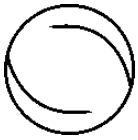

Article

Organization Studies
2017, Vol. 38(5) 577–595

DOI: 10.1177/0170840616670437
www.egosnet.org/os

That's What Friends Are For: Hospitality and affective bonds fostering collective empowerment in an intentional community

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Abstract

Processes of collective empowerment are essentially concerned with the production of social and emotional configurations fostering a mutual awareness that social change is both desirable and feasible. Using an ethnographic study of an intentional community of activists, this paper analyses how friendship practices produce enduring forms of empowerment based on democratic praxis. The analysis shows that nurturing affective bonds of friendship facilitates the prefiguration of alternative ways of life through the experience of living together. This is supported by the cultivation of *hexis* as a political frame, which reassesses the centrality of human beings' otherness and fosters complex equality within relationships.

Keywords

collective empowerment, community, ethnography, friendship, prefiguration

*A friendship that has become steadfast, constant or faithful (*bébaios*) can even defy or destroy tyrannical power'*

Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*

If the idea of friendship has been occasionally tied to the possibility of subverting systems of domination since the premodern period (see for instance Derrida, 2005; La Boétie & Léonard, 2002; Plato & Rowe, 1998), its actual role in collective empowerment remains largely unclear. In the social movements literature, friendship is chiefly understood as the presence of enduring affective bonds among activists (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2007; Jasper, 1998, 2011); and the primary question addressed concerns the influence of such ties in the outcome of such movements (Klatch, 2004; Summers-Effler, 2002; Taylor, 1989). Hence, friendship is conceived as a pre-existing emotional factor that impacts collective action in a causal relationship. Yet, friendship is also a social

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phenomenon in its own right; reducing it to an external cause might obstruct the analysis of the processes through which it can subvert power relationships. Some authors identified friendship – more specifically the creation of 'affinity groups' – as an organizational basis for prefiguring forms of direct democracy (Epstein, 1991; Maeckelbergh, 2009; Polletta, 2002). These studies point out the importance of friendship-based sociality in generating trust and a sense of solidarity necessary for collective action and democratic decision-making (Epstein, 1991; Juris, 2008; Polletta, 2002). However, by building on an understanding of friendship limited to strong and exclusive affective bonds, these studies fail to explain the transformative process through which friendship might lead to collective empowerment. It is argued here that re-integrating the social dimension of friendship with the notion of *hexis* – a hospitable and virtuous disposition toward others (Aristotle & Rackham, 1982; Derrida, 2005) – helps in linking this phenomenon to issues of ethics and politics (Introna & Brigham, 2007).

A careful analysis of the practices of friendship – a phenomenon covering both affects and the shaping of a hospitable disposition – can shed light on collective empowering processes. By changing the collective self and emancipating it from a given system of domination, such processes involve both social (Rao & Dutta, 2012) and emotional (Taussig, 1990) dimensions. They are social processes in that they necessitate alterations in power relationships to produce collective action (Drury & Reicher, 1999; Speer et al., 2003). Yet, they depend on the actors' confidence in their capacity to act together and realize tangible social change. That is, empowerment happens when citizens become conscious, active subjects, shaping their own social activities (Gregoire & Perlman, 1969). Experiencing common fate and shared identity increases confidence and provides a sense of empowerment and critical consciousness, thereby triggering collective action (Goldstone, 2001; Summers-Effler, 2002). Hence, emotions play a great role in this process: empowerment is at once experienced and felt (Taussig, 1990). In sum, collective empowerment is mainly concerned with producing forms of togetherness that foster a sense of shared grievance and identity, as well as a mutual awareness that social change is both desirable and feasible through joint action (Coleman, 1968). The following discussion, focused on the alternative form of sociality created within a movement, illuminates processes through which forms of empowerment are socially and emotionally produced.

Small groups constitute an appropriate level of analysis for investigating the role of social relationships in processes of collective empowerment: 'Because small groups bring society down to the face-to-face level, they have the potential to become mechanisms for social transformation' (Harrington & Fine, 2000, p. 319). In this sense, community-based organizations – such as intentional communities – are of interest. An intentional community, by definition, rejects the norms established in the surrounding environment in favour of alternative social arrangements (Kanter, 1972; Pitzer, 2014). In particular, intentional communities often intend to create an economy which largely depends on personal social relationships rather than on impersonal markets (Polanyi, 2001). Living in a community fosters the development of close relationships with other participants, creating a sense of collective responsibility that enables collective achievement. Experimenting with alternative forms of living, relating, and producing represents a particular form of collective action – one emerging out of a deep political critique and realized through face-to-face, emotionally charged interactions (Kanter, 1972). As such, constructing an intentional community constitutes a political act of re-appropriation through which activists empower themselves by prefiguring alternative forms of life. That is, they directly enact their ultimate values, conflating the private and political spheres of life (Boggs, 1977; Epstein, 1991; Maeckelbergh, 2009, 2011). In some organizational settings, however, the emphasis on individuals' personality and co-workers' social relationships is a managerial tool used to increase productivity and to create deep forms of control (Fleming, 2013). Hence, it is necessary to identify

the conditions under which stressing personality fosters empowerment or alienation. A careful analysis of how friendship is practised sheds light on such conditions.

Rather than reduce friendship to an emotional factor in the movement's success or failure, this paper aims at unveiling the processes through which multiple practices of friendship combine to generate collective empowerment. It builds on an ethnographic study of an activist intentional community that continually [re]creates practices of direct democracy. We will see that friendship serves as a powerful political frame, facilitating the prefiguration of a mode of sociality based on autonomy, praxis and on what Polletta would call 'complex equality' (Polletta, 2002), referring to a practice of equality in which individual differences do not compromise equal status. This form of sociality is prone to denaturalizing the subjugations associated with neoliberal capitalism (Banerjee, 2008; Gibson-Graham, 2006), by challenging hierarchy, obedience to a transcendent ideology and a sociality based on impersonal relationships. The contributions are twofold: first, the study sheds light on practices of friendship that actually constitute a collective empowerment process based on praxis rather than ideology. Second, it demonstrates how practising a culture of hospitality and openness can promote survival of these communities and ensure that they remain agents of social change, thus contributing to the discussion on community boundaries.

The paper is constructed as follows: the next section reviews the different interpretations of friendship and how they relate to activism. Then, the data and the methods are presented. The analysis of the activist community's friendship practices is presented in the fourth part. Finally, the implications of these findings for understanding enduring processes of collective empowerment are discussed.

Friendship as an Affect vs. Friendship as *Hexis*, and Activism

Traditional concepts of friendship regard it as a specific form of relationship based on equality and reciprocity, in which feelings are mutually manifested (Aristotle & Rackham, 1982). If the area of possibilities for developing affect-based friendships is inherently social rather than personal, as determined by the social locations of individuals (Allan, 1998; Bourdieu, 1984; Grey & Sturdy, 2007), the development and nurturing of affective ties is a matter of reflexivity (Costas, 2012) and personal choice (Derrida, 2005). This conceptualization highlights the entanglement of the social and emotional dimensions of friendship. Aristotle proposed a well-known typology that distinguishes among friendships emerging from utility, pleasure and virtue. If the two first categories clearly derive from *affects* (they stem from the qualities perceived as useful or pleasant in the other), the third one is more complex to grasp. Friendship based on virtue requires liking the other in its entirety while disregarding any instrumental calculation. It stems from the ability to live together, suggesting that it constitutes the most intimate form of friendship. Yet, it reaches far beyond feelings of attachment to reflect a virtuous disposition (*hexis*) towards others (Aristotle & Rackham, 1982; Onuf, 2009). The blurring of social and emotional dimensions in this typology complicates our understanding of the role of this phenomenon in activism. Further, the subsequent literature on social movements has chiefly reduced friendship to its emotional dimension (e.g. Goodwin et al., 2007; Jasper, 2011). To better understand how both facets operate and complement each other in the construction of collective empowerment, the present paper considers them separately.

Friendship as an affect in social movements

Degrees of affect-based friendships. Friendship ties vary in degree, ranging from 'casual closeness' (Haine, 1992) to intimate friendship (Agamben, 2004), including differentiated friendships

(Simmel & Wolff, 1950). *Casual closeness* is a form of friendship based on ephemeral sociability and supported by a set of rituals. This type of relationship occurs in cafés for instance, and mixes elements of intimacy and anonymity: 'In the spectrum of sociability that Parisian cafes offered, the *Gemeinschaft* qualities of small-scale, face-to-face personal contacts could be joined with the *Gesellschaft* traits of individuality, tolerance and autonomy' (Haine, 1992, p. 623). In the same way, the degree of anonymity allowed by virtual settings fosters the development of frank, collegial and confessional interactions (Ross, 2007). Similarly, *differentiated friendship* refers to less ephemeral but highly delimited affective bonds. This type of relationship connects people within bounded spheres of emotion and interest. Multiple provinces of discretion restrict differentiated friendships, despite their potential for strong affective depth and willingness to sacrifice (Simmel & Wolff, 1950). Finally, *intimate friendship* contains the strongest affective ties. This type of friendship creates a proximity involving a knowledge of the other that is so thorough that one cannot form a generalized impression of the other as distinct from the self (Agamben, 2004). The nurturing of such friendship requires so much time and energy that it is not possible to have a large number of intimate friends (Agamben, 2004; Aristotle & Rackham, 1982; Derrida, 2005).

The cultivation of long-lasting emotional bonds is intimately tied to the possibility of nurturing interactions, principally involving physical proximity. Sociability indeed begins with conversation, the purest and most sublimated form of 'two-way-ness' (Simmel & Wolff, 1950, p. 53). Simple social activities – such as eating and drinking – perform an essential social function by creating ties among significantly diverse personalities (Simmel & Wolff, 1950, p. 31). The development of deep and permanent emotional bonds requires everyday face-to-face interactions (Summers-Effler, 2002), as perceiving a friend entails sharing a significant portion of their life conversing, and sharing talks and thoughts (Agamben, 2004). Besides, pleasurable interactions with 'confirming others' foster the development of affective commitment inside a group (Nepstad, 2004, p. 51). Thus, the construction of friendship ties is traditionally related to the nurturing of repeated in-person interactions.

Friendship ties strengthen and jeopardize social movements. In the literature on social movements, friendship is predominantly understood as a specific type of emotion – a permanent feeling based on a deep affective attachment (Goodwin et al., 2007; Jasper, 2011; Juris, 2008; Polletta, 2002). Bonds of friendship among activists deeply affect the emergence, maintenance and destruction of social movements. In her study of the women's movement abeyance, Taylor (1989) describes how affective ties played a role in both the recruitment and the commitment of activists. Spaces for social gatherings allowed women to develop personal ties of love and friendship, thus supporting participation. Affective bonds within a social movement shape its collective identity, solidarity and discipline (Goodwin, 1997). According to Summers-Effler (2002), resistance from subordinate populations is only possible through the creation of small groups who are able to maintain a high level of emotional energy, characterized by an intense feeling of connectedness. Face-to-face interactions constitute the basis for long-lasting relationships through which critical consciousness can develop and enable citizens to mobilize toward social change (Fine & Harrington, 2004; Haine, 1992). In her study of the high-risk Plowshares movement, Nepstad (2004) argues that developing close friendship ties with other activists increased one's devotion to a cause. The community of confirming others can therefore be used as a mechanism to reinforce the affective component of commitment. The existence of deep affective ties that constitute the libidinal economy of a movement can also be destructive. As Simmel puts it, intimacy entails an individual-exclusive content that damages close unions when members 'place the accent and the substance of their relationship upon these wholly individual but objectively irrelevant matters' (Simmel, 1950, p. 127). Citing the case of the Communist-led Huk rebellion in the Philippines (1946–1954), Goodwin (1997) shows

how the strong affective discipline imposed on activists eroded solidarity and pushed some of them to leave the movement. In her study of the Students for a Democratic Society movement, Klatch (2004) explains how a small circle of intimate activist friends suddenly faced an increase in membership, transforming the fundamental experience of the group. Affective bonds became a source of oppression when activists began seeking ideological purity. Aiming to become 'full-time revolutionaries', (Klatch, 2004, p. 500) they segregated members who could not fulfil this new identity. Similarly, Polletta (2002) observes that building a movement upon friendship relations limits its growth and effectiveness. According to her, friendship's tendency toward exclusivity carries implicit forms of exclusions, hierarchies and inequalities that are at odds with constructing a democratic project based on complex equality.

The problem is that the concept of friendship, as it is mobilized here, is reduced to unconditional bonding. As such, it generates exclusion and homogeneity instead of facilitating the inclusion of differences needed for practising direct democracy (Maeckelbergh, 2009). However, friendship is a multifaceted phenomenon that goes beyond affective bonds to include a hospitable disposition towards others. Analysing this dimension of friendship is essential to understand its role in collective empowerment.

Friendship as hexis*: A tool to subvert capitalism*

Hospitality as a virtuous disposition. Derrida (2005) considers friendship primarily as an action rather than a passion. It is the *act* of loving the other that necessitates time and effort to be realized and stabilized. Put differently, friendship is a way of relating. It presupposes a disposition, an aptitude and openness towards others. Aristotle calls *hexis* this virtuous disposition that makes the morally superior form of friendship possible (Aristotle & Rackham, 1982; French, 2007). It is a habitus inscribed in the body and not necessarily tied to personal attachment (Bryan, 2009; Derrida, 2005; French, 2007). *Hexis* refers to the possibility and practice of 'hospitality', understood as the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility (Onuf, 2009). Absolute or unconditional hospitality supposes opening one's home to the absolute, unknown and anonymous other without asking for reciprocity. In this sense, hospitality requires a suspension in time of all conventions; it operates a bracketing in which the notion of 'home' is deconstructed (Onuf, 2009). These authors highlight the impossibility to practise 'pure' or 'unconditional' hospitality, and the challenge of practising 'conditional hospitality', as an inherently dangerous and risky experience, holding the potential for destroying communities.

Hospitality and hostility. Hospitality is concerned with confronting the Stranger in its absolute otherness. This is a dangerous experience, as the ability of strangers to contest the authority of the *polis* can threaten its functioning (Derrida, 2000). The stranger disrupts the home, the sameness of the community, and the certainty of the self (Introna & Brigham, 2008). It induces a mutual risk of hostility (for both the host and the stranger) and of putting one's community and identity in danger. Hence, in practice, hospitality is always conditional and colludes with power relationships (Derrida, 2000). The moment of the welcome – when names and courtesy are exchanged – is fundamental. At this moment, stranger and host have taken each other hostage. There is a radical fear; they have to come to an agreement, either of general trust or enmity (Onuf, 2009). By transforming strangers into guests or parasites, these rituals are necessarily loaded with symbolic violence and exclusion. They induce practices of choosing, electing, filtering and selecting who will benefit from asylum (Derrida, 2000). For instance, imposing the host's language to the stranger constitutes the first act of violence. Hence, any act of hospitality must contain within itself the possibility of hostility (Introna & Brigham, 2007).

Practising hospitality as a form of resistance. The advent of modernism saw a pronounced separation between the private and public spheres (Silver, 1990), increasingly tying friendship to intimacy and personal choice. According to Smith (2000) and other classic liberal thinkers, this produced a morally superior form of friendship cleansed of any instrumental calculations. At the same time, it created a space between friends and enemies that was filled by acquaintances and indifferent strangers. The making of a society of strangers facilitated the spreading of liberal universal markets: In a society of anonymous individuals, anyone can enter into an exchange relation and be replaced without impact (Simmel & Wolff, 1950). Hence, practising friendship as a hospitable disposition requires a radically different conceptualization of the Other. A culture of hospitality, which constitutes a questioning and refusal of a society consisting of indifferent and interchangeable individuals, makes it impossible to stay indifferent to the Stranger. Practising hospitality requires the acceptance of being disrupted by the Stranger, and to assign him or her the status of Friend or Enemy. On the contrary, it promotes an idea of community based on an ethical proximity of the other as a matter of justice (Introna, 2008). As such, nurturing *hexis* protects the self against massification and anonymity (Bryan, 2009). It requires the maturity (French & Thomas, 1999) and ethical responsibility to confront the other.

If this literature opens the possibility for considering *hexis* as a seed for any social movement, little remains known about how to materialize it in practice. This question is particularly puzzling within intentional communities, which are supposed to determine clear boundaries in order to create and protect their identity (Clastres, 1980; Tönnies, 1988).

Methods: An Ethnographic Investigation of *Longo Maï*

This study is based on a larger ethnographic investigation of *Longo Maï*, a network of nine intentional communities based in rural European areas. The presentation that follows focuses on the role of friendship practices in the construction of the group as an activist one. Founded in 1969 by a group of young activists from the Austrian Communist Party who became impatient with its perceived bureaucracy, the group was formed as a 'radical organization for youth' (Caty, 1983) to defend the rights of the youth and the working classes through direct action. These actions broadly aimed at challenging dominant neoliberal institutions by constructing 'a counter-project to capitalist exploitation' (Morawietz, Rössler, & Schwab, 2013). A charismatic French activist named Rémi headed the group from its founding until his death in 1993, and merged it in 1972 with a Swiss organization espousing similar ideas. Choosing a path that diverged from both the Hippie movement and terrorism, they described their mission in a 1970 manifesto: 'We must learn to solve ourselves the problems that social institutions are neither willing nor able to resolve. Direct democracy at all levels – this is what we fight for' (Caty, 1983, p. 54). In 1973, they opened their first commune (hereafter 'Principal Commune') in the south of France. To this day, it remains the largest of the network, as well as the central hub of activities. At the time of the study, the Principal Commune had 81 residents from 13 nationalities, mainly European (93%) – including 64% French, 11% Germans and 6% Swiss – 53% were women, and the age distribution was as follows: 19% under 20, 31% between 21 and 30, 27% between 31 and 50 and 23% over 50. Their founders saw the creation of intentional communities in rural areas not as a retreat from society, but as an alternative form of political engagement through the alignment of daily practices with beliefs. In respect to their understanding of direct democracy, and to foster difference and dynamism, the group refuses to write rules or explicitly state its values. However, these are enacted in daily practices. As such, they refuse referring to and obeying fixed ideological principles that would transcend immediate practices. To the contrary, they value autonomy and equal participation of members in the group, while recognizing individual differences. For instance, they respect

individuals' rhythms and personal preferences in the organization of activities, without following any yield objective. This requires repeated interactions to develop a deep knowledge of each member's personality. In addition to their attempt at practising direct democracy within their communes, Longo Maï's members constantly participate in diverse broader social movements, and actively welcome outsiders into their communes. They view open borders as a necessary condition for social change, which requires that they engage in and integrate ongoing discussions about the implementation of alternative modes of organizing. Indeed, their primary goal is to stand as an engine for similar movements.

Data collection process

Data collection occurred between June 2012 and December 2014, consisting primarily of participant observations. These took place in three communes in the southern region of France, as well as an urban communal house in Switzerland devoted to fundraising activities. The observations were conducted over short periods of time, facilitating the organization of data between steps (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). In total, it represented 49 days and nights of participant observation. Fieldwork involved participation in multiple routine activities, meetings and actions both inside and outside the communes. Observations from these activities were written in a notebook that chronicled everyday interactions. The fieldwork was supplemented by archival data. Sources included journals and books published by Longo Maï from 1974 to 2013; 31 radio broadcasts; six books written by Longo Maï members or external actors; and several internal documents. Finally, twenty semi-structured interviews with twelve participants were conducted and transcribed.

Upon first arriving in the Principal Commune, the author was surprised by the explicit political engagement of the group. It seemed to contradict the ideal-type of *Gemeinschaft* depicted by Tönnies (1988), which portrayed an isolated and apolitical group. In contrast with this vision, any mundane activity in Longo Maï was imbued with political claims. People were regularly discussing local or international social movements; many defined Longo Maï as a movement in its own right. This conceptualization raised questions about how a rural community could structure itself as a social movement. Several steps were taken to analyse this. First, an exhaustive narrative account was written to understand and organize the observations. Next, the group's writings that appeared in '*Messages de Longo Maï*", a journal sent to their donors, between 1974 and 2013 were examined for references to political claims and actions. Friendship appeared as a common theme throughout these writings. Personal observations combined with the insights from archival data analysis illustrated how the construction of direct personal relationships constituted a major political object for this group. It was seen as a challenge to the increased anonymity of the surrounding society. From there, it was possible to distinguish different rituals and practices of friendship at play in the communes both within members and in their interactions with outsiders. The last analytical stage consisted in defining how two interrelated sets of friendship practices (*hexis* on the one hand, and development of emotional bonds based on similar behavioural values on the other) contributed to the group's challenge of neoliberal practices while structuring the community as an activist one.

Practising Friendship to Prefigure Alternative Forms of Sociality

Friendship as (conditional) hexis

Responding to requests for visits. Longo Maï places a high value on welcoming strangers, who are perceived as potential 'friends' and named accordingly by participants. They see this open door

policy as an inherent part of their project, as they want to stand as an example for other people willing to construct communities or movements practising direct democracy. Anyone can visit and join in a priori, and all communes regularly organize events to nurture social ties with their families, friends and supporters. For instance, the author participated in a yearly celebration in a small commune of the network, which is composed of ten adults and eleven children. Around 200 people came in for the party, with about 70 of them staying for more than two days. As this commune was not equipped to accommodate so many, they rearranged the space with the resources available to them. They transformed the 200-square metre hangar where straw bales were normally stored into a reception room. That necessitated the displacement of all the straw bales and installation of parquet (made by commune members) a few days before the event. Two days after the party, everything was uninstalled and the parquet piled up again until the next event. This episode illustrates the group's commitment to conviviality and its attachment on building personal relations through face-to-face interactions with guests and anonymous supporters. These practices challenge the dominant form of sociality based on impersonal contracts.

Yet, apart from these specific events, there is no active prospecting for visitors. Some outsiders reach out to Longo Maï by phone, letter or email, asking to stay in a commune. The Principal Commune receives frequent requests and always has visitors present. When somebody wishes to visit this commune, members ask whether the prospective guest knows anyone in Longo Maï and how long he or she would like to stay. A stranger's request is more likely to be accepted if he or she plans to stay for more than a few days. Longer stays allow for development of deeper relationships and are therefore better appreciated than shorter ones. This is because direct democracy as practised within this group necessitates that each member knows the others' skills, preferences and personality quite well to ensure a sufficient level of trust and an equal status for participating in the collective life. Marc (settled in the Principal Commune since the early 2000s) believes it is important to become intimately acquainted with visitors who are planning to stay for a long time. By contrast, he thinks that it is worthless and demanding to develop relationships with people who are only passing by and may never come back (June 2013). Visitors generally sleep in a collective dormitory built for this purpose. The lack of accommodations sometimes complicates the process of accepting visitors, especially in the Principal Commune. In a period of strong affluence, members can refuse additional visitors or ask them to postpone their stay until space becomes available. But visitors can always circumvent this obstacle by bringing their own accommodations.

If the person asking for a stay knows someone living in Longo Maï, he or she will be immediately considered as a guest rather than as a stranger. In these cases, members will take extra steps to provide a comfortable room, generally by lending one of their own. In addition, guests' short stays (lasting less than a week) do not disrupt members. Visitors who return several times are also considered as guests and receive the same treatment. This difference of treatment is explained by the fact that there is a pre-existing affective bond between guests and at least one member, which constitutes the main reason for the visit. Put differently, guests are not necessarily expected to participate in the prefigurative project of the group, so they do not need to comply with the same social requirements.

Presentations at Sunday meetings. Visitors staying in the Principal Commune must present themselves during the first Sunday meeting they attend. These meetings aim at coordinating all activities and events planned for the following week. They start after dinner in what members refer to as 'the large hall', a huge room with a high ceiling situated in the middle of the commune, close to the central collective kitchen. Attendance is not compulsory, but the great majority of members are present. Every meeting opens with visitors introducing themselves to the whole group. Here again, the presentation procedure varies slightly depending upon whether the visitor is a stranger or a guest.

A stranger's introduction includes self-identification, purpose of visit and expected duration. The atmosphere does not always feel welcoming to strangers upon their arrival. This quasi-formal presentation in a large, crowded room can be intimidating. Many visitors feel uneasy upon entering, as they don't yet know the members who – for their part – are often suspicious or even critical of the intentions of the former. Specifically, criticisms arise when visitors regard Longo Maï as an ecovillage or a retreat project devoid of any political content. Indeed, they do not appreciate being associated with any well-accepted label or category because they refuse to align themselves with any fixed and transcendent discourse or ideology. At the same time, they want visitors to understand that they are actively constructing a project with a clear political undertone by trying to practise a form of direct democracy – which is necessarily shifting as it is based on individuals' differences and autonomy. The main purpose of the Sunday ritual is to 'start a conversation with visitors' (Marc, June 2013), and what is induced in these conversation is a first assessment of the visitors' values and perception of Longo Maï. Knowing them personally is important for integrating them in their democratic project. Guests, by contrast, are often presented by the members who invited them. These presentations are brief, including names and relationships with the host, as well as the intended duration of their stay. They are not asked about the purpose of their stay.

Sharing convivial moments with visitors. Once in Longo Maï, any visitor will be invited to participate in daily community life, and to socialize with others. Meals constitute particular occasions for conviviality. Each day, two or three persons prepare the meals (members have to register in a list for scheduling kitchen duty). Once the meal is prepared, people go to the communal kitchen, taking food in large bowls and setting up tables in the yard or the large hall. The first ones to arrive in the kitchen are expected to set the table for others; leaving the kitchen with just one plate is not well regarded, as they value cooperation and care for others.

More generally, participating in daily community life and interacting with members allows visitors to understand the group's values in practice. For instance, a critical aspect of life in Longo Maï lies in the concept of sharing. Kitchens and bathrooms are shared, as are most commodities such as washing machines and cars. Lending rooms and moving from one to another is quite common, and there is no lock on the doors. Members don't have a strong attachment to a particular room and don't consider it their own. Nowhere was this clearer than in the case of Alice and Philippe, two members who decided to construct a new house after living in the Principal Commune for two years. They opted not to build a private kitchen or bathroom in order to 'force [themselves] to continue using the collective spaces' (Alice, July 2013). Alice and Philippe did not consider this house as their private property. In fact, at the time of its construction, they were planning to stay for two or three years, then leave and pass it on to others. When staying at Longo Maï, visitors have to adapt to these behavioural values, be it through sharing meals or sharing one's private space in the collective dormitory. Such practices challenge the notion of private property – which can create distinctions in status – while simultaneously reaffirming equality and cooperation among participants.

Pushing toward disclosure. Another feature of integration that can create discomfort for visitors is the tendency of members to enter quickly into deep and unsettling conversations. Members do not hesitate to ask private and challenging questions about the life visitors have chosen to live, their values and dreams, etc. On several occasions the author was surprised and unsettled by these questions, which forced her to confront her own life trajectory and the possibilities of choosing alternative ways. Members also engage frequently in conversations about politics and cooperative projects happening around the world. These deep discussions are powerful mechanisms of disclosure. They can either foster the development of confidence and emotional bonds toward community members,

or distance visitors from the community. Ultimately, visitors are fully accepted if they have been able to form some affective ties of friendship with community members.

While staying in the Principal Commune, the author observed Helen, a member since the 1970s, expressing displeasure with a visitor who was neither talking to people nor engaging in convivial activities or chores. She complained that he was not participating in community life in any way, and lamented that some visitors tend to forget that they are primarily entering a home when coming to Longo Maï (July 2012). He was supposed to leave on the following day and she had the task of telling him, on the group's behalf, that he would not be welcomed back. The very few instances of 'dismissal' that the author observed were based on a failure to adapt to the community's behavioural values. However, these 'rules' of sharing, conviviality and participation are neither written nor explicitly told to visitors, who are expected to learn them on their own through participating in activities and interacting with members.

Emotional bonds of friendship structure activities

Organizing work through emotional bonds. Members are free to choose which sector of activity to engage in based on personal preferences and relationships. For Denis who joined Longo Maï a year before the observations, affinity with the team is critical to feeling integrated into a sector (November 2012). Marc (July 2012) confirms that friendship ties are crucial in the constitution of a working team. For instance, a member who plans to be absent from work for a period of time looks for a replacement among his or her friends. The replacing person's specific know-how matters less than affective ties, as the team will transmit their knowledge anyway. Respecting affective bonds and personal preferences is essential for them, as it constitutes a basis for constructing a type of equality based on personal differences and autonomy.

As community members become more familiar with visitors during cooperative activities, they see work as a way to develop friendship ties. The structure of work activities highlights the value the group places on togetherness and the potential for emotional bonds over completion of tasks, as the following vignette highlights:

> We worked quickly to finish painting the first wall. We worked in close physical proximity; in fact, the project felt overstaffed with 3 men and 3 women. Before starting on the second wall we took a long break. Lisa (a member for two years) prepared the meal, and Michel (a visitor) made a crumble for dessert, which resulted from a friendly challenge from Marvin (born in Longo Maï) the same morning. After eating, Marvin went to the nearest village to bring back some ice cream for the afternoon, and we waited until he returned (around 3 pm) before starting the second wall. The second wall was more difficult to paint, as climbing roses impeded the installation of scaffolding. As we had just two ladders, only two of us finished the work, while the others were chatting. The atmosphere was very friendly and relaxed. (Field notes, June 2013)

Work and other activities mainly serve as spaces for socialization, functioning to build affective ties. Both the way work is performed and the content of the activities reflect conscious political choices by members. For instance, the introduction of several traditional and endangered professions such as sheep-shearing, that do not bring enough yield to survive within the neoliberal economy, allows the group to develop its autonomy while contesting the search for productivity within the larger society by performing work differently. In Longo Maï, they do not seek to increase their productivity or produce. Rather, they reaffirm the importance of developing pleasant relationships with a focus on the here-and-now as the main object of working together. The emergence of emotional bonds depends on the ability of visitors and members to understand work in a similar way, as a convivial moment in which everyone invests its own skills, rhythm and energy for the

collective good, regardless of the results. Efficiency does not matter. What matters is the mere fact of doing something together in a pleasant way. In the construction site of the previous vignette for instance, a visitor tried to organize work in her own way by 'teaching' other participants the correct painting movements. Members were increasingly annoyed by her behaviour, and started to react cynically to her 'acting as a chief' (Field notes, June 2013). This behaviour contradicted their commitment to equality and autonomy which necessitates accepting personal differences and preferences, including in the way one wants to perform work. Hence, participating in daily activities enables visitors and members to embody and discuss the values of work together.

Emotional bonds trigger political actions. Longo Maï organizes and participates in a range of social movements beyond the frontiers of the communes. However, the group has always avoided becoming a professional organization devoted to a specific cause. Instead of promoting a clear political agenda based on a plainly defined ideology, the group prefers to act freely in diverse social movements echoing the values they defend. Actually, the decision to engage is primarily determined by the development of personal and affective bonds with other activists.

For instance, a European regulation forbids the selling of reproducible (non-hybrid) varieties of seeds. As such, farmers are supposed to buy their seeds every year from industrial companies in order to sell their produce in the markets. Longo Maï engaged in a project dedicated to preserving ancient varieties of seeds in June 2002, after a meeting organized by Proseeds (pseudonym for a French association specializing in the production of such seeds). Three members of Longo Maï – Caroline, Adeline and Olivia – participated in this three-day meeting devoted to discussion around biodiversity. They chatted with some members of Proseeds, who were looking to construct a network of activists willing to take action. Following this pleasant encounter, the three participants, along with other member of Longo Mai, decided to support Proseeds and invited members of this association to the Principal Commune to continue the dialogue and share ideas. Several actions stemmed from these discussions. First, Longo Maï supported Proseeds' fight for biodiversity through the publication of 12 articles in its newspaper '*Messages de Longo Mai*', and the broadcasting of 10 interviews via its radio station. Second, Adeline and Diane created two experimental gardens in the Principal Commune, where they taught themselves how to preserve a large variety of non-hybrid seeds. Third, they distributed those seeds in various barter markets in Europe. Fourth, Longo Maï organized several workshops in partnership with Proseeds in the Principal Commune's gardens, where farmers and activists learned to reproduce their own seeds. Finally, during a barter exchange in Turkey, Adeline and Diane met a farmer who was complaining of limited access to knowledge about seed reproduction – especially for illiterate farmers. This led them to develop a pedagogical DVD to reach a larger population.

As we observe from this repertory of actions, the development of personal interactions with other activists is seen as a condition for exchanging ideas and prefiguring alternative ways of producing. These actions happening on-site constitute opportunities to reach a larger group of people outside the communes to train together in producing differently. Here again, Longo Maï promotes autonomy through learning-by-doing techniques and through the refusal of a regulation that implies farmers' dependency upon large seed producers. These actions also shed light on Longo Maï's preference for experimentation and diversity rather than yield or efficiency.

Longo Maï regularly invites its large network of supporters to the Principal Commune for discussion of diverse social issues. During its twenty-first year of existence, the group organized annual congresses (each lasting a week) inviting activists and politicians from all over the world. The aim was to discuss socio-political issues and jointly devise concrete actions to resolve problems. From these events, members relate the warm atmosphere and the development of friendship ties seen as central to challenging the broader system: 'But the essential dimension of the congress

consists in the friendship ties that have developed across whole continents. We hope that these links will be strong enough to cope with a world in which the values of solidarity and hospitality are increasingly rare' ('*Messages de Longo Maï*', n°19, May 1985, p. 4). Personal and emotional interactions serve as a building block for debating political projects and assessing the potential for starting collective actions. At the time of this study, the group was still organizing events with a political tone but the drive to create 'solidarity projects' around the globe has diminished.

Producing Collective Empowerment Through Friendship Practices

Cultivating hexis *and affective bonds*

Practising hexis *while bracketing danger through hospitality rituals.* Virtual settings entail the possibility of being constantly unsettled by strangers (Derrida, 2000; Introna & Brigham, 2007). As such, they are spaces in which the fundamental questions of ethics and justice are continually experienced through the disruptive presence of the foreigner (Introna & Brigham, 2007; Introna, 2008). This is particularly discomforting because practising unconditional hospitality and letting the absolute stranger in as a friend could dismantle sameness and community (Clastres, 1980; Derrida, 2000, 2005). If the continuous implementation of hospitality is already challenging in virtual spaces, how can an intentional community practise *hexis*? Indeed, within intentional communities, members share not only interests – as in virtual communities (Ross, 2007) – but their entire lives through *Gemeinschaft* of place (Tönnies, 1988). They need to be at least partly insulated (Pitzer, 2014) to protect the unity (Clastres, 1980, p. 194) and identity of their collective self (Kanter, 1972; Zablocki, 1971).

This study sheds new light on these questions by showing how an intentional community practises hospitality as *hexis* in its everyday life; and how this actually constitutes a pillar of its identity as an activist movement. In Longo Maï, acts of hospitality are extended only to strangers willing to visit the community and potentially settle in. Contrary to kin and friends who already share ties with some community members, strangers unsettle the sameness of the home by introducing elements of difference and contestation (Introna & Brigham, 2008; Onuf, 2009; Simmel & Wolff, 1950). They represent symbolic threats in their ability to transgress boundaries (Douglas, 2004). Because strangers are constantly present among the group, this threat is ongoing. To cope with this continuous danger, members have developed a ritual of hospitality: the presentation of visitors during Sunday meetings. This weekly ritual helps them to contain and control this threat by simultaneously symbolizing and materializing the crucial moment of the encounter. For instance, even if a visitor arrives on a Thursday and actually meets members, presentation at the next Sunday meeting will still be required. In this case, the ritual symbolically marks his or her encounter with the entire group. It also materializes the act of hospitality, as names and personal stories are given. Through this process, Strangers become 'visitors' and are recognized as such by community members. Put differently, this ritual eliminates absolute strangers by giving them the status of visitors (Bourdieu, 1982), thereby alleviating some of the dangers associated with otherness.

This ritual can also be conceptualized as an act of symbolic violence consisting of a radical asymmetry between the outsider and community members (Derrida, 2000). The danger associated with the intrusion of strangers is reverted here, as the outsider bears the risks associated with disclosing her identity and purpose with no form of reciprocity. Besides, hostility – the fundamental risk contained in hospitality (Derrida, 2000, 2005) – is often released when community members openly express negative judgements regarding the outsider's purpose. Thus, the presentation ritual materializes both hospitality *and* hostility. More importantly, it brackets them in a specific space and time. This process allows the group to bound and distance the dangers associated with

hospitality from their everyday life (Howard-Grenville, Golden-Biddle, Irwin, & Mao, 2011) and thus contain and control the threat associated with the intrusion of strangers.

By showing how an intentional community practises hospitality as part of its everyday life, this study challenges the traditional conceptualization of such groups as a unified and homogeneous whole (Kanter, 1972; Pitzer, 2014; Zablocki, 1971). Rather than focus on the construction of clear boundaries, these findings suggest that nurturing porosity actually helps intentional communities to remain dynamic and relevant actors of social change.

Developing affective ties through socialization rituals. Once strangers acquire the status of visitors, they are *invited* to participate in daily communal life. However, they cannot be fully considered as guests: members must still decide if they are desirable or 'parasites' (Derrida, 2000). This is actually where emotional attachment comes into play: practising *hexis* opens up the possibility of developing affective bonds of friendship (Derrida, 2005). In Longo Maï, this is done through a myriad of socialization rituals such as sharing the meal, conversing, participating jointly in activities, etc. These various acts constitute the collective experience of living together in physical proximity. It is through this experience of repeated face-to-face interactions that people share thoughts and talks and may perceive the other as a friend (Agamben, 2004; Aristotle & Rackham, 1982; Simmel & Wolff, 1950; Summers-Effler, 2002). Visitors become guests when they develop affective bonds with at least one community member. Hence, this range of socialization rituals serves to filter and select who will gain the status of desirable guest (Derrida, 2000).

The degree of friendship need not be strong for a visitor to be accepted, and visitors are not required to form friendship bonds with all members. The degree of friendship among Longo Maï members is indeed variable. Each member is part of a group of intimate friends, outside of which the degree of friendship is reduced to peripheral and 'differentiated friends' (Simmel & Wolff, 1950). In general, members will specialize in a given activity in accordance with these relationships. Interpersonal conflicts also happen, sometimes provoking a redistribution of members within activities and communes. As such, the development of emotional bonds is an organizational principle constituting the main criterion for structuring activities and selecting newcomers (Grey & Sturdy, 2007).

The political intentionality of friendship practices

Considering strangers as potential friends and applying this terminology to guests and supporters highlights one of the central values defended by Longo Maï, which is to put the person and its otherness at the centre of the organization. This means here respecting the biological rhythms, personal preferences and concerns rather than looking for instrumental and transcendent goals such as productivity or the organization's survival as an end per se. If members put such effort into opening their doors to visitors and transforming them into friends, it is because such practices constitute the core of their political engagement. Practising hospitality towards strangers prefigures an alternative mode of sociality in which relationships are not anonymous. Knowing the Other and its 'otherness' is a prerequisite to create and maintain a form of 'complex equality' in which differences in skills do not compromise equal status (Polletta, 2002) and are on the contrary valued in daily practices. Hence, members refuse to define a clear and unified ideological discourse in order to nurture direct democracy and complex equality. The selection of 'friends' through rituals of socialization, therefore, does not operate at the discursive level. One can frequently observe heated discussions on different political or social issues, as disagreement is appreciated. For instance, the researcher was allowed to stay in the community and participate in their daily activities even if most members disliked her belonging to a business school and the values attached to such organizations. As members

refuse any fixed ideology, visitors are not required to fully adhere to the group's norms and their views are easily listened to. Letting strangers in and debating with them fosters opportunities for Longo Maï to renew its political views, claims and practices. As such, the community remains a meaningful activist site, aware of the evolutions happening in the surrounding environment. This is necessary for the group to pursue its role as an engine for activists willing to construct other communities or movements with a democratic project. By opening their doors to potential activists, the group is trying out and constantly recreating the experience of living together in accordance with the values of cooperation, autonomy and complex equality. These practices help the community to find a balance between homogeneity and difference (Brigham & Introna, 2006). The creation of friendship ties operates by breaking down the separation between everyday life and politics (Boggs, 1977; Epstein, 1991) by creating, experimenting with and experiencing different forms of social relations, decision-making, culture and human experience (Maeckelbergh, 2011; Yates, 2015). Hence, when friendship is performed as *hexis* rather than being limited to unconditional bonding, this form of sociality can stand for an appropriate basis for practising direct democracy.

In this sense, friendship becomes a political frame (della Porta & Diani, 2005; Snow, 2007) for reaffirming the importance of the otherness of the Other in performing a form of complex equality and direct democracy. This prefigures a form of sociality contrasting deeply with the impersonal character of contracts, and with the allegiance to transcendent instrumental goals which characterize neoliberal sociality. Hence, Longo Maï's form of sociality challenges the instrumental forms of action fostered by the market economy. A communal way of life based on intimacy and concern for one another stands in direct opposition to the structure of the highest impersonality of the modern metropolis, in which individuals cultivate an unconscious mutual aversion, strangeness and repulsion (Simmel & Wolff, 1950). By putting human relations at the centre of the economy and workforce, Longo Maï is opposing the prerogatives of market-based arrangements whose very functioning mainly relies on a society of anonymous and indifferent strangers (Silver, 1990; Simmel & Wolff, 1950; Smith, 2000). Contrary to the general tendency of negating alterity within organizations (Pullen & Rhodes, 2014), the group reaffirms the importance of the personality and otherness of each individual, using friendship as their political frame.

Moreover, affect-based relations constitute the main basis for cooperation. For instance, outsiders represent the main trigger for political actions. The community has participated in many diverse activities throughout its history, as the decision to act stems primarily from personal relationships. Face-to-face interactions seem to condition the engagement in specific political projects, such as the struggle for reproducible seeds. Companionable moments lead individuals to act together; affective bonds embedded in the relationships and the object of the political action act jointly in triggering such decisions. These practices conflate the private and political life through the refusal to follow instrumental goals. This is at the heart of prefigurative movements that constantly try to make the processes used to achieve their ultimate goals an embodiment of the same goals (Maeckelbergh, 2009). An emphasis on personality and affect through the development of a friendship culture also opens the possibility of introducing concertive forms of control (Barker, 1993; Costas, 2012; Polletta, 2002) and biopower (Fleming, 2013). In Longo Maï on the contrary, it fosters a lasting form of collective empowerment. This is made possible because the group constructs its togetherness around multiple and contradictory practices rather than around a clear and unified ideology, as explained next.

Collective empowerment based on praxis

Members of Longo Maï refuse to define a clear and unified ideology, concentrating instead on daily collective experimentations. This omission is important, as it constitutes another barrier to

the introduction of patterns of domination inside the group. The presence of a clear ideology may constrain the dynamism of activist organizations. The integration of newcomers in community-based movements generally constitutes a difficult challenge, especially when the group shares a tightly defined set of norms and values (Epstein, 1991; Polletta, 2002). In their study of a small intentional community, Holden and Schrock (2007) illuminate some processes through which older members (unconsciously) hindered the participation of new members in decision-making. When new members attempted to voice dissent and concerns, their claims were constantly reframed, discredited and attacked. As a result, most newcomers dropped out after a short stay and the community was therefore unable to grow and develop. Opening a homogeneous group to outsiders constitutes a potential threat that stands at the heart of the notion of hospitality (Derrida, 2000). Thus, some community-based social movements facing an increase in membership can be tempted to reinforce and preserve their ideological purity, exercising strong forms of social control in which the political engulfs the self (Klatch, 2004). This process drives the segregation and exclusion of members, rather than the integration of their concerns. Similar mechanisms can be at play in different types of organizations. For instance, Barker (1993) analysed how the self-determined value consensus of a team can be turned into strong social rules with regard to the integration of new members. Here again, the team resists such integration and excludes many to preserve their cohesive social fabric, thus enabling a nascent ideology to emerge.

As ideology refers to a discourse aimed at concealing the existence of structural divisions and conflicts (Clastres, 1980), its production would undermine an organization committed to democratic and egalitarian values (Maeckelbergh, 2009). Hence, rather than resist by articulating discursive struggles confronting the predominant and apparently hegemonic ideology (Spicer & Böhm, 2007), Longo Maï members empower themselves primarily through the experimentation and re-appropriation of fragmented practices. As has been highlighted by Marianne Maeckelbergh in her study of the alter-globalization movement (2009), unity is often resisted as it can create exclusion. On the contrary, activists prefer prefiguring an alternative democratic praxis based on the principles of diversity and horizontality. A similar type of democratic praxis is observed in Longo Maï and facilitated by the mobilization of friendship as a political frame. Practicing *hexis* implies accepting differences and disagreements instead of looking for unity. Hence, using friendship as a political frame helps the group in promoting an ethic of hospitality, as it conveys a clear intention of considering human beings as equals while recognizing their differences. When members are on an equal basis, they nurture an ability to disagree, which becomes an essential dimension of the collective life. Centrifugal forces help in avoiding the development of bureaucratic and centralized organizations (Clastres, 1987; Osterman, 2006). Ambiguity creates autonomy and ambivalence regarding norms and practices, and this is essential for resisting bureaucracy (Binder, 2007). The absence of a unified discourse facilitates the production of a culture of ambiguity and disagreement, which are necessary for the construction of a democratic project (Maeckelbergh, 2009). By prefiguring an alternative mode of sociality based on *hexis*, Longo Maï's members continually attempt to maintain a system of complex equality, autonomy and cooperation that constitutes their democratic project, which is always in-becoming. In other words, the group derives empowerment from embodying its goal of constructing a collective, democratic and egalitarian way of life in the here-and-now (Boggs, 1977; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Razsa, 2015; Wright, 2010).

An empowering process based on praxis and ambiguity facilitates the integration of newcomers and new political concerns, rendering the organization more flexible and adaptable to different generations of activists. Of course, newcomers are also expected to adapt to certain behaviours, such as sharing and participating in the collective life. However, the absence of written rules provides them with a space for expressing their concerns. It also allows them to experiment with different practices without being constantly constrained by a pre-existing ideology. This facilitates the

production of enduring and transferable forms of collective empowerment. The openness to strangers is actually essential for the survival and development of a political project. It promotes flexibility within the group, allowing members to adapt to their evolving environment. Such hospitality to outsiders may force members to question their own actions and beliefs, causing some insecurity and unease. At the same time, this ability to continuously reflect on their practices and values constitutes a powerful condition for enduring social creativity. Thus, practising friendship as *hexis* and affect produces lasting and emergent forms of collective empowerment derived from a politics of 'becoming-other-than-one-is-now' – to use Razsa's terminology (2015) – that surpasses the collective enthusiasm (Durkheim, 2012) and the transient and tremendous sense of power deriving from mass mobilization.

With an increased interest in the impact of digital technologies in new social movements, it is important to recognize the diversity of activist forms by analysing movements for which offline interactions are central. Movements need not be massive or global to offer workable everyday life alternatives to the prevailing culture. The ongoing construction of intentional communities where activists shape alternative forms of sociality are politically significant. In particular, re-socializing everyday life and encouraging a hospitable culture are powerful tools for resisting and defying the dominant system based on impersonal interactions by developing new forms of solidarity (Gibson-Graham, 2006). In Longo Maï, friendship – as *hexis* and affect – stems from a political intention that triggers collective action. Politics are not isolated from daily life. Social change is expected in the here-and-now, with activists acting together to experiment with alternative lifestyles (Maeckelbergh, 2011) and to transform their subjectivity in the process (Razsa, 2015). The structuration of sociality around the notion of friendship operates a collective empowerment through which social concerns and individual differences (Pullen & Rhodes, 2014) overcome organizational life.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Guest Editor Steven Vallas and the anonymous reviewers for their support and guidance during the review process. Earlier drafts of this paper benefited from the insightful discussions at the workshop on New Forms of Activism hosted by OCE Research Center at EMLYON Business School. My thanks also go to the people at Longo Maï for their openness.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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Author biography

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