.

KEYWORDS

Activism, Agency, Energy, Ethics, Responsibility, Work

"I've gone on a long journey," said Iris.[1] She was a joyous and reflective character, quick to laugh but often deep in thought. I had first met her in January 2019, as she sat in protest on the tarmac at the entrance of Cuadrilla Resources' unconventional gas extraction site—or the "fracking site," as most activists referred to it—located off the busy Preston New Road (PNR) linking Blackpool to Preston in Lancashire, in the northwest of England. A year later, she told me,

> I've gone on a long journey. Ten years ago I was a teacher; I really believed in being a part of society as it was. It was very idealistic, thinking I can help people have a better life, but it was too much about feeding them into a structure that was designed, really, for other people's satisfaction rather than [for] the average human being. I didn't feel that what was happening in schools was helping humans reach their full potential. It was a hard experience to lose my professional middle-class idealism. (interview, January 24, 2020)

Iris had gone from being a teacher to working in local administration to living on the activist camp a mile from Cuadrilla's site, taking part in daily protests at its entrance. When we met, she had left PNR to care for a relative. She returned when she could to support the movement:

> For me, it's about not cooperating anymore. There's so much bad stuff going on. Whether it's environmental destruction, whether it's social structures that are breaking people. … For people like me, we were doing a boring, vaguely middle-class kind of job. I totally think you should make an effort. You should stop aligning yourself with supporting the power structure, which is what we've all been educated to do. Cut down your outgoings so you're living on less. … For the hours that you are not working for the system, do something useful, like get involved with community projects, get involved with resistance.

Iris was part of a diverse community of people campaigning to stop fracking in Lancashire and the wider United Kingdom, to whom I will refer as my "interlocutors"; the site at PNR was crucial for them.[2] After years of campaigning through formal channels—organizing public events across Lancashire and beyond, writing to MPs and signing petitions, participating in public consultations—my interlocutors welcomed Lancashire County Council's rejection of Cuadrilla's plans in 2015. This decision was subsequently overturned by the national government, and construction proceeded in 2017, prompting sustained physical opposition on the PNR roadside from January 2017 to December 2019. During this time, fracking was carried out from November to December 2018 and from July to August 2019. Lancashire remains the only region where fracking for shale gas has taken place in the United Kingdom.[3]

While Iris's opposition to fossil fuel infrastructures and their risks was a driving force behind her anti-fracking resistance, her concern for nurturing "human potential" and for opposing "social structures that are breaking people" came to guide her more broadly. On the protest front line, my interlocutors shared an engagement with "processes involved in making a living," where "living" extends beyond employment relationships to include "physical, social, spiritual, affective, and intellectual dimensions" (Narotzky & Besnier, 2014, S6). Getting involved with the anti-fracking movement and living on a protest camp, Iris and others found themselves on a "journey" that pushed them to confront notions of valuable work in their attempt to create realities they thought were good and right.

A LIFE WORTH LIVING AND WORKING FOR

In the "journey" that activists were on, this article focuses on notions of work and responsibility. My research highlights an attention to ethics in conjunction with work, by focusing on *what is*, *what ought to be*, and *what to do* as articulated by my interlocutors' engagement with energy infrastructures (see also O'Brien, 2023). How did "the imperative to earn a living" (Denning, 2010, 80) and the impulse to make a meaningful life meet at PNR? How did environmental activists in contemporary England "make ends meet" in an ethical sense?

This article complements long-standing research on activism and social movements, seeing them as a "particular [ly] suitable arena" (Escobar, 1992, 408) in which to explore tensions and contradictions in our daily lives, by combining an attention to ethics with conceptualizations of work. Researchers interested in activism and social movements have shifted their analysis from a functional focus on social order and (in)stability to exploring people's political agency, subjectivity, and practices (Wright, 2016). More recently, attention has been paid to notions of temporality and space (Featherstone, 2010; Juris, 2012; Szolucha, 2016); identity, representation, and political practice (Day & Goddard, 2010; Salman & Assies, 2017); and citizen science (Jalbert et al., 2017). Other authors have emphasized the centrality of prefigurative dynamics, showing the ways in which people carve out alternative spaces in the present, to show how possibilities and change emerge from forms of resistance at different scales (Fians, 2022; Graeber, 2002, 2009; Krøijer, 2010; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Razsa, 2015; Razsa & Kurnik, 2012). Prefigurative practices of activism explicitly fuse means and ends to bring about desired realities, particularly within groups that foreground direct action and physical protest as ways to establish that "another world is possible" through practicing it (Graeber, 2002, 72).

I build on research on prefigurative practices and its focus on ethical world-making by exploring work not as fixed entity in a web of sociality but rather as practice related to the realization of a "wealth of human values" (Kusimba, 2020, 173). Guyer (1993, 255), focusing on the equatorial African context, suggests that reality emerges through "culturally delineated … kinds of work." Harris (2007) explores how her interlocutors in the Andean region celebrate arduous forms of communal activities, contrasting this with servitude associated with such work elsewhere. Beyond differences across ethnographic contexts, King (2020) examines conflicting conceptualizations of valuable activities within a food collective in Mexico and, echoing Mollona's (2005) findings in a UK steel factory, shows how interlocutors celebrate or disparage activities depending on the forms of values they seek to realize through it. In examining the quotidian elements of my interlocutors' activism, I show how people's sense of agency was tied to taking responsibility for bringing into being realities "in which or with which" they want to live (Blaser, 2013, 552). Agency was creative and individual, as well as tied to broader collective endeavors, in the sense of "being agents," and thus responsible for or "on behalf of" other entities or a cause (see Laidlaw, 2010, 147, 151, 163).

My findings are based on ethnographic research carried out from December 2018 to January 2020, using mainly participant observation and semistructured interviews. I attended daily protests at PNR, lived on the protest camp, monitored the

site with my interlocutors, was welcomed into their homes, and accompanied them to events and activist gatherings across the country. Taking an overt research position and actively participating in my interlocutors' lives, I became part of the community while simultaneously documenting our experiences. The resulting ethnography is entangled within its site of study, blurring the boundaries between a researcher's status and a participant in the field—a common characteristic of the "everydayness of [anthropological] practice" (Jackson, 2010, 284) compounded in highly informal grassroots settings. I note my positionality here as brief scene setting to my ethnographic analysis. However, further reflection on the implications of "taking action" for researchers is needed—a rich topic unfortunately beyond the scope of this article.

The remainder of this article first describes the work of anti-fracking activism in Lancashire and examines how interlocutors interrogated the value of their activities in relation to common conceptualizations of employment. Next, critically drawing on Arendt's work (Arendt, 1958, [1964] 2000, [1964] 2003; see also Passerin D'Entrèves, 2004), I show the ethical dimensions of their work by discussing the dynamics of prefiguration underlying their activities. I examine how interlocutors grappled with funding the work of activism, as they endeavored to ethically and materially distance themselves from the harmful dynamics they perceived to be fueling fracking. The ethical salience of their work implicated a constant practice fraught with contradictions and tensions, not easily resolved in a context where interlocutors worked to distance themselves from hydrocarbon-fueled livelihoods. They asked themselves what reality they were responsible for bringing into being, as they confronted a "work/energy nexus" (Daggett, 2019, 101) experienced as realizing values of productivity, efficiency, and profit accumulation. Finally, I examine how the "power of the collectivity" experienced by my interlocutors enabled them to challenge—but not leave them detached from—the practical and conceptual usefulness of employment in a context of hydrocarbon extraction. I thus show how interlocutors took responsibility for *what to do* as a way to realize the necessary synthesis between *what is* and *what ought to be*. I suggest that the ethical livelihoods for which my interlocutors were working at PNR invoked mutually constituting notions of personal and collective agency and responsibility.

THE WORK OF ACTIVISM

Claudia exhaled heavily as we dragged bags of scrap wood dropped off by local workers along the side of PNR. We were headed toward the stove, standing in the modest structure that served as our monitoring station, also known as Gatecamp. Erected in 2017, Gatecamp was tucked against the edge of a field on one side and opened up onto PNR and the fracking site on the other. After we finished, Claudia stared toward the site, ready to note any activity in carefully kept logbooks. Following her gaze, I could see the top of the workover rig through the fences lining the pavement, the thick hedge behind it, and the two lines of high paneling encircling the site. I jumped at the sound of "Get a job!" The invective came from a young child, head poking out of the vehicle driving past. Claudia sighed: "That's one of the top insults around here. I already have a job—saving the planet!" She then declared softly, "There is a lot of work to do—but there are no jobs" (fieldnotes, July 17, 2019). Just then, a familiar car pulled up on the curb, and a local activist's face appeared in the window. She gestured to the back: "I've got the drinking water containers!" Claudia and I got up and went to work unloading them.

Frequently, passing drivers would pull in by Gatecamp or walk into the community hub and ask about fracking and the opposition movement. Recurrent questions were "What do you all do in life? Do you work?" These questions, alongside the "get a job" refrain, formed part of a broader canvas of ethnographic encounters of which I was a part at PNR, wherein various envisaged relations between anti-fracking activists and employment surfaced.

My interlocutors included people living on and off protest camps, some in full-time employment and others with no form of income. Some were dedicated to being physically present at the roadside, while others donated food, equipment, and money. Claudia lived on the protest camp full time, alongside Aileen. They had both moved to Lancashire to get involved at PNR on a full-time basis and were involved in establishing the 24-hour monitoring system on the roadside in 2017. Aileen said, "I have had four different jobs before this one. I'm putting in so many hours now, probably many more than people going to work every day!" (fieldnotes, February 4, 2019). She and other activists carefully recorded their monitoring in logbooks and online livestreams, spending many hours at the roadside and sometimes doing several night shifts in a row (for a detailed description of this practice, see Szolucha, 2021). The information collected was circulated in social media groups online, where activists kept each other updated about events on-site. Observations were also used to challenge Cuadrilla's operations—in Freedom of Information requests addressed to regulators like the Environmental Agency (EA) or in questions sent to local political representatives asking for clarity or condemning potential permit breaches.[4]

When there was no visible site activity, presence on the roadside and on the camps was a form of work in itself. The roadside and associated camps were a constant hive of activity as people undertook the work of activism and sustained the community that practiced it: holding placards, blockading vehicles entering the site, performing "lock-on" actions, documenting, livestreaming, organizing and attending talks and events, and doing endless housekeeping tasks.[5] As Claudia had told me, there was indeed "a lot of work to do" at PNR.

LIFE UNDER EVALUATION

My interlocutors commonly referred to their activities at PNR by discussing the "activist line of work." They talked about "going to work" and "putting in the hours," about the monitoring "shifts" needing tending to or the marches and rallies needing organizing. They would joke about "knocking it off the wages" when people showed up late to shifts. Cuadrilla's security guards also articulated activities in relation to formal employment terminology when interacting with activists at the entrance of the site: "benefits and pensions, the lot of you!" (fieldnotes, March 20, 2019). Political voices explicitly framed the work of the activists in opposition to employment. In November 2018, the UK clean growth and energy minister addressed the House of Commons, announcing her intention to visit the site to meet those "exploiting the resource to create jobs" as well as those opposing the site. She stated, "Those of us on Government benches believe in jobs, not mobs" (Hayhurst, 2018). These statements reveal a common trope that my interlocutors felt outsiders to the campaign often imposed on their activities, namely, that activism is not a valuable or valued activity—my interlocutors' own jokes acknowledged the ambiguity around what "work" meant in this context.[6]

The concept of employment as a way of describing human activities has been normalized over recent centuries in Europe as a social, political, and economic organizing principle in a "society of laborers and jobholders" (Arendt, 1958, 46; also Denning, 2010; Kasmir & Stasch, 2018; Komlosy, 2018; van der Linden, 2014). In a Euro-centric narrative where selling one's labor power for monetary compensation is a "defining condition of humanity," employment can be empowering for workers, freeing people from the feudal relationships of the Middle Ages and opening up autonomous possibilities (Chang, 2014, 347). However, this narrative also casts unpaid activities in an unworthy light, relegating them to marginalized demographics (Komlosy, 2018, 9, 16–18). Unemployment becomes a "situation of lack, the space of exclusion" (Denning, 2010, 80) in a global narrative equating paid activity with work and singling out (un)employment as a condition worthy of political interventions that "contain the spectre of the wageless life" (Denning, 2010, 84; Komlosy, 2018, 9).

When I met Aileen at PNR, she described herself as having had a lengthy "career" on the activism "front line." She had been involved with anti-fracking campaigns across the United Kingdom, quitting full-time paid employment to live on camps. Aileen and others in her situation would rely on short-term cash jobs offered by people they knew in the anti-fracking movement and material and financial donations from supporters. Yet they resisted any suggestion that a life "without any form of income, nothing from the state or anything like that," was lacking:

> People say they are grateful for what we do, because we have given up our employment, we have paused our life to fight fracking. But my life is not paused—this *is* my life! I don't have any other. This is what I am doing. (fieldnotes, July 11, 2019)

Sam, another long-term camp resident, told me,

> When you're full-time campaigning, working would just be impossible. It becomes like a job. Well, what an average person considers a job. But with [campaigning], well, the thing you're passionate about becomes. … You live it, you breathe it—you wake up and it's always there. (interview, December 2, 2019)

For Sam and Aileen, the work of activism is making a living, fully and completely, with its share of difficulties and contradictions. Arendt (1958, 22) pushes back on reducing humans to employed workers and suggests examining the range of activities making up the "*vita activa*": "the human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something." She theorizes *labor* and *work* as life-sustaining activities, respectively corresponding to satisfying "bodily" necessities and the making of a livable environment (Arendt, [1964] 2000, 170–6). *Action*, Arendt's third category, corresponds to the creative "beginnings" that each "unique" human brings into the world: spontaneous deeds constituting a "web of human relationships" and giving meaning to the *vita activa* (Arendt, [1964] 2000, 178–9). Actions can then inspire others as they are conveyed by "storytellers" and "crystallized" into historical accounts (Passerin D'Entrèves, 2004, 75).

Action in this framework is an immediate intervention or disruption to reality, mirroring the concept of direct action central to many activist groups (see Graeber, 2009). In direct action, participants stop something from taking place without intermediaries. As in Arendt's *action*, direct action aims to trigger "new beginnings" (Day & Goddard, 2010) and thus implicates prefigurative dynamics by acting "as if one were already free" (Graeber, 2009, 203).

In my fieldwork, direct action is most easily identifiable in lock-ons and group blockades—activities directly disrupting the site's operations. Other practices, such as monitoring or contributing to camp chores, seem to fall into different categories of the *vita activa*, yet were nonetheless explicitly acknowledged as critical elements of the collective work of opposing fracking. While this complicates Arendt's tripartite framework, her conceptualization of responsibility helps us to understand Aileen's and Sam's descriptions of making an ethical collective life on the protest front line. Arendt identifies an ethical breakdown in human activities when means are separated from ends and people fail to judge their actions responsibly, in relation to the web of sociality of which they are a part (Arendt, [1964] 2003; Baehr, 2000, xxv–xxvi; Kohn, 2003, xxix). "Responsible" activities entail explicitly engaging with dynamics of prefiguration by foregrounding the ethical articulation of means and ends

(or *what to do* and *what ought to be*) to actively and collectively bring about a desired reality (*what is*). Activist work at PNR demanded just that: taking responsibility to prevent one kind of reality, where fracking projects are developed, and bringing about another in which and with which they wanted to live—a world free from fossil fuels. In this sense, making ends meet in a broader ethical sense was crucial to my interlocutors' activities at PNR.

THE SPECTER OF THE WAGED LIFE

My interlocutors rejected the characterization of activism as *lacking* due to falling outside formal employment and actively tried to distance themselves from the waged life in their activities on the roadside. They frequently mocked "jobbos," a term interlocutors used to designate people or themselves when in full-time employment. Monetary compensation was deemed problematic as people sought to contain the "spectre of the *waged* life." The wage itself was not necessarily the issue at play; it was rather the overall web of agentive relationships and responsibilities in which this wage was being paid and received.

The accusation of being a paid protester was offensive for most, if not all, of my interlocutors.[7] Being rewarded financially for the work of activism was a perilous prospect, to be carefully negotiated. Harry, a long-standing anti-fracking activist, explained how he had been treated suspiciously in his early days in the campaign: "People were accusing me of being paid by NGOs!" (fieldnotes, December 4, 2019). A few campaigners had told me Harry worked really hard and was a great activist but that he was "only in it for a job" (fieldnotes, November 24, 2019). The idea of monetary compensation for his activism, or using his experience to get salaried work, disturbed them. One young activist was appalled. He explained, "I would never get paid for my activism! It would stop being activism then." I asked what made him so uncomfortable, and he explained that as soon as money comes into play, people's motivations are wrong: "You don't believe in it; you only do it because you are getting paid" (fieldnotes, November 24, 2019).

I pushed this same activist on the point of monetary compensation. One afternoon, I reminded him that my PhD allowance enabled me to spend time at PNR; in some ways, I was paid to be there. He replied that my position was different: I was not being paid; I was being funded. He explained that funds or grants are different, particularly collective funding for a campaign: The money was for a specific aim, a specific kind of work, and it did not go to one individual in particular but rather had to be shared out. Sam made a similar point:

> Funding is a lot different to anyone being paid. You're not paying someone by the hour. You're not paying someone's holidays. You're not paying somebody to get up in the morning and get out of bed. It's more, "We need money to build this toilet." … Any funding you apply for within activism will clearly state that they will not pay people's wages. … It's entirely different. (interview, December 2, 2019)

In my interlocutors' eyes, the work of activism emerged from ethical responsibility rather than as a response to monetary incentives. However, to them, funding (as opposed to waged work) did not compensate individuals; rather, it funded collective tasks or causes. Completing a task in this sense did not rely on what one individual's personal motivations might be or the intentions of an employer. The size of the funding was also unrelated to how long or how quickly something was achieved; hourly rates did not convert time into money. My interlocutors felt such arrangements avoided as much as possible the accumulation or misappropriation of money—once the toilet was built, the task was done and the money was accounted for.

Daggett (2019, 88–89) identified a shift during the Industrial Revolution in Britain from "piecemeal" or "taken work," where payment was based simply on the completion of a task, to intensified work rhythms predicated on a waged system, a dynamic also described by Thompson (1967) and analyzed by Marx ([1932] 2000, [1941] 2000). Marx ([1941] 2000, 89) suggests that when "the activity of the worker is not his own spontaneous activity … it belongs to another and is the loss of himself," decrying the condition of workers employed by those owning the means of production. Marx's ([1941] 2000, 89–90, 93) early writings convey his humanist view of "vital activity" and the creative capacities of humans to create meaningful lives, a capacity thwarted by the alienation of waged labor.

I recognized such fears in my interlocutors, alongside their concerns about responsibility. They looked for funding that would enable their work to prefigure economic relations that balanced agency with responsibility and enabled them to distance themselves from the hydrocarbon extraction they were resisting.

THE WORK/ENERGY NEXUS

My interlocutors saw their work of activism in both practical and conceptual opposition to the dynamics driving the hydrocarbon extraction. Their activism attempted to stop extractive activities but also to challenge the logic of being driven by a focus on accumulation. One interlocutor explained,

> Ultimately, all these industries, oil industries and fracking industries … it's all there to make money …; they are looking for excess value. They don't give a shit about whether your Nana's heated in her house or not. (fieldnotes, August 14, 2019)

He later elaborated,

> I call fracking *extreme energy* because it's what I would call the fag end of exploitation. … It is just *exploiting for the sake of exploiting*. (interview, December 5, 2019)

As my interlocutors resisted fracking by taking up the work of activism, they were not solely fighting a type of energy source; they sought to resist "exploiting for the sake of exploiting." Klein (2015, 295, 310) ties fracking projects to concepts of "high-risk extreme extraction" and "extreme energy" (see also Jalbert et al., 2017), arguing that large-scale extractive sites and hydrocarbon production "sacrifice" the natural environment and erode democratic institutions and local regulatory procedures (Klein, 2015, 310–1). This mirrors the view of my interlocutors that these industries are at the far end of a spectrum of exploitation of both resources and the human fabric of society. Daggett (2019, 101, 106) provides historical context to this through the idea of a work/energy nexus originating in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and offers energy as a "figuration" that brings into being the fossil fuel economies in which we live and work and to which we contribute. She examines the common definition of energy as "the ability to do work" (Daggett, 2019, 107; see also Frigo, 2017), grounding contemporary Western conceptualizations of work in histories of industrial revolutions, in particular in Britain. She suggests that the ethics of work emerging from increased and intensified industrialization are based on thermodynamics: a science valorizing productive and efficient energy extraction and transformation.

The anti-fracking movement took place in a postindustrial landscape and in the vicinity of Blackpool, one of the United Kingdom's most socioeconomically deprived areas (see Bowie, 2019). Fracking supporters saw the prospect of job creation as a great opportunity for Lancashire (Leadsom, 2016; Watt, 2014), a major center of the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of the work/energy nexus (Brown, 2002, 49; Phelps et al., 2018). The hope for pro-fracking actors was to build on this industrial potential of the North and create a skilled workforce that would lead the way in UK onshore extraction. Cuadrilla explicitly emphasized "putting Lancashire first" (*Lancashire Business View*, 2016) to boost employment in the Northwest.

Yet my interlocutors rejected these arguments, not least based on disagreements on predicted employment figures (Friends of the Earth, 2015). The work of fracking was not work they welcomed. They wanted work that enabled responsible relationships with their environment and with others. Here Klein's and Daggett's analyses help to highlight concerns I recognized in my interlocutors. For them, the intensive and expanding hydrocarbon industries were enabled by and emerged from extractive profit-making activities. Waged work and formal employment were integral to such activities and wrongfully articulated *what is*, *what ought to be*, and *what to do* in realizing damaging productivity, efficiency, and profit accumulation. In this context, being "unemployed" but taking up the work of activism was needed and valuable: It began a "journey" toward a different web of agentive relationships.

"I DON'T REALLY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHOW FOR IT"

The "journey" was a complex and conflicting one. As much as people considered monetary employment problematic and mocked "jobbos," many who closely supported the camp were indeed jobbos. They were in full-time employment, self-employed, or retired. Sam recounted,

> It's not this idyllic fucking world where you're living without money or without capitalism or without plastic. That's bullshit because you still rely on supermarkets. The people that bring you food and donate things, they're still earning a wage and paying taxes to bring you those things, so you're still stuck in that system. (interview, December 2, 2019)

"Jobbos" supporting the camp were thanked for their help, and close friendships were formed. However, Sam found it frustrating that people were stuck in the capitalist wage system and its harmful dynamics, whether jobbo or not. Responsible activist work was not a fixed state of affairs but an ongoing practice of ethical reconciliation between work and its funding, agency, and responsibility, in an attempt to negotiate distancing oneself from the work/energy nexus.

Aileen and Sam were proud of their working-class roots, often deploring the common assumption that camp residents must be from privileged financial backgrounds. This was not the norm at PNR, as Sam explained:

> A lot of grassroots activists come from working-class backgrounds. I've never had money. I've never had things. I've never had privilege. I haven't had that so not having it now is not any different to me not having it when I was a kid. It's the same, except before I lived in a house. (interview, December 2, 2019)

Aileen and Sam cited a strong work ethic as crucial to their work of activism and resisted depictions of activists as people who did not or could not work. A sign stuck on the camp kitchen wall emphasized the "active" nature of the camp; it urged residents to act in accordance with this by maintaining the camp and being respectful of those who supported it. I also recall Sam commenting on someone not turning up for their monitoring shift: "To me, it's as if they were not showing up to work—you just don't do that!" (fieldnotes, March 14, 2019). People did not want to be seen or feel as if they were not working to contribute to the cause and to life on camp.

On one occasion at Gatecamp, a jobbo tried to give a camp resident a twenty-pound donation. The resident refused, stuffed the note back into the donor's hand, and walked away. The donor handed the money to me, asking me to try to pass it on. I tried without any success and returned it to the donor. Another time, I returned from a trip away and was picked up by Claudia and Sam. We went shopping to replenish the camp's food stocks; when I paid at the till, Claudia announced we should pay with camp funds or else split it. Mindful of my income through my student allowance, I insisted that I wanted to contribute. In the car, Sam tried to give me some money, but I suggested to instead put that money in the camp funds. She seemed annoyed and confused; she insisted on paying me back, "because I have to contribute as well" (fieldnotes, September 9, 2019).

Interlocutors feared being seen as enjoying a "free ride," living off donations from campaign supporters to avoid the constraints of a more formalized life—rent, mortgage, a job. One camp resident sometimes worried he could be seen in this way: "I haven't done much [direct action or lock-ons] this year, I don't really have anything to show for it" (personal communication, October 7, 2019). When I discussed "free-riding" with Sam, she did complain about people sometimes not "pulling their weight" on camp. However, she thought such behavior was occasional and overall rare. She added, "It's not an easy free ride. If you didn't really care about the protest and were just doing it for a free ride, there are probably easier ways to do that!" (interview, December 2, 2019). She stressed how dedicated many people were, mentioning Claudia's unrelenting work. Claudia frequently put her name down on the monitoring rotation for vast numbers of consecutive shifts, despite her visible exhaustion. Claudia later explained to me that she wanted to "do her part" and make sure she "put her hours in." Sam had told me once when discussing Claudia's workload, "I worry about people on camp wanting to show they are committed, strong, and capable. I wonder how much is wanting to give back [to those supporting the campaign], as well as prove resourcefulness in being able to live this kind of life" (fieldnotes, March 19, 2019). Reflecting on Sam's comments and the ethnographic moments I described earlier, I suggest my interlocutors were grappling with their impulse to create new "beginnings" (Arendt, [1964] 2000, 178–9; Day & Goddard, 2010) at PNR, while being influenced by the work ethics of the hydrocarbon extraction they resisted and the webs of relationships through which they lived.

THE CONFLICTING "POWER OF THE COLLECTIVITY"

On one hand, my interlocutors were rejecting and disrupting "work as necessary to a good life" (Daggett, 2019, 98). Life at the roadside, and particularly on camp, revealed a rejection of formal, systemic forms of governance and organization of work. When attempting to form an alternative reality, people valued flexibility, fluidity, and autonomy as organizing principles. These aspects of life on camp were appreciated by many of my interlocutors and often described as "anarchist." The use of such terminology revealed the values, principles, and modes of sociality that were significant for activists and served to distance them from hydrocarbon livelihoods. Graeber (2009, 201–3) links direct action and its prefigurative dynamics to the anarchist legacies of bypassing formal and centralized governance of collective life. Although he notes that "anarchism" has been seen as a form of social organization, a "revolutionary strategy," or a body of theory (Graeber, 2004, 6), much of his work examines "actually existing anarchism" (Razsa, 2015, 686) as a set of principles and practices that has manifested in revolutionary and activist groups (Graeber, 2009, 2010; Juris, 2012; Razsa, 2015; Razsa & Kurnik, 2012). The anarchist ethos sets itself against relations of oppression, hierarchy, and domination and against formal institutions centralizing decision-making to enforce ways of working and living.

At PNR, there were no fixed numbers of shifts one had to take up, nor were there any official obligations to take part in blockades or lock-ons. When someone wanted to discuss household issues, such as whether camp funds should be used to buy wood, they would haphazardly convene with others to arrange a collective meeting. This fluid way of working was celebrated by my interlocutors: "At least we're not stuck on the treadmill," confided Aileen (interview, July 16, 2019). A few of my interlocutors explicitly identified as anarchists, while others developed sympathy for and understanding of anarchism after their experiences "on the front line." The vast majority did not explicitly subscribe to "anarchism" but subscribed to values forming part of anarchist traditions, such as mutual aid, diversity, autonomy, and decentralized decision-making. These notions crucially implicate webs of responsibility from which action emerges and to which it contributes.

On the other hand, waged and unwaged work coexisted in a vast ecosystem of roles and practices. Relations of responsibility connected people employed in the work/energy nexus with those seeking a life outside of it, aiming to disrupt the extractivist dynamics they perceived to be driving fracking. In these circumstances, taking action to prevent fracking combined with the constraints of a full-time campaigning life and resulted in much inter- and intrapersonal tension. Daily sharing and borrowing in the anti-fracking community meant finding financial and practical support for communal and personal activities, managing

requests from people who had less access to certain resources, being able to accept help from others, and recognizing and managing vulnerabilities of ourselves and others (see also Martin, 2021; Neumark, 2017; Strathern, 2011; Widlok, 2021).

Whereas Sam felt people were stuck in the capitalist wage system, whether in formal employment or not, Iris told me that she feared getting stuck instead in this work of activism:

> I lived on the camp full time, eating into my savings. But I was reticent to completely step into the "anarchist system," I guess. I don't know that I have it in me. … Even moving around became difficult. I had to rely on the *power of the collectivity* [emphasis added], on other people to give you a lift, rather than being able to pay for my own transport. I was scared of the feeling of being stuck and relying entirely on other people's capacities and goodwill. … It was difficult. (interview, January 24, 2020)

Iris had experienced the messy but resilient ecosystem of people cohabiting on the camps, committed to the cause and distanced from formal obligations. Though she had entered the "collectivity" of the anti-fracking movement to make a meaningful living and collectively act on the personal responsibility she felt toward resisting fracking, she feared losing her own sense of agency within the collectivity. She missed this ecosystem when she was away from PNR, yet she also struggled when she was part of it. The web of relationships, tensions, and conflicts was its own form of physically and mentally arduous work, in a "constant labor of transformation [calling] for a particular form of endurance that requires minute attention to every single action" (Krøijer, 2020, 57). It was particularly difficult given the explicit focus for many on resisting the extractive logics emerging from disciplined work, productivity, and efficiency (Daggett, 2019, 96–7, 101).

In one conversation on this topic, Sam sighed and said, "If we were at work, there'd be a sort of conflict resolution mechanism. … Maybe we should learn about conflict mediation" (fieldnotes, April 10, 2019). Rather than seeking formal mechanisms to harmonize activities at PNR or pushing for people to agree with one another, interlocutors had to establish ethical livelihoods through navigating action and responsibility. They valued—and grappled with—respecting and being in solidarity with one another in the diversity of circumstances at PNR. Solidarity and respect did not necessarily mean agreeing with one another; it meant continuous and difficult efforts to value each other's "unique beginnings" (Arendt [1964] 2000, 178–9) and to support each other to be part of the collective. At PNR, collective and personal actions and responsibilities were thus conceptualized as inseparable from making ethical livelihoods through the complex work of activism.

CONCLUSION

My interlocutors reflected on the use and meaning of work at PNR as it fell outside of common understandings of employment and as part of a community opposed to extractive dynamics. By engaging with prefigurative practices that sought to rearticulate *what is*, *what ought to be*, and *what to do* to make a meaningful life, they continuously struggled to reconcile agency and responsibility into a tense but powerful collective life.

Thus my interlocutors' work was not solely to resist an energy source: They were working to create ethical alternative realities. The work of activism was a matter of personal and collective responsibilities—ethical, interpersonal, and practical—that pulled my interlocutors in different directions. While Iris thought she perhaps "didn't have it in her" to embrace the power of the collectivity and the responsibilities it entailed, she also recognized that she was on a "journey" and that this had changed her. Although the journey had been difficult, contradictory, and conflicting, she realized that such tensions were what the journey and the work of activism entailed: taking responsibility to act and bring a desired reality into being.

With the current urgency of extensive energy transitions, further research on conceptualizations of work is needed. Climate, energy, and employment are often either pitted against one another or go hand in hand. They are also matters of intimate concern for people in their daily lives, in contemporary contexts of employment precarity and growing climate change fears (as examined in O'Brien, 2023). Understanding people's relationship with work, particularly when they are engaged in the criticism and transformation of energy systems, is therefore crucial. By shedding light on the ethical dimensions of work within the anti-fracking community, I hope to contribute to a broader dialogue in which my interlocutors were deeply engaged and which asks not just what kind of energy we use to fuel our work and society but also what kind of work and society we want to fuel.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The names used throughout the article are pseudonyms. Certain individual details have been altered to protect anonymity.

[2] I use the terms *hydraulic fracturing* and *fracking* interchangeably. They refer to one part of the extractive process in the oil and gas industries—in other words, the stimulation of a drilled hydrocarbon well—and are commonly used to refer to the shale gas industry as a whole.

[3] In November 2019, following the largest earth tremor caused by fracking in the United Kingdom in August, a moratorium on fracking in England was introduced by the government. Briefly lifted in October 2022, it was reinstated and is still in place at the time of writing (November 2022). The devolved Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish administrations had already opposed fracking prior to the 2019 moratorium.

[4] Between 2017 and 2018, Cuadrilla breached its water regulation permit several times and its waste management permit. Low-level methane emissions were also linked to the storage tanks containing fracking flowback (*BBC News*, 2018; Hope & Scott, 2018; Seaman, 2018). In 2019, Cuadrilla cold-vented an estimated 2.7 to 6.8 metric tons of methane, failing to adequately monitor this and report it to the EA, despite regulations in place (Hayhurst, 2019).

[5] A lock-on refers both to an event at which people are "locked on" and to the device used. It is an item built for people to chain themselves to, complicating their removal by security guards or police officers. Once a lock-on is successfully "deployed," specialized teams are required to "cut out" the protesters.

[6] This trope can be linked back to "mob" depictions during the Industrial Revolution in Britain: people "out of steady employment" and surviving by illicit means (Thompson, 1966, 55–56).

[7] People joked about it: "Did you not get your brown paper envelope today?" or "I'm waiting for my pay from Russia and Greenpeace." Such reflections build directly on historical depictions of the mob in Britain—whereby groups of people were said to be hired to carry out a third party's interests (see Rudé, 1959; Thompson, 1966, 68).

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