

## Article

# (Non-)Politicized Ageism: Exploring the Multiple Identities of Older Activists

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**Abstract:** The increase in ageing populations has spurred predictions on the growth of a politically powerful old-age bloc. While their protest mobilizations have risen to reach youth standards, there is scarce scholarly evidence of the role of multiple identities in older activists' involvement. We address this gap by interviewing activists in Iaioflautas, an older adults' social movement emerging from the heat of the protest cycles in Spain in 2011. In-depth interviews with 15 members of varying levels of involvement revealed the paramount role of the movement in the identity construction of its participants. Iaioflautas endows a strong sense of collective identity based on intergenerational solidarity and enables to counter the culturally devalued identity of older adults and retirees. Whereas perceptions of widespread ageist stereotypes against older adults abound in this group, they omit to view the movement through an old-age identity politics lens. Furthermore, they reproduce ageist attitudes against age peers refraining from active involvement. This paradox suggests that the non-politicization of ageism restrains the development of a collective identity based on old age. We highlight how an increase in ageing populations might advance this issue in future research.

**Keywords:** activism; ageism; Iaioflautas; identity; intergenerational solidarity; politicization; older adults; social movements



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## 1. Introduction

Nonviolent civil resistance campaigns have experienced an eruptive growth in the twenty-first century [1]. Contrary to the standard narrative that portrays older adults as socially disengaged and politically “insular” [2], research has shown that, in some countries, they are as likely to be involved in non-institutional political activities as their younger counterparts [3,4]. Scholarship has documented cases of social movements led by older adults addressing different issues, from social justice to environmental protection to international solidarity to ageism [5–8]. Nonetheless, while social movements' studies have long established the critical role of identities in collective action processes [9], the arrangements of identities that individual older activists make and experience in this setting have received scarce scholarly attention. At the same time, when compared to other social categories of discrimination such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or functional diversity, old age has seldom configured a political identity capable of attracting and mobilizing potential participants into action [10]. Despite widespread yet implicit ageism against older adults in contemporary societies [11], old age has thus far predominantly failed in framing the discrimination and social exclusion experienced by the constituents of this group as a political matter [10]. In other words, older adults have not significantly crafted a politicized collective identity comparable to other well-established identity politics [12].

Born out of the outburst of mobilizations in Spain in 2011 under the umbrella of 15M—also known as the “Indignados” movement—the emergence of Iaioflautas serves as a timely opportunity to assess the relevance of the older identity among its activists. Regarded as an older people's social movement, Iaioflautas publicly discloses its old-age identity to convey the centrality of intergenerational solidarity as its “raison d'être” [13,14].

In addition, media outlets often resort to labels such as “older adults,” “grandparents,” and “retirees” to describe the movement’s distinctive traits [15]. These myriad descriptors hint at the group identification older activists might go through once involved in an older persons’ social movement. However, scant scholarly accounts to date on the identity-building processes experienced by older activists raise questions on what exactly are the identities that surface in these circumstances and how they are managed and arranged. In short, what are older activists’ real and experienced identity ascriptions? In this article, we examine the prominence and relevance of multiple identities among older activists in Iaioflautas and how these identities relate to their involvement in the movement. More concretely, we ask, (1) what are the relevant identities that emerge among older activists in Iaioflautas? and (2) what is the role of an older-person identity in their involvement?

### 1.1. Identity Building and Older Adults

Identity is a construct that different disciplines have long approached in the social sciences. Drawing from psychology, social psychology, and sociology, scholarship accounts for three primary levels in which identity unfolds [16]. First, identity at a personal or individual level alludes to a set of characteristics and attributes that may define the individual, such as values, beliefs, desires, or fears. Second, identity at a relational level refers to a person’s role in relation to other people, as in being a daughter, neighbor, colleague, or customer of one or multiple others. Third, identity at a collective level relates to people’s identification with a group or social category of which they are members and, thereby, share a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes. Drawing from this identity pool, an individual may actively create and negotiate multiple identities simultaneously [17]. Moreover, depending on the context, one particular identity may become more salient than the others [18].

The issue of competing identities is significant in social movement studies. In some circumstances, individuals may struggle to conciliate their different identities if they do not coalesce or push in the same direction [19]. However, social movements can also devise a collective identity that speaks to their constituents, despite stark differences on the issues of interest, the strategies adopted, or their ideological stances [20]. For instance, longstanding and multigenerational feminist movements have endured over time, despite the constant flux of new activists of different ages joining the collective [21,22]. In her study, Borland [21] shows how self-identification as historical, intermediate, or younger cohort members in Buenos Aires’ feminist movement is sharply delineated. Nevertheless, questions arise on which identity becomes more salient when more than one could be summoned in certain cases and circumstances. Prior research on mobilized older adults reveals a strong predominance of self-identifying with the social movement or political organization they are involved in rather than with the age group they belong to [12,23,24]. Simon and Klandermans [12] attributed this phenomenon to the politicized collective identity that social movements endow activists and, conversely, the lack of a politicized identity of the older age category.

Social movements collectively craft a politicized identity in terms of defining their common grievances, claims, and adversaries [25]. Activists may assemble in social movements to deconstruct a stigmatized or devalued identity based on social categories—e.g., gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation—a type of political action referred to in the literature as “identity politics” [26]. However, identity politics based on the social category of age have fared differently. While youth movements might place the quest for a distinctive identity with political content as of primary interest [27,28], most of their older counterparts do not seem to follow the same drive [3]. Gilleard and Higgs [10,29] argue that, with few exceptions, the increasing wealth disparities and, consequently, consumer lifestyles among retirees have led to the individualization of retirement, conducive to a fragmentation rather than a coalescence of an old age-based identity. In this sense, although research documents older adults’ political organization in pensioners’ political parties [30] and pensioners’ social movements [31–33], some of the observed cases of older persons’ mobilizations confirm the lack of a common and unified political identity based on old age [3,34]. The Gray Panthers

in the U.S. [8] and the Raging Grannies in Canada [7] stand as a few well established and renowned exceptions that appeal to a politically driven identity based on old age. Nevertheless, the increased popularity of non-institutional political activity among older adults invites to revise the role of identities in this contemporary political surge.

At the same time, accounts of prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion suffered by older adults have long been revealed in the past [35,36]. What Butler [35] initially coined “ageism”, as another form of bigotry comparable to racism, sexism, or classism, has been increasingly acknowledged in gerontological scholarship yet remains widely implicit, invisible, and unchallenged in society at large [37]. As the concept suggests, ageism entails discriminatory beliefs and attitudes against people based on their age, and while young people can also be subjected to ageism, its most predominant form targets older adults [11,38]. Ageist prejudices are so culturally embedded [39] that they can be held by young people, middle-aged adults, and older adults themselves [40]. Levy [41] reveals that permanent exposure to a culture of ageism causes people to deploy ageist stereotypes against themselves once they reach old age. Research shows how “remaining active”—i.e., staying physically fit, intellectually challenged, spiritually positive, or socially engaged—in later life is a way older adults cope with the negative imagery of old age while also allowing the dissociation of the older self from the stereotypical old group [42].

In times of increasingly ageing populations in most societies worldwide, addressing ageism and the potential for older adults’ organized contention based on their age identity merits greater attention [43]. Castells [44] argues that contemporary power relationships determine the social construction of legitimizing identities (individuals in groups and institutions that abide by the dominant elite’s imposed identities), resistance identities (holders of devalued or stigmatized identities who actively resist the elite-imposed principles), and project identities (the construction of newly defined identities that changes its constituents’ position in society). Since ageism is widely ubiquitous and unrecognized, it is unsurprising that a political identity based on old age has largely conformed to a legitimizing identity that abides by the dominant discourses on ageing. Although active contention against these imposed identities aiming at social change has been observed occasionally, it remains to be explored whether increased awareness of the negative social constructions of old age will pave the way for the proliferation of resistance and project identities in the upcoming years.

### 1.2. *Iaioflautas Social Movement*

Iaioflautas was born as part of an array of several grassroots collectives emerging from the 15M movement—internationally known as the “Indignados”—in Spain in 2011. The overarching 15M, which stands for May 15 as a commemoration of the first action that ignited the wave of protests that followed thereafter, reached most cities throughout the country as well as numerous cities abroad [45]. It assembled multiple voices in response to governmental measures on multiple economic, social, and political issues: from critiques against budget cuts, bank bailouts, political corruption, or youth unemployment to demands of real democracy, affordable housing, decent work conditions, or environmental protection, among many others [46]. The 15M movement started predominantly as a youth movement [46] but gradually became intergenerational [47]. Older adults joined the cycle of protests in sectoral initiatives supporting public health and education, social services, and water as a human right [48]. Iaioflautas was first formed in Barcelona in October 2011 and rapidly spread in different cities at the state level [49]. As such, Iaioflautas gained public notoriety in what was popularly recognized as 15M’s older adults’ wing.

The movement’s name came about as a vindication of the derogatory label “perroflauta”—literally “dog-flutes”—used by right-wing incumbent authorities and media outlets against young activists occupying Madrid’s main public square, Puerta del Sol, during 15M’s early days [50]. Iaioflautas adapts the label to older adults, “iaio” meaning grandfather in Catalan (to be precise, the label Iaioflautas combines the Catalan term for grandfather (iaio) and the Spanish term “flautas”, a lexical creation that reflects the bilingual character of the Barcelonian society). Therefore, Iaioflautas roughly translates as flute-grandparents. Their

fundamental claim demands the right to existence and decent living conditions related to the welfare state developed in the late Francoist regime and consolidated afterward, which they summarize in the motto “we are the generation that fought and got a better life for our children” [50]. The movement diverges from prototypical single-issue mobilizations as it explicitly articulates multiple demands: (1) no more public expenditure for bank bailouts; (2) quality public education, health, and services; (3) reversal of labor and retirement reforms; (4) rights to social housing and annulment of evictions; (5) a universal basic income; and (6) civil, political, and reproductive rights and liberties [49].

In advancing such demands, *Iaioflautas* performs nonviolent civil disobedience [49] through what they call “travesuras”—mischiefs. These “travesuras” draw from a repertoire of different direct actions, such as demonstrations, marches, occupations, sit-ins, or picketing in public and private spaces [14]. Mirroring the communicational tactics deployed by 15M activists, *Iaioflautas* members rely on digital media platforms to communicate their claims and disseminate some of their actions and activities [51]. The movement’s chapters in different cities post and share messages, audiovisual material, and links on their blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts, many of which are currently active. However, *Iaioflautas* also resorts to organizational practices found in clandestine resistance against Franco’s dictatorial regime, which are based on secrecy methods and imply a high level of trust among members [14,49]. The movement, thus, blends knowledge and experiences of the past and present to perform peaceful resistance actions still to this day, despite the partial hiatus of its offline activities forced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The unexpected mobilization of older adults in a political grassroots collective in the heat of a wave of social unrest, their publicly elicited generational identity and intergenerational concern, the societal reach of the issues they address, and the combination of old and new methods of political contention constitute an interesting case to inquire the identities older activists build, organize, and “connect” with. We describe how we attempted to tackle this identity issue in what follows.

## 2. Methods

We approached members of the *Iaioflautas* based in Barcelona, the movement’s place of birth, in 2013 to conduct individual in-depth interviews. We reached potential participants at the movement’s, at the time, usual meeting point—a cultural-political neighborhood association—following a snowball sampling logic with a focus on assembling a heterogeneous group in terms of level of involvement in the movement. Fifteen members confirmed their participation and were interviewed following a semi-structured format with open-ended questions addressing topics such as personal political trajectory, motives for participating, modes of participation, and the feedback they received from their social surroundings. Both authors agreed on the final outline of the questions after discussing the design proposed by the second author. Noteworthy, while we did not explicitly introduce the topic of identity in our questions, it constantly surfaced across the subjects discussed, suggesting that the relevance of identity matters in this group.

The first author conducted the interviews in locations of the participant’s preference (i.e., home, park, cafeteria, office, or cultural center) between July and September 2013, nearly two years after the movement’s acknowledged formation. Such a timeline brings insights to the movement once it has achieved a certain stability, which should allow a more nuanced perspective in the points of view of its members. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, spanning from 1 to 3 h in length, and voice recorded. At the outset of the interviews, participants were informed about the interview’s topic, goals, and outline and their right to withdraw from the interview during its course. They were also assured confidentiality in the management of their data and anonymity in the writing of reports and publications. A short survey was administered at the end of each interview to collect sociodemographic information for descriptive purposes. We followed the usual ethical protocols established in the university where the research was designed and conducted.

The group of participants included highly committed “core” movement members (i.e., members with committee duties and involved in all actions) and less involved, “peripheral” members (i.e., people with no responsibilities and occasional participation). In regard to the participants’ characteristics, they were mostly in their 60s at the moment of the interviews, with ages ranging from 54 to 84. The group was reasonably balanced gender-wise: seven women and eight men. Most of them were retired, while others were still in the labor market (either working or unemployed).

The first author transcribed the interviews verbatim and translated into English the quoted material in this article. We analyzed the transcriptions using ATLAS.ti version 8, adopting an inductive thematic analysis to identify the emergence of topics that build the overall story of the participants in this study [52]. With this in mind, we read the transcriptions and the first author coded them, focusing on the participants’ discourses that conveyed identity constructions and distinctions. After several iterations of discussion, we agreed on the codes and the general themes for the analysis. Finally, codes were screened for quotations.

### 3. Results

An underlying concept present throughout the different themes that emerged in our interviews is that of elderhood. Old age, the older self, and the older age group were constantly alluded to in the participants’ testimonies about their self-reported identities. Nonetheless, the articulation of elderhood was expressed differently according to the topic at stake, whether talking about the movement, their age peers, or the younger generations. Accordingly, we identified the following three themes stemming from the participants’ stories: (a) *Iaioflautas* as a collective and symbolic innovation; (b) inter- and intragenerational relationships; and (c) intergenerational solidarity as an identity motto. Throughout these themes, older activists alluded to older and younger age groups in negative and positive terms, suggesting the ambivalent nature of their discourses despite the overtly altruistic orientation of the movement. These themes and discursive elements are described below and supported by exemplifying quotes from the interview transcriptions. The participants’ pseudonym, gender, and age when interviewed follow each of the selected quotes.

#### 3.1. *Iaioflautas* as a Collective and Symbolic Innovation

Older activists in the study expressed great satisfaction with the formation of the movement, in general, and with their involvement, in particular. Participants manifested enthusiasm on the type of action group they were contributing to create, as it blends traits ascribed to traditional political organizations with novel ways of organizing, communicating, and mobilizing. Consequently, they experience the movement as a new kind of organization, regardless of their prior experience in political organizations. Gustavo (male, 70) illustrates the distinction of their movement with other associations:

The thing is *Iaioflautas* is a movement, but it’s also obvious that it’s minimally organized because we meet monthly, we have a coordinating group, a finance group ... [ ... ] But the difference is this: an organization is a structure from top to bottom; ours is from bottom to top.

The organizational dimension was often stressed as a decisive issue for the well-functioning of similar social movements. This concern is ingrained particularly among experienced members in political organizations. Although they celebrate the sizable uprising of a mobilized youth and take pride in being involved thanks to them—“I feel proud of being one of them, one of the eldest sons of 15M.” (Mario, male, 84)—they do not spare some criticism for their utter opposition to any form of political praxis known until then. Dalia (female, 74), a lifelong republican activist, pinpoints 15M’s lack of organization as a barrier to advancing the movement’s goals:

When I went to Plaça Catalunya [15M’s main protest venue in Barcelona], I saw a lot of good intentions, much rebelliousness, but no organization. And without



organization, there are no ideas. [ . . . ] Young people think that individually or with a friend . . . If there is no organization, ideas disappear.

Different from traditional political organizations, older activists in Iaioflautas also took pride in the freedom of participation the movement grants to its members partly due to its lack of legal ascription as an entity. Although organizational tasks demand some level of commitment, participants have an unbinding link with the movement and are free to join the activities and actions of their interest. Participants emphasized the movement's nonpartisan character and its pragmatic orientation, which attracts a heterogeneous composition of membership in terms of political adherence. Antón (male, 63), a longtime communist, held these features as the movement's defining identity. "The only thing that gets close to what we probably are is a collective imaginary of a group of people that meets up to achieve things," because "what matters is not what you bring [to the movement], but what you do." Accordingly, the interviews revealed how the movement constantly explores new ideas and experiments with methods and activities that keep them challenged and motivated. Antón (male, 63) further explained:

Now everyone is thinking about how we renew ourselves. [ . . . ] We already occupied a bank, a bus, the Catalan employers' association, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, we stepped in and got ourselves kicked out of the Catalan government's [head office], the German consulate . . . We can keep doing things like these, but we have to try new stuff.

Processes and practices such as these, which foster continued exploration, learning, and transformation, contribute to creating a sense of cohesion with the collectivity that has scant resemblance with other political organizations they have known before. In this light, Iaioflautas represents an innovative political initiative for older adults that infuses feelings of joy among its activists. "I'm happy of being in this movement. Which, as a communist, I cannot say, 'I'm happy of being in the Communist Party.' I think I'm where I should be, but I'm not necessarily happy. Here, people are happy and excited!" (Biel, male, 62).

Apart from the novelties participants experience in the movement, they also concurred that its core feature is that it is comprised of older adults. While their actions intend to denounce the government's cutbacks on social rights and protection programs, their original goal was to "recruit" older peers from the sizable, retired population in the country. Addressing this population provided the movement with a wide age range among members, as Hortensia (female, 54) and Mario (male, 84) illustrated. However, importantly, and as older adults themselves, most of them acknowledged the negative stereotypes commonly attributed to older retirees, expressing their annoyance with several labels and images of the old.

Culturally widespread ageist beliefs were a significant notion that emerged in the interviews. To the participants, such beliefs are inherently associated with retirement status and reasoned about the perceived uselessness of people in this role originating from their withdrawal from the "productive" labor market. Antón (male, 63) stated clearly how this belief is imbued structurally in society:

The system educates us for work, productive work. [ . . . ] And when the system arrives at the conclusion that we are no longer useful from a productive point of view, whatever that means, it makes it look as if our lives ran out.

He provides a further reflection on how this stereotype is drawn to a meso level, wherein organizations manage their elder members unequally depending on their position in the organizational hierarchy:

The unions: "you are useless"; the parties: "you are useless, you are retired." Bankers do not retire, even if they are 90 years old. But there is an attitude, I believe wrong, that once you reach a certain age, they cannot count on you [anymore].

Criticism abounded on the assumed disengagement of older adults from society once they enter retirement. Participants often elicited the image of elders spending their

spare time in “Casals de Gent Gran”—municipal civic centers for older adults—as the stereotypical portrayal of retirees. While such spaces usually offer a range of cultural, ludic, and sports activities to older citizens, our interviews suggested that the predominant image of its users are elders playing cards, dominoes, or “petanca”—bocce ball. Kristina (female, 58) argued that this image renders retirees as being “too comfortable” with their lives: “[there is a stereotype] of a certain kind of older people. For example, someone who worked all their life and now receives a pension and that’s it, there is nothing else ...”. Adding to this socially disengaged portrayal is the notion of older adults as great consumers of public resources, a concomitant belief that combined generates attitudes toward older adults of being worthless or devoid of value. Gustavo (male, 70) illustrated this idea clearly:

I believe that older people are in a life stage that is viewed, like, as something negative, right? “You are no longer productive,” meaning, “What is your contribution? Are you going to cause us any trouble?” Because you are going to be sick more often than when you were 40 years old. You are going to cause more expenditure to the system. So, I am not saying this is [what] everybody [thinks], but I believe that a majority of the people that come behind us have that concept.

However, feelings of being perceived as boring, aloof, close-minded, or annoying seemed to be neutralized once older adults joined Iaioflautas. Indeed, participants described the way in which involvement in the movement restored a sense of value and self-worth among its members. Biel (male, 62) forcefully expressed how being part of Iaioflautas constitutes a process of dignification of older adults because:

It is not only that they are useful, but that they are needed. And that gives you a personal value in your own life that the system intended to make you lose. It brings back your dignity. You are no longer a being that is used and thrown away.

The reported testimonies point out that members felt happy and satisfied when participating in the activities and actions the movement carried out, fostering a sense of belonging to the group. Engaging in such activities “has brought me back to life,” asserted Mario (male, 84), a long-time syndicalist. It also prompted Jaime (male, 69) to “show that even if you are 69 years old, you are not dead and that you can keep on fighting.” The public display of their actions and resonance through legacy and digital media outlets seemed to infuse a sense of social respect and admiration toward the movements’ members, explicitly expressed via their social media platforms and on-the-ground actions:

When I say I am in Iaioflautas, they applaud me! Can you imagine [for] someone like me that has never joined anything; that has been in Iaioflautas for a couple of years? When we get to places, people applaud us! They get me here [pointing to her heart] (Olivia, female, 63).

Active involvement in the movement, thus, would provide members positive feelings of self-value and an opportunity to counter ageist stereotypes about older adults. Nonetheless, whether or not combatting ageism was a factor driving their engagement, their reports yield no consensus. While a handful of participants stated that they did not feel targeted with discriminatory attitudes based on their age, a few assured how decisive these preconceived ideas were for their involvement. Antón (male, 63) described how “the decision to occupy a bank is a conscious attitude of saying ‘Hey, I might be older, but I can still do things.’” Jaime (male, 69) further elaborated this conviction by stressing the way they adapt their actions to their physical capacities:

I believe we still have much to say and do. There are people 80 years old carrying their canes, and they are always there. [It is about] showing that fighting is ageless. What we have to do is adapt our fight to the physical conditions we have nowadays.

Some remarked how the focus on adjusting their activities to their capacities allowed them to be themselves. Luisa (female, 68) clearly emphasized, “I want to be older and

do things like an older person. I do not want to pretend to be younger.” Participants acknowledged and embraced their ageing selves and bodies, which shows in the public display of their interventions. Consequently, there is a general sense that the movement collectively contributes to debunking ageist stereotyping of older people, at least to some extent. Biel (male, 62) argued in favor:

I believe that Iaioflautas as a movement is indeed breaking stereotypes, [but] I do not know if [it is the case of] every Iaioflauta individually. Because in my life, I have met older people very concerned with [certain] issues. What I had never seen was a movement of older people.

Contrary to other participants, only Antón (male, 63) viewed widespread ageist beliefs as a standalone political issue. In his view, the system’s undisputed promotion of youth and vitality runs rampant throughout society, which excludes people who fail to match the model’s expectations. When reflecting on the ubiquity of this social norm, he highlights how it remains unseen even for most of his age-peers: “I know this can give the impression that it is not very social or political. But I disagree; I think it is very much.” Hence, while others neglected the sociopolitical angle of a predominantly ageist culture, to him, it was a profoundly ingrained political issue that deserved greater awareness.

### 3.2. Inter- and Intragenerational Relationships

Inherently linked to the participants’ enthusiasm for a movement such as Iaioflautas is their sense of inter- and intragenerational relationships. Being part of an older adults’ social movement entails an awareness of belonging to an age group that contrasts with other age groups. Moreover, intergenerational relationships have been a cornerstone of the movement since its inception in 2011. Although essentially comprised of older activists, several participants recalled the presence of old and young people when the idea of setting up a movement surfaced. Dalia (female, 74) remembered what her fellow retirees said:

Well, young people are demonstrating in the public squares, and we retirees are only known for playing bocce ball, dominoes, and going to centers for the retired. [But] it is inconceivable that we do not try to mobilize all those millions of retirees. With the current situation, we have to start doing something.

In this line, participants praised the young for 15M’s rise and subsequent mobilizations, referring to it as a trigger or a breath of fresh air. Some highlighted their spirit and creativity, while others remarked how they “brought back to the table values that were always there” (Antón, male, 63). Relatedly, young activists’ rejection of any established form of political praxis concentrated one stream of criticism from the participants. In their view, this may be related to youth’s lack of experience in politics, resulting in them neglecting the history of political ideas and struggles that preceded them. Although willing to work together, Hortensia (female, 54) revealed how this influences where she allocates her efforts:

I could join 15M and listen to what they say, but I would feel more displaced than in Iaioflautas. I do not feel discriminated [against] but displaced because there are people twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two years old. [ . . . ] And there are things they are, like, discovering that you already know that go nowhere.

Nonetheless, many participants’ main avenue of criticism targeted people refraining from the momentum of mobilizations, regardless of their age. On the one hand, some wished for greater involvement of younger generations on issues of their own interest (e.g., protesting university fees), while others aspired for more mutual support in each other’s actions. On the other hand, many demanded more significant involvement of their older peers and, interestingly, often demonized those who preferred to spend their time at the “Casals de Gent Gran”. This apparent contradiction in their discourse suggests the prominence of their identity as mobilized older adults in the Iaioflautas collective over that of the general old age category, a remark that serves as a distinction from the ageist imaginary of the stereotypical older person prevalent in this context. Participants



emphasized the urge to have more older adults mobilized in the streets from the pool of retirees and critically acknowledged the negative response from users of these “casals”. Based on his experience, Jaime (male, 69) expressed his dislike bluntly for these centers:

The “casal” has always given me the feeling that it is the entrance to the cemetery. It smells like death to me when you go to a place like this, seeing the people there playing cards, dominoes, spending hours, and doing nothing else. [ . . . ] From there to the grave.

Nino (male, 62) understands that the critical factor is “consciousness,” either long-established or recently awakened and that Iaioflautas assembles older adults bearing this consciousness. At the same time, he blames older adults for not connecting with the new generations. Dalia (female, 74) and Hortensia (female, 54) also criticize the older people in terms of being unable to attract youth to their causes, transferring or sharing their knowledge or delegating their responsibilities onto others. These criticisms also point to themselves and their fellow activists, who feel somewhat responsible for this neglect. This (self-)criticism exercise suggests the paramount concern older activists in the Iaioflautas pose on the younger generations, from middle adulthood to younger ages.

### 3.3. *Intergenerational Solidarity as an Identity Motto*

The movement’s foundational principle is protecting the younger generations’ welfare and living conditions. Accordingly, this guiding principle emerged in the discourse of all the participants as the primary motive for their involvement. Although some of their claims and actions addressed issues of interest of their age category (e.g., retirement pensions, care aids), these were also justified as an intergenerational matter since they were “defending their [younger people’s] pensions” (Dalia, female, 74) as well. However, their priority rested on their younger counterparts:

One thing I believe is important is to think about the generations that come behind us. Because I am not saying that we do not matter. But damn, what are we going to leave our children? A situation with no [labor] contract, [unfair] labor relations, no pensions. Are we going to leave them that? (Antón, male, 63).

Concern on the legacy they pass on to the younger generations was frequently evoked in the interviews. The inheritance of quality services, welfare programs, and public policies gathered the most concerns. This resonated particularly among those with more political experience since they were witnessing the dismantling of rights and benefits that they contributed to achieving in the past. These regressive measures generated a sense of empathy toward the younger generations that risk experiencing the adversities they faced in their earlier years: “Most of us are very old. We know how to value what has cost us [effort]. We understand the situation of today’s youth. And that is what motivates us. [ . . . ] That makes you take responsibility” (Mario, male, 84).

Some allude to a sense of moral obligation as a relevant drive for their involvement in Iaioflautas. “It is a way of being at peace with your conscience” (Gustavo, male, 70), or “[this way] I can look at myself in the mirror” (Biel, male, 62) are excerpts that reflect their sense of responsibility toward others. In this line, Dalia (female, 74) reported: “I am not one of those who sets before their self-comfort, being quiet at home, listening to my music, and isolating myself from society. It is not in my nature. I bear my responsibility as a citizen very deeply.”

Ultimately, the sense of responsibility for helping others—and more concretely, solidarity toward the younger generations—is the movement’s identity mark. It constitutes the primal definition of the movement as a whole and its activists in particular. To Hortensia (female, 54), more than being a group of older adults, “the motto that says ‘we are from the generation that fought and . . . ;’ that is what identifies you.”

#### 4. Discussion

Examining the subjective experiences of activists in a social movement of older adults allows us to inquire on the motives and identity construction processes that shape, and are shaped by, their involvement in a collective political endeavor. In this light, the participants' reflections suggest that their involvement in Iaioflautas is not driven mainly for older adults' benefit. Although they take action on matters of older citizens' concern and collaborate with contemporary pensioners' movements [53], their intergenerational focus is vastly echoed in our interviews. Scholarly accounts of older adults' solidarity movements have been documented [6,54], contradicting popular beliefs of older generations' selfishness and self-centeredness [55]. Activists in Iaioflautas make their intergenerational concern their motive and identity marker simultaneously, a feature that distinguishes the movement when compared to other similar cases.

Nonetheless, the backbone of older activists' multiple reported and suggested identities revolves around their sense of elderhood. On a personal level, older activists are aware of the physical limitations their ages might impose on them. However, they manage to sustain their participation by adapting Iaioflautas' interventions to their bodies' capacities. On the relational level, the participants adopt the shared frame of being "grandparents" protesting for society's "children" and "grandchildren," despite some participants reporting not having offspring. In addition, those retired and close-to-retirement acknowledged this social role when alluding to the broader social (productive) system, yet they rejected being lumped together with the stereotypical imagery of retirees. On the collective level is where older activists placed their preferred identity alignment, more specifically on Iaioflautas. The movement's collectively defined identity simultaneously alludes to people belonging to an in-group—i.e., older adults—committed to people outside the group—i.e., all younger generations—which amalgamates activists of diverse backgrounds, interests, and ideological stances.

Involvement in the Iaioflautas movement brought significant changes to the activists we interviewed on two different levels. On the one hand, the group's organizational aspect represents an innovative way for older generations to perform collective action as they introduce new dynamics of functioning inspired by contemporary grassroots movements—e.g., 15M itself, Arab Spring—into well-established forms of organized political action—e.g., demonstrations, rallies. Iaioflautas functions more as a fluid and organic entity rather than as a rigid organization, a feature that attracts the politically experienced and non-experienced. A prevalence of pragmatics over abstract ideologies, a focus on concerted action instead of personal background, an interest in constantly exploring and experimenting, and the freedom to partake in activities of each one's choice are all attributes that interviewees appreciate greatly about the movement. More specifically, the collective's open and flexible character are key elements that mark distances from the dynamics of traditional political organizations such as parties and labor unions, a finding that supports previous research on older adults' activism [34].

On the other hand, the active involvement of older adults in the cycle of protests in 2011 through a social movement of their own making served as an opportunity to cast light on the social imagery of the older population and dispute widespread ageist stereotypes held against their age group. Activists in Iaioflautas could counter extended assumptions about older people in Barcelona—and Spain at large—of being self-centered, close-minded, and disengaged from society, in part stemming from retirement from the labor market and the allocation of different public resources and services to this age group. The public display of the activities and actions of Iaioflautas reinstates a sense of self-worth and usefulness to its members and inspires feelings of admiration and respect in others, reinstalling a sense of dignity as older adults. Therefore, active engagement and involvement in the movement contribute to questioning the supposed passiveness associated with older people and help debunk, to some extent, negative stereotypes derived from this belief.

In this line, the participants' feelings of belonging to the Iaioflautas collective are notably more salient and predominant compared to their sense of belonging to their age

groups. This result supports previous research on the primacy of a collective identity linked to a social movement instead of a group identity based on their old age [12,23,24]. While the participants reveal a sense of sharing the same “generational unit” [56]—adults who lived through and opposed meager social protection and restricted liberties in a totalitarian context in the past—there are no reports on such commonality regarding older people as a social group. This finding echoes studies reporting a lack of a unified age-based identity among mobilized older adults [3,10,34], further contradicting unsubstantiated fears on the growing political influence of an older population acting as a homogenous bloc [57]. Heterogeneity in later life is a well-known fact in social gerontological scholarship [58], a stage in life where the usual political cleavages found in earlier stages—e.g., social class, gender, ethnic heritage, or partisan adherence—are pervasive as well [57]. Accordingly, the participants highlighted and positively assessed the heterogeneous membership in *Iaioflautas*. Furthermore, while reports acknowledge old age as the movement’s core feature, it is not the factor that summons its constituents onto mobilization since it has not been collectively framed as an oppressed group. Although the participants perceived bearing a stigmatized identity based on their age, this oppression has not been envisioned as a problem with political reach [12]. Provided that old age is not politicized as a discriminated social group, identity politics based on elderhood does not surface.

The non-politicization of ageism hampers the development of a collective consciousness of belonging to the same stigmatized group, even among mobilized older activists reporting being targeted with negative prejudices about their age. Widespread ageism is not regarded as a problem, and thus, it remains unchallenged. Therefore, older adults end up reproducing ageist stereotypes against other age peers as well as themselves [41]. In addition, the culturally pervasive mandate of remaining active well into later life contributes to perpetuating ageist beliefs against the relatively “inactive” [42]. Following this thread, the participants’ preference in setting their group identification on the *Iaioflautas* movement suggests a mechanism of distinction between active and inactive older adults and a dissociation from the ageist imagery of the old. This phenomenon is clearly observed when participants articulate their criticism of fellow older adults who spend their spare time in ludic activities at the “Casals de Gent Gran,” a profile that represents the stereotypical portrayal of the retired population in Barcelona. In this sense, even if challenging ageist beliefs was a driver for the engagement of a few participants, they did not deploy their resistance on behalf of the age group at large but rather on the social movement in particular.

Being politically organized and mobilized mainly for the benefit of the younger generations is the movement’s core claim and the participants’ primal motive for being involved. As such, it is not surprising that combatting rampant ageism against older adults is not featured in the movement’s public agenda. Nonetheless, the reported perceptions of being negatively prejudged due to their old age and the reproduction of ageist beliefs and attitudes upon age peers refraining from joining the movement raise some questions about whether ageism should be addressed more integrally in older adults’ social movements. In Barcelona—and Spain as a whole—old age has, thus far, largely conformed to a culturally imposed identity construction that is legitimized by its constituents and remains undisputed. However, if ageism becomes increasingly visible, questioned, and problematized, conditions might be fit for transitioning into a project identity that reconstructs the meanings attached to old age and relocates the position of its members in society, as Castells [44] argues. Given the ever-growing ageing of the population and the popularity of nonviolent civil resistance actions, there are interesting prospects for future research in examining whether ageism is tackled more from a political lens by (older) activists and whether an old-age identity politics crystallizes in this cultural setting.

## 5. Conclusions

Among the multiple identities older activists draw from their active involvement in an older people’s social movement such as *Iaioflautas*, the strongest and most salient one is

being a member of the movement. The collective identity crafted around the movement is greatly appealing to its members as it represents an innovative grassroots organization for older adults that fights for younger people. Consistent with the centrality of intergenerational solidarity, a generational identity also surfaces, especially among the participants with an extended trajectory in political participation. The “grandparent” identity is visible in the movement’s name and adopted by all participants regardless of the representativeness of this social role in each case. However, while a shared sense of elderhood is latent in these narratives, the heavily stigmatized old-age category prevents a more robust identification with the group overall. Ultimately, joining Iaioflautas serves as a distinction that separates members from the common portrayals of older people. Despite their diversity and heterogeneity, as long as widespread ageist stereotypes remain unchallenged and non-politicized, it is unlikely that an identity politics based on old age emerges. Our findings, thus, respond to the current gap in the literature on the disposition of multiple identities among older activists, a group that is understudied in non-institutional politics. Accordingly, we bring together social movement studies and social gerontology, two fields that seldom intersect in recent scholarship.

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