

CREATING COMMITMENT IN AN ECOVILLAGE COMMUNITY

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Existing literature on the topic of individual commitment to social movements focuses primarily on how the internal dynamics of those movements foster commitment. In so doing, scholars have largely ignored the ways that intra- and extra- movement mechanisms work in tandem to reinforce commitment in social movements and social movement communities. This thesis draws on original data gathered through participant observation and interviews at a Japanese Ecovillage to speak to the central theoretical question: How is individual commitment to social movement communities—especially those that resemble total institutions—sustained? Building on the work of Kanter (1968, 1972) I argue that four types of mutually-reinforcing mechanisms sustain commitment in *high-commitment social movement communities*: 1) quotidian rituals and group practices, 2) individual investment and sacrifice, 3) charismatic leadership, and 4) embeddedness within transnational movement networks. I suggest that this fourth kind of commitment mechanism, embeddedness within transnational movement networks, is an understudied type of commitment mechanism that may actively reinforce individuals' affective, instrumental, and moral commitment to high-commitment social movement communities. I conclude by discussing the implications of this analysis for the study of activist commitment to contemporary transnational social movements.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Existing literature on commitment to social movements and their organizations examines how internal movement structures, practices, and characteristics produce activist commitment (Corrigall-Brown 2011; Downton and Wehr 1998; Klandermans 1997; Lichterman 2004; Nepstad 2004). Studies of intentional communities, including religious ones, also identify a variety of commitment forms and the mechanisms by which commitment is created and sustained (Kanter 1968,1972). However, insufficient attention has been paid to the existence of movement commitment mechanisms that arise as a result of linkages with *external* networks of activists. Furthermore, few scholars have attempted to address the ways that internal and external movement mechanisms work in tandem to reinforce commitment in movement settings. This thesis attempts to fill this gap. Drawing on original data gathered through participant observation and interviews at a Japanese ecovillage, I address the central theoretical question: *How is voluntary commitment to social movement communities, and especially those that resemble total institutions, sustained?* Using Kanter's (1968,1972) theory of commitment mechanisms as an entry point, I argue that such communities sustain commitment using four mutually-reinforcing kinds of commitment mechanisms: 1) quotidian rituals and group practices, 2) individual investment and sacrifice, 3) charismatic leadership, and 4) embeddedness within transnational movement networks.

In the first section of this thesis I bring together several relevant literatures that provide important context for my analysis of how commitment is created and maintained within an ecovillage community. This includes existing research on religious commitment, commitment in the context of social movements, charismatic leadership as a vehicle for commitment, and commitment within intentional communities (by this term I mean residential communities formed around a shared religion, ideology, or set of core values). The following section includes a brief description of my case, a Japanese ecovillage by the name of Konohana Family. The third section is devoted to history and background on the global ecovillage movement. The fourth section describes my methodology. Finally, in the fifth section I explicate how individuals' commitment to the ecovillage is created through each of the four types of commitment mechanisms: quotidian rituals and group practices, individual investment and sacrifice, charismatic leadership, and embeddedness within transnational movement networks.

2.0 PERSPECTIVES ON COMMITMENT

2.1 TYPES OF COMMITMENT

Scholars have long investigated how and why individuals become engaged and remain committed to social movements and institutions. Howard S. Becker's (1960) article, "Notes on the Concept of Commitment," although not specifically addressing social movements, attempted to formulate a sociological theory of commitment. Becker describes commitment as "consistent lines of activity" that persist over a given period of time, and argues that consistent behavior cannot be understood fully without also incorporating the idea of "side bets" (1960:36). Side bets, according to Becker, are the interests that make inconsistent behavior costly in some way. Sometimes, a side bet may be linked to actual financial costs (such as financial penalties that arise when someone defaults on a commitment to pay a mortgage) but Becker also discusses the *social costs* of inconsistent behavior that violates "generalized cultural expectations" (1960:36).

Building on this work, R.M. Kanter (1968,1972) is credited with developing one of the most enduring and influential typologies of commitment. Based on a study of nineteenth century American utopian communities, Kanter identifies three types of commitment: *affective commitment* resulting from relationships, emotional ties, and high group solidarity; *instrumental commitment* ensuing from a calculation of cost and benefits that result from either staying in or leaving the community; and *moral commitment* arising when the demands of a system are seen

as right, moral, or expressing one's own values (1972:73). Kanter links each of these types of commitment to specific social processes that underlie them. These include: 1) *communion*, an attachment process in which individuals give up separateness for a feeling of unity with the group as a whole; 2) *renunciation*, the relinquishing of relationships—especially those external to the community—that may threaten group cohesion; 3) *sacrifice*, a requirement that members give up something as a price of membership; 4) *investment*, the process of ensuring members have some sort of personal stake in the community, financial or otherwise; 5) *mortification*, the exchange of an individual's previous identity for one defined by the community; and 6) *surrender*, the association of decision-making with that of a higher power (1972:74). Other scholars have since extended this classification of commitment, adding to it the dimension of *normative commitment*, the feeling of obligation to remain with an organization (Allen and Meyer 1990; Klandermans 1997). The idea of “normative commitment” is distinguished from Kanter's “moral commitment” in that it has been applied to organizational settings, such as firms, where individuals may feel obligated to remain committed but for reasons other than moral conviction (Allen and Meyer 1990).

2.2 COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In addition to identifying and differentiating types of commitment, scholars have focused on understanding the conditions that create activist commitment to social movements and political struggles more broadly. Early scholarship on this topic privileged a psychological/motivational level of analysis (Cantril 1941; Feuer 1969; Glock 1964; Hoffer 1951) and sought to explain collective action and social movement participation as a function of individuals' susceptibility to

certain states of mind. Known as “convergence theory,” this approach privileged analysis of the shared beliefs, motivations, and goals of participants who engage in crowd behavior. Through this lens, collective action was seen as the outcome of convergence of like-minded individuals expressing their underlying personal tendencies.

Unsatisfied with convergence theory’s failure to satisfy the remaining question of why certain individuals are more likely to come into contact and be recruited by movements, Snow, Zurcher, and Eklund-Olson’s (1980) study of social movements and social networks shifted focus to a range of microstructural factors that account for individuals’ *differential availability* to movement recruitment and participation. Differential availability—also called “structural availability,” “biographical availability,” and “absence of countervailing ties” (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988; Snow et al. 1980; Snow and Machalek 1984)—refers to ways in which “the biographical circumstances of a person’s life may serve to encourage or constrain participation in important ways” (McAdam et al. 1988:709). Examples of populations typically considered more biographically available include college students and retirees because of their greater access to “discretionary time or unscheduled time to explore or participate” (Snow and Machalek 1993:62). While some have critiqued this concept (see Opp 2009) for its lack of specificity in terms of spelling out the entire array of costs and benefits for activist participation (e.g., one may be “biographically available” in the sense of having discretionary time, but also unavailable in the sense that one’s friends and family may exert negative social pressure regarding movement participation) the introduction of biographical availability as a concept marked a critical shift in the way scholars understood social movement participation. Snow et al.’s study (1980) found that the probability of recruitment to a movement was largely a function of whether or not an individual has a) pre-existing or emergent social ties to other movement

members, and b) the absence of countervailing social networks. This continues to inform how scholars understand and explain commitment to social movements and other forms of collective action.

Despite the influence of microstructural perspectives, other scholars of social movements have pursued psychological and motivational explanations. Paul Lichterman (1996) explores how the rise of “personalized politics” has impacted individuals’ participation in activism and social movements. Personalized politics refers to political activity arising from “personalism,” a form of individualism that emphasizes self-fulfillment, expression, development, and actualization. Personalism, Lichterman writes, “supposes that one’s own individuality has inherent value, apart from one’s material or social achievements, no matter what connections to specific communities or institutions the individual maintains” (1996:6). Drawing on ethnographic research of four environmental activist groups, Lichterman challenges the basic assumptions of the “seesaw” model, which imagines self-expression and private life as being in direct conflict with morality, political dedication, and public virtue. Countering the idea that personalism only inspires fleeting and egocentric commitment, Lichterman argues instead that the rise of personalized politics has strengthened rather than weakened activist commitment to the common social good. Personalized politics, he contends, is instrumental to “cultures of commitment,” which he describes as the “taken-for-granted ground” on which activists build democratic political communities through processes such as ideology reinforcement, identity formation, and even routine administrative processes (1996:219). Seen in this light, personalized politics reflects not merely a way to announce an identity, but also a culturally mediated form of commitment to the social good.

Literature that explores the social/psychological motivation of social movement actors also examines the process by which activists define and respond to grievances. Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford's (1986) work on "framing" explicates how activist groups' interpretive work directly impacts their later success (or failure) to garner commitment to movements and causes. *Frame alignment*, a term that Snow et al. (1986) use throughout this work, refers to "the linkage of individual and SMO interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and [social movement organization] activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary" (1986:465). The deployment of frames—and activist identification with those frames—is, in Snow et al.'s view, a necessary condition for activist participation in social movements, and can serve to strengthen or weaken activist commitment to any particular cause. Later work (Barkan, Cohn, and Whitaker 1993, 1995) also confirms this connection showing that the strength of activist allegiance to a movement is highly related to the extent to which individuals' preeminent beliefs and values are consonant with those of social movement organizations.

If initial commitment and participation in movements can be explained by ideas like biographical availability, personalized politics, and frame alignment, the question remains: what *sustains* commitment? In search of explanations for long-term activist commitment in the context of high-risk movements, Nepstad's (2004) study of the Plowshares movement (an anti-nuclear weapons and Christian pacifist movement) finds that movements survive when their leaders are able to form supportive communities where activists' identities and commitments are reinforced and strengthened through immersion in rituals and cultural practices. Such communities, Nepstad argues, function as *plausibility structures*, a term borrowed from Peter Berger (1969) who uses it

to describe the underlying social base necessary for social reality to be accepted as “real” by any group of individuals. Employing the example of the Incan empire under siege, Berger writes:

The religious world of pre-Colombian Peru was objectively and subjectively real as long as its plausibility structure, namely, pre-Colombian Inca society, remained intact. Objectively, the religious legitimations were ongoingly confirmed in the collective activity taking place within the framework of this world. Subjectively, they were real to the individual whose life was embedded in the same collective activity...Conversely, when the conquering Spaniards destroyed this plausibility structure, the reality of the world based on it began to disintegrate with terrifying rapidity. (1969:45)

As Nepstad demonstrates in her study, this concept is applicable to the topic of commitment insofar as individual commitment to a community, organization, or movement may be buttressed by structures that reinforce a certain way of perceiving reality. For instance, throughout her study of the Plowshares movement, Nepstad finds that left-wing Catholic political and social communities strengthen activists’ normative commitment by functioning as plausibility structures that reinforce countercultural beliefs such as pacifism. She argues that such communities achieve this through group retreats, and rituals that include scripture reading, singing, and prayer. Nepstad writes:

Such ritualistic reinforcement is particularly crucial since Plowshares activists often see no measurable results from their efforts. After decades of resistance, war has not been eradicated and nations have not dismantled their weapons of mass destruction... As a plausibility structure, Catholic Left communities must therefore provide an alternative explanation that underscores the importance of resistance regardless of the outcome. (2004:54)

Thus, Nepstad’s research demonstrates that perceived effectiveness is not a necessity for long-term activist commitment or the maintenance of a strong movement community.

Effler (2010) also takes up the question of persistence in the context of activist organizations, asking: “how do chronically failing altruistic social movement groups persist?” She addresses this question drawing upon three years of ethnographic research on two groups, a Catholic Worker house and an anti-death penalty group. She writes that her purpose was “to

understand the emotional dynamics of such groups, and how group dynamics either motivate the production of collective goods or drain participants of their feelings of efficacy and enthusiasm” (2010:1). First, Effler finds that groups’ emotional dynamics (their focus, emotional expectations, and understanding of themselves) affect their ability to adapt to environmental change. Faster emotional cycles lead to greater group flexibility and response, while slower emotional cycles lead to rigidity in response (2010:182). Second, she draws connections between the effectiveness and survival of social movement organizations and their ability to develop creative and flexible responses to “evolving cycles of emergence, stability, collapse, and reemergence” (2010:21). Persistence in these groups, Effler explains, involves a lot of change and unpredictability, and this adaptability is crucial to groups’ long-term survival. Finally, building on the premise that “stable social patterns can be seen as evolving cycles of emergence, stability, and collapse,” Effler argues for a more general theory of social organization that understands such patterns as emerging “when anticipation shunts action into increasingly well-worn paths” which, “collapse when increasingly rigid organization limits access to necessary resources” (2010:21). The findings from this study are relevant to the study of activist persistence, which is relatable to Corrigan-Brown’s (2012) examination of activist participation.

Corrigan-Brown expands our knowledge of activist participation through a longitudinal study of American social movement organizations. Her findings challenge the idea that social change primarily results from small, homogeneous cadres of long-term activists. Instead, she finds that the majority of social movement groups are propelled by a diverse group of individuals that may “engage for only a short time and then leave altogether” (2012:3). In fact, Corrigan-Brown argues that the “typical” activist is far more likely to exhibit episodic and intermittent engagement in contentious politics, and also move between social movement organizations.

Building upon previous research that identified two main trajectories of participation (persistence and abeyance) Corrigan-Brown develops a model that adds two additional, and intermediate trajectories of participation that she terms *individual abeyance* (episodic political participation) and *transfer* (movement among and between activist groups). By examining activist participation throughout the life course (and not merely focusing on initial engagement), Corrigan-Brown shows how individuals may disengage from particular movement circles, but not from contentious political activity as a whole (2012:9).

2.3 RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

The study of commitment in the context of social movements shares much in common with studies that examine the processes that engender commitment to religious groups, especially those that are considered deviant or unusual, often referred to as cults, sects, or new religious movements (Barker 1995; Bibby and Brinkhoff 1974; Lofland and Stark 1965; Stark and Bainbridge 1980; Stark and Glock 1965). Previous research on commitment to religious groups has generally fallen into three main camps that place primary importance on a) organizational structure, b) adherents' personal characteristics, or c) interpersonal relationships (Furseth and Repstad 2006).

In the vein of scholarship that emphasizes organizational structure, Kanter's (1968,1972) study of religious utopian communes finds that the longest-surviving groups shared a range of concrete social practices that helped to solidify member commitment and perpetuate the longevity of the society. These included features such as: a communal purse, joint ownership of

property, communal spiritual rituals, confession, mutual criticism, and dyadic renunciation.¹ Such conventions worked to create commitment by strengthening social bonds among members, maintaining control over individual behavior, and integrating members into the social system.

Other theories of religious commitment seek to explain differential patterns of recruitment by emphasizing personal characteristics (economic, social, or psychological). The roots of this perspective go back to *deprivation theory*—an approach pioneered by several 20th century sociologists of religion (Glock and Stark 1965)—who saw commitment to religious groups as compensation for absolute or relative deprivation. Summarizing the main tenets of this theoretical tradition, Furseth and Repstad write:

Compensation may be religious in a restricted sense or more ‘earthly’ in the sense that participation in a religious community provides a form of gratification or reward. Often these two sources of compensation are interwoven. The disabled person may have a religious hope of resurrection with a new body, and at the same time, experience care given by fellow believers. (2006: 112)

Beginning in the 1970s, deprivation theory was challenged empirically and theoretically by scholars who showed that middle class individuals (not those from the lowest socioeconomic strata) made up the majority of membership in established churches and new religious membership (Barker 1995; Moberg, Hoge and Roozen 1982; Roof and Hoge 1980). These critics also highlighted deprivation theory’s failure to explain why certain individuals experiencing deprivation commit to religious communities while others do not. Additionally, the rise of the resource mobilization perspective in the 1970s led to its application in the study of religious commitment. Bibby and Brinkerhoff (1974), for example, assert that devout religious commitment is in fact indicative of access to resources (rather than deprivation). They reason

¹ Dyadic relationships involve the renunciation of exclusive romantic or sexual partnerships between individuals. This can result in either celibacy (no member may have relations with any other member) or free love (each member is expected to have intimate relations with more than one member) (Kanter 1968: 508).

that this is because a person's fundamental needs must be fulfilled before they have the luxury of posing existential questions.

The third main perspective in the study of religious commitment focuses primarily on the effect of interpersonal relationships. Early studies of recruitment to cults and sects (Bainbridge 1978; Lofland and Stark 1965) find that, rather than being attracted to a group because of its ideology, individuals came to accept an ideology because of their personal ties to a group. In a study of the American followers of a Korean-based cult led by the Reverend Sun Myung Moon (popularly referred to as "the Moonies") Lofland and Stark observed that "final conversion was coming to accept the opinions of one's friends" (1965:871). Building upon this idea, Stark and Bainbridge's (1980) study examines the role of social networks and shows that the interpersonal bonds between members of religious groups and potential members (recruits) are essential to maintaining religious commitment. They find that, while ideological messages remain important, "a group's effectiveness in gaining recruits depends heavily on the extent to which its members belong to or can enter social networks outside the group" (1980:1392).

Finally, the application of rational choice theory to the study of religious commitment has yielded various insights. For example, Iannaccone's (1994) study of "strict churches" speaks to the theoretical puzzle of how organizations and institutions that require high levels of commitment and personal sacrifice are able to thrive and maintain membership. Drawing upon the idea of rational choice, Iannacone contends that "strictness" serves to make an organization attractive to potential members by cutting down on free-riding, screening out those who lack commitment, and inspiring participation from existing members (1994:1187). This in turn leads to a maximization of rewards and minimization of costs, thereby making commitment a rational action in comparison to other options available. Such rewards may come in the form of close

interpersonal relationship and social support, but can extend further. Numerous psychological studies of religious commitment find that even perceived relationships with deities can result in benefits for an individual such as the alleviation of pain caused by loneliness and exclusion (Aydin, Fischer, and Frey 2010; Altstaedten and Stephens 1994; Burris, Batson, Altstaedten, and Stephens 1994; Epley, Akalis, Waytz, and Cacioppo 2008).

2.4 COMMITMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

Existing research on commitment in the context of communes and intentional communities reveals a number of insights into the factors that strengthen commitment. For example, a quantitative analysis of census data relating to Shaker communities (Cosgel 2001) shows that continued commitment of veteran members could be predicted primarily by personal characteristics such as age, gender, nativity, and occupation. For new recruits, having kin who were already members, and the presence of similarly-aged individuals, was noted to have a positive impact on commitment, but not a strong effect on veteran members. Cosgel writes:

These results indicate that individuals at different stages of the commitment process respond differently to factors that influence commitment. Whereas personal characteristics can be the primary source of influence at advanced stages, social bonds and community characteristics can also influence commitment at initial stages. The differential nature of influences on commitment thus suggests that the maintenance of commitment in an organization depends not on the presence of the same factors for everyone but on the way the differential influences of these factors match with the characteristics of individuals, social networks, and organizations (2001:37).

These findings point to the weakness of a “one-size-fits-all” idea of how commitment is created, and highlight the need for dynamic conceptions of how commitment mechanisms play out in varying circumstances, and among individuals at different stages of membership in a community.

Hall's (1988) follow-up study to Kanter (1968,1972) adds another useful perspective on commitment within intentional communities. Using Kanter's sample of utopian groups, Hall tests the empirical relationship between communal groups, their commitment processes, and longevity. His primary innovation in this study involved sorting communal groups according to five "ideal types" drawn from Schutz (1967). These include communes, other-worldly sects, intentional association, community, and ecstatic association.² Hall discovered that groups' ability to employ commitment mechanisms vary widely by type, and that communities with long tenure may achieve commitment "through cultural structures that shape the relationship between individual and group in fundamentally different ways" (1988:679). Specifically, he finds two "pathways of commitment" that derive "from alternative cultural structures of social organization, that of the community, keyed to social cohesion via ethnicity, and that of the other-worldly sect, directed to social control through hierocratic domination" (1988:690). Hall goes on to say that, although the pathways are distinctive, they may not be mutually exclusive; organizations that combine ethnicity and sectarian hierarchy may engender commitment even stronger than either pathway alone.

² By the term *communes*, Schutz refers to "relatively individualistic, pluralistic, and egalitarian associations of family-like solidarity that lack goals of utopian perfection, or even institutional perfection," *otherworldly sects* "prophesy the apocalyptic end of time in a society at large and gather together true believers to create post-apocalyptic 'timeless' heavens on earth separated from the 'evils' of this world," *intentional associations* "promote principles of pluralism, individual freedom, equality, and justice—all based on the diachronic treatment of time as a commodity, such that the clock coordinates social action," *communities* "embrace an egalitarian solidarity and shared ideology of the 'many who act as one, temporally mediated through communion in the here and now,'" and *ecstatic associations* are defined as "a group dedicated not to reformation through doctrine, philosophy or rational scheme, but to 'breaking out' of ordinary reality by orgiastic celebration or meditation," (Hall 1988:681).

2.5 LEADERSHIP

Within the context of intentional communities, leadership is undoubtedly an important factor in sustaining member commitment. While many different types of leadership styles, roles, and structures abound across a wide spectrum of intentional communities, the study of “charismatic leadership” has long captured the interest of scholars. Max Weber was one of the first to identify and write about this kind of leadership, which he referred to as *charismatische herrschaft* or “charismatic authority” (Weber 1968). Weber borrowed this term from its religious context—charisma as the idea of divinely conferred power or talent—and applied it to the secular realm (Szelényi 2009). According to Weber, charismatic authority rests “on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him” (Weber 1968:215). Contrary to the common understanding of charisma and charismatic authority as evolving from inherent character traits, Weber saw it as derived from the relationship between leader and followers. In the words of George Ritzer, “To put Weber’s position bluntly, if the disciples define a leader as charismatic, then he or she is likely to be a charismatic leader irrespective of whether he or she actually possesses any outstanding traits” (1992:134). In practice, such charismatic authority may amplify or diminish traditional authority and adherence to established rules. Writing on Weber’s treatment of charismatic authority, Anthony Giddens underscores that “while [charismatic authority] is irrational, in that it is not calculable or systematic, it can be revolutionary, breaking traditional rule and can even challenge legal authority” (1971:160). This observation applies especially to the context of communities that seek a way of life outside of conventional paradigms of authority.

Scholarship on charismatic authority within the context of intentional communities reveals a number of interesting findings. Kanter's (1968,1972) study of utopian intentional communities sets out to explain why some communities experience longevity and others do not. She draws connections between charismatic leaders, followers' devotion to them, and their overall commitment to the communities in which they live. Communities rely heavily on the presence of committed members, and Kanter shows that charismatic leadership is an important component for many long-lived communities. She also notes, however, the challenges that communities face when charismatic leaders die or leave. Kanter writes:

For nineteenth-century utopian communities, the problem of leadership succession was an acute one. Many, both successful and unsuccessful in terms of years of existence, fell apart when their founder and charismatic leader died. Those that provided for continuity of leadership, however, managed to outlive their founders. (1972:156)

Kanter goes on to argue that while charismatic leaders may facilitate commitment and communal bonds, their contributions are often counter-balanced by the dysfunction they may create in terms of perpetuating the community long-term.

The relationship between charismatic leadership and community longevity is elaborated by Brumann (2000), who examines 43 cases of historic and continuing property-sharing utopian communes. He finds that communities dominated by one person (and one central settlement) were more vulnerable to collapse than those that put into place "a federative branch structure of semi-independent settlements" (2000:445). Examples of communities that employ(ed) branch structures include groups like the Hutterites, Shakers, Arche, and Brudherhof (2000:428). Brumann goes on to conclude that while charismatic leaders may certainly cultivate a community's longevity—provided that the membership avoids dependency on the leader's personality—communities that invest a leader with spiritual superiority, privileges, and other

powers may ultimately collapse. He argues, “While centripetal tendencies may thus be avoided, the death or demise of the central figure cannot really be transcended – a dynamic which, for that matter, is certainly not restricted to utopian communities (2000:445).

2.6 SUMMARY

Together, all these studies advance our knowledge of commitment by identifying how social ties and practices reinforce solidarity and collective identity. However, in surveying the relevant literature it is clear that these scholars fail to account for several factors. First, studies neglect to examine how extra-communal and extra-movement factors contribute to mobilization, participation, and ultimately commitment. Much has been written about transnational mobilization (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997; Smith and Johnston 2002) but little attention has been paid to transnational commitment mechanisms. Transnational commitment mechanisms are likely to be important in strengthening commitment but are different from local or national mechanisms in that they emphasize a broader sense of universal purpose. Although individuals may experience strife or challenges within their community, the knowledge that there are others around the world experiencing similar struggles for a shared purpose (whether it be modeling a healthier relationship with the planet or staving off the worst of climate change, for example) can help sustain community members/activists’ commitment to a movement. This has implications for how scholars ought to look at both the macro and micro processes of a movement; the global is often tied to the local and vice versa.

Another shortcoming of existing literature is the tendency to treat activists’ movements as separate from other kinds of institutions, such as faith-based institutions. In reality, as David

Snow and his collaborators have pointed out, the distinction is not as great as is often assumed (1980,1986). The case considered here showcases the dynamic intersection of a variety of features too often treated separately in existing literature because movements often exhibit religious characteristics and visa versa. Here I examine a community that is at once part of an international, grassroots environmental movement, but is also a spiritually-based community led by a charismatic leader. While many environmental movements, for instance, embrace the empowerment of women and minorities as leaders of environmental stewardship—Wangari Maathai’s Green Belt Movement, Vandana Shiva’s campaign against genetic engineering and the patenting of nature, and Berta Caceres’ fight on behalf of indigenous communities against the Agua Zarca Dam, to name a few—environmental, grassroots movements (and their organizational bodies) are not *always* synonymous with egalitarianism and other forms of participatory and democratic governance. By taking up the case of a patriarchal, spiritual, and ecologically-minded community, this study seeks to fill this gap in the scholarship. In so doing, I take into account how internal commitment mechanisms as well as extra-communal and extra-movement commitment mechanisms reinforce individuals’ loyalty to high-commitment social movement communities.

3.0 THE CASE OF KONOohana FAMILY ECOVILLAGE

Konohana Family, a residential agrarian-based intentional community³ of approximately 86 members located in the Shizuoka Prefecture of Japan, is a useful case for exploring commitment mechanisms for several reasons. First, it is an established community that has thus far endured the test of time. Founded in 1994 by twenty members, the ecovillage has survived and grown in membership over a span of twenty-three years.⁴ Second, Konohana Family is an example of a *total institution*. This concept developed by Goffman (1961) refers to “places of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (1968:11). As will be detailed later in this thesis, the structure of Konohana Family is such that residents have all of their basic needs met by the community—things like housing, food, and employment. While services like education and medical care may be provided outside the community, they are arranged and paid for from the communal purse. Unlike the typical example of an asylum or prison, however, Konohana has *voluntary* conscription and is more similar to Goffman’s example of monasteries or abbeys, described as “those establishments designed as

³ The Fellowship for Intentional Communities (an organization that keeps a directory of thousands of communities around the world) defines intentional community in the following way: “A group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values. The people may live together on a piece of rural land, in a suburban home, or in an urban neighborhood, and they may share a single residence or live in a cluster of dwellings” (<http://www.ic.org/wiki/intentional-communities-lifestyles-based-ideals/>).

⁴ Although reliable statistics on the rate of failed intentional communities are difficult to come by, an estimated 90 percent fail within the first few years (Christian 2003)

retreats from the world even while often serving also as training stations for the religious” (1961:16). While religious communities such as these can be coercive in many ways, abbeys and monasteries (unlike prisons and asylums) cannot keep people against their will. The study of commitment within the Konohana Family ecovillage sheds light on the larger puzzle of how voluntary commitment to *total institutions* is sustained, and especially the question of under what circumstances individuals commit to living in total institutions.

Finally, Konohana’s identification with the global ecovillage movement means it is not merely an insular intentional community, but rather, a *social movement community*. This concept, introduced by Buechler (1990), is a term that refers to social movement organizations as well as informal networks of activists. In contrast to the more rigid idea of a “social movement organization,” the term “social movement community” is inclusive of a wider variety of groups, organizations, and activist networks, and continues to be used throughout the social movement literature (Staggenborg 1998; Taylor, Whittier, Morris, and Mueller 1992). The Konohana ecovillage’s status as a residential community, as well as its embeddedness in a larger global movement, calls for the use of the term “social movement community” which takes into account such complex linkages, and provides greater analytic leverage than the labels of “intentional community” or “social movement organization.” I use the term “high-commitment social movement” to reference Konohana in order to specify and account for the uniquely restrictive and/or demanding lifestyle of participants in this social movement community that functions as a total institution.

4.0 THE ECOVILLAGE MOVEMENT

4.1 BACKGROUND

The term “ecovillage” was first coined in a 1991 report on sustainable communities authored by Robert and Diane Gilman. Today, this term has been adopted by an ever-growing number of communities that strive to meet the goals set forth in the original description:

A ‘full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future.’ (Dawson 2006:13)

In practice, ecovillages pursue ecologically sensitive lifestyles in a variety of ways that may include organic, locally-based food production, alternative economic arrangements (such as the use of local currency), permaculture design, renewable energy, green buildings, and low-impact waste management systems.

Describing a “typical” ecovillage is challenging, given the range of forms these communities may take. Litfin (2014) emphasizes the great variety, writing:

ecovillages are diverse in every way you can imagine – cultural, architectural, economic, and climatic...These sustainable communities are appearing in tropical, temperate, and desert regions; among the rich and the very poor; in cities and in all parts of the countryside. People living in ecovillages espouse beliefs rooted in all the major world religions, paganism, and atheism, as well as by a spectrum of moral codes.(2014:10)

But despite the heterogeneity, there exist some clear commonalities among ecovillages. For instance, the “village” portion of the word “ecovillage” points to vital ideas regarding scale, community, and local self-sufficiency. Ecovillages strive to be “human-scale,” a term which refers to an ideal number of inhabitants—typically between 50 and 500 people—that allows residents to know and be known by others, and to feel as though they have an ability to influence the direction of the community in which they live (Gilman 1991:10). For its part, the overarching goal of an ecovillage is to provide individual access to basic necessities—such as food, manufacturing, leisure, social opportunities, and commerce—in ways that minimize negative impacts on natural systems. The hope of many ecovillage proponents is that these communities can serve as models for achieving a high standard of living (supporting holistic human development in physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental ways) while also planning for long-term sustainability (Bang 2005:27).

A variety of socio-political factors have fueled the desire to develop sustainable and alternative lifestyles. Growing concerns about climate change, food security, overconsumption of natural resources, military conflict, and inequality have inspired individuals across the globe to join or form new communities that espouse the values they find lacking in the societies in which they live. Like other kinds of intentional communities before them, ecovillages strive to create ideal small-scale societies within the shell of the old.

In this sense, the ecovillage movement participates in what is known in the social movement literature as “prefigurative politics” (Breines 1989). This term *prefigurative politics* was first popularized by Carl Boggs (1977) who used it to reference modes of organization and social movements that seek to embody “within the ongoing political practice of a movement those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture and human experience that are the

ultimate goal” (Boggs 1977:359). In contrast to other forms of political engagement, prefigurative movements are distinguished by the importance they place on both the ends and the *means* by which they achieve social change. The term prefiguration means “to show or represent beforehand by a figure or type,” and thus prefigurative movements engage in creating the alternative social order that their members wish to see implemented. Occupy Wall Street and its spinoff social movements—which arose in 2011 across the United States largely in response to growing economic inequality—are examples of some recent movements associated with the idea of prefigurative politics (Cornish, Haaken, Moskovitz, and Jackson 2016; Hammond 2013). As a prefigurative movement, one of the principles that Occupy sought to install in its social relations was “horizontality,” a practice of shared leadership with the purpose of ensuring that each person had equal standing with the next. On the ground, this was implemented through a concerted effort to teach and share skills with newcomers. As Hammond explains:

In performing tasks, whether the mundane or those requiring skills, the more reticent or less experienced were encouraged to take leading roles, and those who were accustomed to leadership to relinquish it....They shared their skills with novices. They regarded themselves as "citizen journalists" and believed that everyone was entitled to a voice regardless of prior training or experience. For such tasks as consensus facilitation and media production, beginners were systematically incorporated and trained, immediately put their new skills into practice, and assumed responsibilities. (2013:510)

By implementing structures and processes for the purpose of disseminating important skills and leadership roles in the present, Occupy sought to prefigure the kind of egalitarian society they hoped could eventually be built. Similarly, the ecovillage movement aims to prefigure sustainable alternatives to the current ecologically destructive paradigm.

4.2 ECOVILLAGES AS A “LIFESTYLE MOVEMENT”

The idea of “the personal is political” constitutes a significant political development that Breines (1989) traces back to early prefigurative movements. As Breines explains, many of the 1960s student movements attempted to bridge the gap between personal liberation and political effectiveness in order to see them as equal parts of a single process. Moreover, these movements contributed to the growing recognition of the inseparability of people’s everyday lives and their personal politics (1989:44). Today we see a continuation of this playing out in social movements that adopt life-style strategies. Such movements have been referred to in the literature as “lifestyle movements” (Cherry 2014; Dobernig and Stagl 2015; Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012). Haenfler et al. (2012) lay out three distinguishing features of lifestyle movements including: 1) choice of lifestyle is seen as a social change tactic; 2) “personal identity work” is central; 3) these lifestyle movements follow a diffuse structure (2012: 3). To this list I add a fourth factor: lifestyle movements operate at different scales. In contrast to highly organized, party-based political engagement, lifestyle movements focus their largest efforts to create change on the individual and local level, rather than on a regional or national government scale. A prime example of the logic underlying life-style movements is the popular slogan “think globally, act locally,” a phrase that has become a leftist mantra. The message may seem straightforward, and yet there is a lot contained in it including an allusion to a particular theory of social change. It raises the question: How feasible is it to achieve broad social and political change by acting locally?

The Ecovillage movement, for its part, has tended to shy away from involvement in conventional politics, so much so that some scholars have called it an “a-political movement” (Trainer 2000). During my own time spent in the field, it was not unusual to come across

ecovillage residents who participated (or had previously participated) in protest and direct action for political causes. However, this participation was always presented to me as an individual decision, not an action undertaken collectively by an ecovillage community. What then, can be considered the Ecovillage movement's theory of social change?

The Global Ecovillage Movement (GEN) website describes ecovillages in the following way:

Ecovillages, by endeavoring for lifestyles which are 'successfully continuable into the indefinite future,' are living models of sustainability, and examples of how action can be taken immediately. They represent an effective, accessible way to combat the degradation of our social, ecological and spiritual environments. They show us how we can move toward sustainability in the 21st century. (Agenda 21)

As can be seen in the language above, GEN holds to the belief that promulgation of successful examples of ecovillages will encourage greater numbers of people to adopt sustainable life-styles. The hope of many ecovillages is that they can play a role in generating viable alternatives to the current ways in which humans interact with their environments, and that the "power of example" may ultimately culminate in a fundamental shift of the status quo.

An effort to measure the efficacy of the ecovillage strategy in practice,⁵ or to gauge the perception of efficacy held by the movement's participants, would both be worthwhile topics for future research, but an extensive examination of these are outside the scope of this study. However, I provide a brief discussion here inasmuch as these topics are material to the subject of commitment: A movement's ability to achieve its stated goals (and perception of success by its participants) is one potentially important factor that could have impacts on long-term retention of activists. Thus, the vigorous debate surrounding the Ecovillage movement's form, theory of

⁵ Some researchers have already attempted to do this using a metric called the 'ecological footprint analysis' which takes into account communities' demand of ecological resources as well as the available supply (biocapacity). (<https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/ecological-footprint/>)

change, and tactics, cannot be ignored. Is it, as some have claimed, a compelling grassroots strategy that circumvents the existing political channels to bring about needed change? Or at worst, a self-indulgent, misguided, and doomed project? Ted Trainer, a scholar who has written extensively on the ecovillage movement, echoes some of the common criticisms of ecovillages:

At present the Eco-village Movement falls well short of satisfactory performance. It includes a wide diversity of initiatives, many of which are not consciously intending to pioneer a new world order. Many eco-villages simply involve people in trying to build better circumstances for themselves, often within the rich world in quite self-indulgent ways. It is a remarkably theory-less and a-political movement. (2000:3)

Even so, Trainer sees the Ecovillage movement as a promising step towards the “simpler way,” an idea that refers to the process of transition to a more just and sustainable society characterized by simpler lifestyles, small and highly self-sufficient local economies, and cooperative and participatory governance.

Notably, these larger debates seem quite distant from everyday life at Konohana Family, suggesting that ecovillagers’ main concerns often involve more practical matters: Who will be helping with the sweet potato harvest this afternoon? How will we make sure there is enough food for the evening meal? The question of movement or lifestyle efficacy is often set aside due to the necessity of addressing immediate, pressing concerns. While I cannot claim that Konohana is prototypical of ecovillages everywhere, it is an ideal case for illuminating how commitment is created and sustained on the individual level in a high-commitment social movement community. Moreover, its arrangement as a total institution allows for analysis that sheds light on the broader puzzle of why some individuals voluntarily choose a restricted existence in the environment of a total institution.

5.0 DATA AND METHODS

In order to explore commitment mechanisms found in the context of an ecovillage, this study analyzes original data collected in the fall of 2013 during eight weeks of full-time participant observation at Konohana Family, an ecovillage located in central Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan. To obtain access I first reached out to the community via their website and inquired about the possibility of booking a one-month stay.⁶ In my introductory email I was clear about my intent to conduct research and made no attempt to conceal my academic role. Shortly after contacting the community I received a reply from a member who works in Konohana's community office. We negotiated the dates and I booked an initial month of room and board. I later extended my stay for an additional four weeks.

During the eight weeks that I lived at Konohana, I made a concerted effort to adjust the rhythms of my daily life to match that of the community members'. This meant rising early in the morning and joining in the day's labor with the community's various work crews, eating lunch and dinner in the communal dining hall, bathing daily in the community *ofuro* (bath house) and attending evening community meetings. My participant observation took place primarily within the space that is Konohana Family ecovillage's main residence building called *Himawari*

⁶ The Konohana Family ecovillage website reflects the community's high level of technological sophistication. In addition to their Japanese webpage, they have created one for English speakers with links to multiple articles, newsletters, photograph slideshows, and short film documentaries that feature the Konohana ecovillage. The website also presents the various educational seminars offered, the menu of their restaurant, and a pricelist for guest accommodation (daily, monthly, and weekly rates).

(the Japanese word for sunflower), a structure that houses the personal quarters of several dozen members as well as the dining hall where the community members dine together. The dining hall also doubles as the space where adult members gather for a community meeting every day of the week.

In addition to my observations at *Himawari*, I ventured outside of the community on multiple occasions. Once, I accompanied a group of community children and their chaperones to a field-day at the local public school. On other occasions, I spent time with the farm crew helping to plant and harvest crops. Throughout my tenure at Konohana Family ecovillage, I took copious photographs and field notes with the permission of the community leaders (in fact, I was informed that I was one of a handful of researchers who had visited the community over the years). Though I do not speak fluent Japanese, I do understand many words and phrases, which facilitated interactions with members of the community. Of all the opportunities for observation, the evening meetings provided the most direct view into the inner-workings of the community. There were three fluent English speaking members who graciously took turns sitting with me and translating during these meetings. As they translated, I jotted down notes which I revised into complete field notes and memos for analysis.

The second source of data for this study consists of two recorded hour-long interviews conducted with the community's spiritual leader, a man I call Izumo⁷. These interviews were also facilitated by the aid of a translator, and I used these conversations to better understand the ideology and spiritual beliefs of the community. In these interviews, I asked Izumo about the spiritual philosophy of the community, how he saw his role as the spiritual leader, and how the community deals with conflict, among other topics. Although I had many informal interactions

⁷ Name changed.

and conversations with numerous community members, my novice language skills in Japanese and the limited availability of the three members who could provide translation services hampered my ability to do more interviews. Additionally, I sensed that the community would have seen me as imposing a burden if I were to take community members away from their duties to conduct interviews.

6.0 COMMITMENT MECHANISMS IN AN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

6.1 QUOTIDIAN RITUALS AND GROUP PRACTICES: AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

Affective commitment refers to the type of commitment that arises from relationships and emotional ties between individuals. As Kanter (1968,1972) discusses in her work on 19th century utopian communes, communities with greater levels of affective commitment are often characterized by high group solidarity and cohesion. My findings show how affective commitment is created and reinforced in a high-commitment social movement community. During my time spent immersed in the day-to-day life of the Konohana Family ecovillage, I observed several quotidian rituals and group practices that facilitated high levels of member interaction, and, as I argue here, functioned as mechanisms that sustained affective commitment. These include: cohabitation, collective-childrearing, diet and communal meals, and community meetings.

6.1.1 Cohabitation

The community's chosen name, Konohana Family, speaks to the members' shared belief that their calling is to live as one large family. To that end, members do not live in traditional nuclear family units. Although dissolution of the nuclear family structure may seem bizarre to the

average observer, the adoption of alternative familial arrangements is well-documented among many intentional communities. Two relevant historical examples include the Oneida Community (1848-1881), a religious communal society founded by John Humphrey Noyes in Oneida, New York, and the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, commonly known as the Shakers (1747-present), a millenarian Restorationist Christian sect founded in 18th century England, both of which sought to model alternative social arrangements. In the case of the Shakers, their social norms dictated absolute celibacy and the physical separation of men and women.⁸ In the Oneida Community, restrictions on exclusive relationships and the practice of "complex marriage" meant members cohabitated with same-sex roommates rather than with romantic partners.⁹ Similarly, during my time with Konohana Family, I observed that members did not live in separate family groups, but rather with same-sex roommates in three residential buildings (each of these included bedrooms and common spaces) that were clustered less than a mile apart from one another.¹⁰

As was the case at the historic Oneida Community, most husbands and wives at Konohana lived separately from one another. The reasoning for this goes back to the community's ideological commitment to dismantling exclusive relationships for the stated purpose of strengthening bonds between *all* members. In interviews I conducted with Konohana's spiritual leader, Izumo, he went so far as to describe times that he has used his authority to intervene (and even end) romantic relationships of which he did not approve. As he explained to me, this was because of a conviction that exclusive romantic relationships will

⁸ Evidence of this segregation by gender can be seen in remaining Shaker buildings; many of which were constructed completely symmetrically with staircases on either side so that men and women would not have to pass each other on the stairs.

⁹ Surviving records from the Oneida Community do not reference any romantic same-sex relationships.

¹⁰ While I was there in 2013 the Konohana community had begun construction on a fourth residence hall that was to be home to the spiritual leader and other members.

inevitably “undermine the solidarity of the community.” Such strict policies governing relationships are a means of engendering “renunciation,” Kanter’s (1972) term describing the social process of relinquishing relationships that threaten group cohesion (see following section for a discussion of renunciation as it relates to collective childrearing).

Another aspect of Konohana’s unique living arrangement responsible for strengthening affective commitment can be traced to the community’s use of space; nearly all living areas are designated for communal, and not personal, use. Thus, I argue here that it is not simply the performance of quotidian rituals that reinforces affective commitment, it is their performance *within* communal space that serves to consistently reinforce the primacy of the community over and above the needs/desires of any single person. This in turn contributes to greater solidarity and community cohesion, which generates both group and individual level affective commitment.

The vast majority of daily interactions among members occur in the community’s main building and residence hall, *Himawari*, a former assisted-living facility that has been converted into a multi-use center. It is the first place that visitors are taken when they arrive and can be best-described as the “nerve center” of community life. Entering *Himawari* through the front entrance, one first comes across a small shop area stocked with a variety of items produced by the community: honey, rice crackers, and other baked goods. Further behind the shop is a hallway, and then doors leading to the large dining/multi-purpose room where community members take all their meals together, the place where they nap in the afternoon, fold laundry, and gather for community meetings each evening.¹¹ The *Himawari* building also contains a front

¹¹ All but the youngest Konohana members practice a long fast from the evening meal until lunch, and do not eat breakfast. This is done according to a belief in the health benefits of intermittent fasting.

office, industrial kitchen, bakery, laundry room, a handful of guest rooms, the *ofuro*, as well as bedrooms for many residents.

Yet, despite the great size of the *Himawari* building compared to the average Japanese domicile, I observed that members engaged in the same rituals one might see in a typical Japanese household. First, there was the custom of removing one's shoes and putting on house slippers when crossing the foyer of the building (removing one's shoes is standard routine in nearly all Japanese homes, and not surprisingly, was employed at Konohana too). The second important indicator of *Himawari's* status as a "home" was the communal practice of verbally announcing one's arrival and departure. In Japanese culture it is common for family members who are leaving to say, "*ittekimasu!*" meaning "I'm going and I'll come back." The family members staying behind will usually respond with the standard of "*itterasshai!*" meaning "please go and come back." Similarly, when a person returns home, it is traditional for them to announce this with the phrase "*tadaima,*" the Japanese equivalent to "I'm home!" and they will be greeted with a response of "*okaeri!*" meaning "welcome home!" Like any traditional Japanese family, Konohana members arriving or setting out typically greet each other in this way. Such a practice recreates a tradition that most adult Konohana members recognize from childhood, and creates affective commitment by reinforcing the idea of their community as being one large family.

Another important aspect of Konohana's cohabitation is the sharing of facilities such as the laundry and the bathhouse. While communal bathing is the norm for Japanese society, the daily ritual of communal bathing at Konohana Family is arguably one of the most important quotidian rituals responsible for sustaining affective commitment. This is because it is one of the few occasions for members to relax and socialize. At Konohana, communal bathing takes place

before the evening meal when members, returning from their day's work, gather at the community's *ofuro*. In general, women and young children are scheduled for the first hour, and men and boys take their turn afterwards.

The *ofuro* is located off a hallway that leads to *Himawari's* multipurpose room. Behind a sliding glass door is the first room of the bathhouse where individuals remove and sort their dirty clothes into various laundry baskets, as well as acquire a clean towel. The room beyond that is a floor-to-ceiling tiled room containing one large communal bath, about the size of a small bedroom in the U.S. On a typical day, I would arrive and take my place next to several other women, seated on low stools, who would chat casually as they washed themselves and bathed any nearby small child who would cooperate. Once finished, they would rinse thoroughly, tie up their hair, and enter the deep and extremely hot, cedar-infused soaking tub for ten minutes or so before drying off and changing into clean clothes.

In my observation, the intimate time spent together in the bathhouse served to strengthen ties among and between individuals. In a community where I was told by several members that “physical fatigue is a sign of spiritual poverty,” the bath ritual created a sanctioned (and sacred) space for members to practice self-care (albeit briefly) as they took some time to unwind from a long day and check in with each other. In this way, the communal bathing ritual helped to reinforce and strengthen affective commitment by holding time and space for relaxation and bonding between members.

In sum, Konohana's model of co-housing creates affective commitment in several ways. First and foremost, the model of housing an entire community in only three large dwellings ensures daily and unavoidable contact between members. Whereas some ecovillages, such as Atamai in New Zealand, and parts of Findhorn Ecovillage in Scotland, are laid out like

traditional subdivisions with tracts of land for individual family homes, Konohana's arrangement allows for numerous daily interactions among community members, which may help to explain its high level of social cohesion. Konohana's minimal personal space makes it much more likely that members will spend time in common areas in the presence of others. This high level of community interaction and the practice of quotidian rituals within communal spaces is further reinforced by norms that require members to participate with a work crew during the day, eat lunch and dinner with fellow members, and attend evening community meetings. If a member cannot abide this level of community interaction, s/he is relatively quickly "weeded out".

6.1.2 Collective Childrearing

Yet another element of Konohana's intention to live as one family is their policy of raising children apart from their biological parents. Children born in the community typically live with their biological mothers until they reach six months of age. At that point additional breastfeeding is believed to provide no extra health benefit, and infants are weaned and placed under the watch of women whose main community role is child care.¹² Although many of the caregiving women were childless themselves, or had adult children, there was at least one woman that I knew to be the biological mother of a child in the youngest age cohort (infants six months to three years old). Thus, having a child did not preclude a person from working as a caregiver, although it was certainly not the norm.¹³

¹² Although I did not witness this in action, it was my understanding that families with older children that join the community are slowly integrated into this lifestyle.

¹³ The reasons for this were not explicitly laid out to me, but I surmise that the community felt that biological parents, in general, may have had a harder time refraining from favoring their own child over others in the cohort, and therefore may not have been the best option for the role of caretaker.

The responsibilities of the caregiving role were many: sleeping in the nursery with the children overnight, bathing them, rising with them in the mornings, seeing them off to school, helping them with homework, and putting them to bed in the evenings. Throughout the day when most of the children were enrolled in local public school, caretakers generally worked as members of the housekeeping and laundry work crews. Children still too young for school were primarily supervised by the oldest women in the community who were responsible for folding laundry and accomplishing other less physically demanding tasks while they kept an eye on them. In the absence of their mothers, many of these infants bonded very strongly with the older women and it was not unusual to see a wailing baby putting out its arms to be held, or crawling towards one of the grannies to seek comfort.

This system of communal child-rearing with children separated into different age cohorts is maintained until children are teenagers. At that point, the academically gifted ones are afforded the opportunity to attend boarding school and then, in some cases, the opportunity to attend university. Those without academic aspirations sometimes leave to pursue other forms of training with the intention of returning, or simply join the community and are given adult responsibilities such as serving on a community work crew. Others choose to leave the community. During my time at Konohana I only met one young person who had chosen to leave. In contrast to other communities (such as the Amish) that shun members who defect, I detected no animosity or disapproval on the part of the Konohana members who joyfully welcomed her back when she came to visit with her young daughter. What this particular woman's example shows is that even in a high-solidarity, cohesive, community atmosphere, member turnover is unavoidable. Because of the community's relative youth, it remains to be seen how many of the collectively-reared children will choose to remain community members into adulthood.

In sum, my observations of Konohana's collective childrearing revealed a well-functioning system in the sense that all the children I encountered appeared healthy, well-adjusted, and showered with affection from many directions. Indeed, because of the shared parenting responsibilities spread among adult members, it was difficult for me to determine (without inquiring first) who the biological parents in the community were. This system of collective childrearing actively discourages exclusive affective connections (such as between romantic partners, and parent to child) while simultaneously strengthening affective commitment at the community level. From my interviews with Konohana's spiritual leader, I learned that this was an intentional social design aimed at engendering social cohesion by reducing member factionalism, and freeing up individuals from the burdens of child care to make them available to complete other necessary jobs. Indeed, several biological parents expressed to me their relief at being able to share the responsibility of childrearing with the entire community, and also gratitude for the freedom this created for them in terms of pursuing other roles in the community (such as leading a crew of community farm workers or working in the office as an administrator.) Several women who had been financially unstable single mothers when they joined the community spoke glowingly of the community's support for their children, and the pressure it relieved knowing that all their child's needs would be met. From my informal conversations with these women it appeared that any perceived drawbacks of communal childrearing were outweighed in their minds by the economic security and emotional support that the Konohana community provided them.

6.1.3 Diet and Communal Meals

Yet another unique aspect of daily life at Konohana is the shared special diet to which the members adhere. In a country with one of the highest per capita rates of seafood consumption, members practice strict lacto-ova vegetarianism (vegetarianism with moderate consumption of eggs and dairy).¹⁴ When asked about their reasons for not eating meat, Konohana members spoke of the environmental benefits of vegetarianism, as well as the belief that the elimination of meat from the diet is better for humans' physical and spiritual wellbeing, suggesting the role of a shared ideological commitment to the principles of environmental sustainability and spiritual wholeness. As an agrarian-based community, the Konohana ecovillage is remarkably self-sufficient in terms of local food production. This is especially significant given national trends that reveal Japan's high reliance on imported food products. The community itself takes great pride in this self-sufficiency, and even cultivates enough surplus food to sell produce directly to local consumers via a C.S.A. (community supported agriculture) model. As their entry in the *Intentional Communities Directory* boasts, "the community grows over 260 varieties of vegetables and grains, in addition to producing miso, soy sauce, and other fermented products, and only purchases staples such as sugar, salt, and spices from the outside" (<http://www.ic.org/directory/konohana-family/>).

As a visitor, I had the opportunity to assist in the community kitchen where I witnessed the dedicated kitchen crew transform Konohana's produce into a variety of complex and delicious vegetarian dishes. Undoubtedly, the kitchen crew was one of the most tireless and

¹⁴ During my time there, I learned that Konohana was in the process of transitioning to an even stricter diet as they phased out consumption of the last few animal products (eggs and milk) due primarily to concerns over the sustainability of sources of feed for the chickens.

dedicated of all the work crews I had the opportunity to assist. On their feet for hours, measuring ingredients, chopping seemingly endless quantities of vegetables, and carrying heavy vats of boiling water, not to mention all the time invested in meal planning; the effort expended was remarkable. The result of their labor was nothing short of elaborate. A buffet spread for each of the two daily communal meals (served at mid-day and in the evening) often had 10-12 vegetable-based dishes along with the daily staples of rice and miso soup. In addition to making meals, the kitchen crew was also responsible for fulfilling extra requests such as cooking special dinner platters for short-term guests, preparing special order lunch boxes for catered events, and making up the occasional celebratory dinner platter for members on their birthdays. Undoubtedly, food was one of the key ways that community members demonstrated care for each other, through small acts like making favorite dishes, devising special treats for community celebrations, and accommodating individuals with stringent dietary restrictions.

In summary, my observations on food, mealtimes, and their role in the daily life of Konohana Family reveal the importance of shared diet and communal dining as yet another mechanism for engendering affective commitment. Like bath hour, meal times presented critical opportunities for members to socialize outside of work. The common saying that “nothing brings people together like food,” was in full force at Konohana. Furthermore, the ecovillagers’ commitment to one of Konohana’s primary goals, to live lightly on the earth, was reinforced day in and day out as they consumed food made from their own, locally-grown, organic produce.

6.1.4 Community Meetings

In addition to co-housing, collective childrearing, and communal bathing and dining, I observed that evening community meetings were another quotidian ritual extremely important in the

maintenance of high group solidarity and cohesion. These daily meetings typically began around seven o'clock in the evening and routinely lasted four to six hours. Each meeting opened with a ritual that involved two people (the position rotated among the members) whose job it was to sit at the front of the room and produce a loud ringing with two different singing bowls. As this happened, everyone in the room would assume a state of meditation – many sitting cross-legged with their eyes closed. After a minute or so had elapsed, the individuals leading the ritual would stop the sound by muting the singing bowls, and after a few seconds, people would begin to stir and the meeting would begin in earnest with an agenda projected onto a screen at the front of the room for all to see.

In terms of content and purpose, community meetings were the place to discuss financial matters, make plans for community events, coordinate work schedules among members of various work crews, and air grievances. In addition, meetings were a time where individual community members might be selected to receive group criticism. While group criticism did not occur every night, I observed several occasions where members were publicly rebuked for actions or mistakes they had made that day. In many cases, the infractions appeared to be small and fairly inconsequential. For example, on one occasion a community member was publicly chastised for borrowing a personal laptop and failing to close the website tabs he had used before returning it. Not only did community members stand up and speak to the egregiousness of this act, several made statements that alluded to these actions being indicative of character flaws such as carelessness and laziness. On another occasion a community member who was undergoing treatment for cancer was questioned by other community members who suggested that her illness was perhaps an outward manifestation of inward spiritual problems. She was encouraged to

engage in deep self-reflection with the suggestion that this might help alleviate her health problems.

One question that may be asked regarding Konohana's employment of group criticism is: Why does such a practice appear to create solidarity and commitment when, theoretically, it could just as easily create division? One potential explanation is that group criticism functions as an effective mechanism for keeping members accountable, and in turn cuts down on free-riding behaviors and other actions that may harm community solidarity. In line with Iannaccone's (1994) work on strict churches, we can see members' submission to group criticism as a rational choice that weeds out those individuals who cannot withstand it. Indeed, I saw this happen one evening with a young man in his mid-twenties who was publicly rebuked by community members for failing to take a safety precaution when using one of the community tractors. In contrast to the display of contrition that I was accustomed to seeing from members receiving criticism, the young man in question attempted to justify his actions and appeared visibly frustrated and defiant when it was his turn to respond. Two days later, I learned that he had left the community. This particular case exemplifies how group criticism works to root out individuals who are unwilling or unable to follow rules, and who refuse to self-correct in the face of community disapproval.

Ultimately, affective commitment, characterized by group solidarity and cohesion, is diminished by the actions of individuals who actively disrupt the community's status quo, and strengthened by the presence of those willing to put the community before themselves. During my eight week tenure at the community, I witnessed the voluntary departure of six individuals who decided, for one reason or another, that the lifestyle of the community was not compatible with their personal needs and desires. These exits from the community, rather than signifying a

breakdown in commitment mechanisms, exemplify the community's ability to self-regulate by holding members to strict standards of behavior. Rather than bending rules on an individual basis at the risk of slippage in the ecovillage's mission and daily routines, Konohana's rigid expectations force disruptive individuals to make the choice: cooperate or depart. As a result, those who choose to remain in the community are more likely to be cooperative, thus continuing a culture of high solidarity and affective commitment.

6.2 INVESTMENT, SACRIFICE, AND INSTRUMENTAL COMMITMENT

The second primary type of commitment identified by Kanter is "instrumental commitment," which refers to the idea that the more individuals *invest* in something, whether emotionally or financially, and make personal sacrifices, the less likely they are to walk away from that thing (1972:72). At Konohana, I observed multiple community policies that appeared to be aimed at engendering instrumental commitment by soliciting principally three different kinds of investment: emotion, labor, and money.

6.2.1 Emotional Investment

One of the first ways that Konohana assesses a potential recruit's level of commitment is by requiring interested individuals to go through an initial trial period of at least twelve months. During this time, prospective members are expected to fully integrate into the life of the community by cohabitating with other members, and joining one of the community work crews. After the trial membership, the individual and the community-at-large decide if the person is a

good fit for permanent membership. The primary expectation of new members is to demonstrate commitment to the community's ecological lifestyle, spiritual practice, collectivist values, as well as have the ability (and willingness) to contribute to community life through work. This commitment is exhibited by getting along well with other members, attending all community meetings, and showing dedication to one's work assignment, among other things. Konohana's strong emphasis on work ethic makes laziness practically a cardinal sin: one person's lack of productivity is seen as a blow to the entire community.

For single mothers or elderly individuals on fixed incomes, investment most often takes the form of emotional currency. For parents, there is commitment to the community that arises from the desire to create long-term stability for their children. One woman, whom I spent many hours working alongside in the community bakery, ultimately made the difficult decision to take their child and leave the community to join her estranged husband. Yet, even after announcing her intent to depart the community, she wavered in her resolve and expressed deep concern over the effect this move would have on her five-year-old daughter who had never known life outside the community. Like most biological parents at Konohana, she felt that her connection to the community was even deeper, having committed to raise children there in the communal childrearing system. Thus, motivations to remain in the community may be based primarily on emotional investment, rather than on financial and resource-based calculations.

For some members, the decision to join the Konohana community means sacrificing relationships with kin. For members whose relatives do not approve of their decision to live in the community, maintaining outside relationships can be a struggle. Moreover, the demanding and rigorous lifestyle (members work seven days a week) leaves little time for people to visit their friends and family outside of the community. In some cases, joining Konohana eventually

leads to the severing of familial ties. Kanter refers to this process as “renunciation,” characterized by the “the relinquishing of relationships—especially those external to the community—that may threaten group cohesion” (1972:72). The experience of effectively sacrificing ties to family and friends for the sake of the community may motivate individuals with doubts about the community to double down and “make it work” rather than being forced to admit a mistake to estranged family and friends. Thus, emotional investment and sacrifice should be seen as important incentives in terms of the creation and sustenance of instrumental commitment in social movement communities.

6.2.2 Labor Investment

The vast majority of Konohana’s members are also tied to the community by way of employment: members are required by the community to invest their time and labor each day in some capacity. As is the case with many voluntary total institutions, the ecovillage has several cottage industries that are staffed by members. These include farming, catering (vegetarian food), and a bakery. In addition, the community generates income by hosting dozens of visitors each year, most of whom pay to attend week-long workshops on topics ranging from spiritual practice to philosophies of sustainable agriculture. Certainly, Konohana’s economic viability depends largely on the success of these business ventures, and that success in turn, requires strong member work ethic and commitment. Although individual schedules vary, members typically work seven days a week from seven o’clock in the morning until four o’clock in the afternoon (with breaks for lunch and afternoon tea). In exchange for their labor, each member receives a small paycheck in addition to the other communal benefits they secure in the form of lodging, food, healthcare, etc. During my time with the community, I observed how members

placed remarkably low emphasis on the possession of material goods and personal ownership. To that end, all larger, expensive items (such as cars and farm equipment) were owned, maintained, and shared among community members. With nearly every need met by the community, I was told that there was very little that members needed or wanted to purchase.

6.2.3 Financial Investment

Once a person “officially” joins the community they are subject to a number of expectations, including the surrender of absolute control over their financial resources and assets. Because of this unique financial arrangement, Konohana falls into the category of an income-sharing community. Even so, the community does not presently have a minimum financial requirement of new members. This is remarkable given that many other intentional communities have such policies in place to ward off individuals who would be a financial risk or burden. In fact, a handful of current Konohana members told me that they were struggling single parents before they joined Konohana, and that the stability of having all the basic needs met for themselves and their children was one of the first things that initially attracted them to the community.

Through a conversation with a member who works in the front office, I learned that although members are permitted to maintain their own bank accounts, any person in the community may be called upon to provide funds towards an expense that the community deems necessary. There are a small handful of individuals who join the community with significant monetary resources. An example of this is a former member by the name of Yasuo¹⁵ who came to the community after a lucrative career in business. However, after living with Konohana for

¹⁵ Name changed.

several years, Yasuo suffered a falling out with the community's spiritual leader in late 2013. Through discussions at community meetings, I learned that in the wake of Yasuo's departure, the community had received angry and threatening letters from him demanding that Konohana reimburse him for the considerable amount of money he had contributed during his tenure with the community. Although I was not aware of the exact sum he claimed to have been owed, it was a figure in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Ultimately, under the threat of bad publicity and in response to Yasuo's increasingly belligerent tactics, it was decided during a long and tense community meeting that the funds would be remitted to him.

This particular example of conflict within the community showcases the potential hazards of financial investment as a mechanism for instrumental commitment, both for individuals and the community-at-large. Indeed, investment is a viable mechanism for promoting instrumental commitment, but its power can be undermined if members believe that their financial contributions are subject to return if/when they decide to leave. In the end, Yasuo's willingness to put up a public and potentially embarrassing fight (he wrote several blog posts about his alleged mistreatment at Konohana) ultimately tipped the scales in his favor, and caused the community to bend their own rules about returning financial gifts.¹⁶

6.3 MORAL COMMITMENT AND CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

The third primary form of commitment identified in Kanter's study is "moral commitment." This term refers to the type of commitment that arises when the demands of a system are seen as

¹⁶ This example highlights the important and ever-evolving role of the internet in allowing individuals to publicize grievances, and leverage publicity, even in the context of a relatively isolated intentional community.

right, moral, or expressing one's own values (1972: 72). In her typology of commitment Kanter links moral commitment to two underlying social processes: "mortification," the process whereby individuals acquire a new social identity based upon the power and meaningfulness of group membership (1972:72), and "surrender," the association of decision-making with that of a higher power (1972:74). As I will describe in this section, both of these social processes were present at Konohana Family, as well as induced by Konohana's charismatic spiritual leader. Leadership is one factor that Kanter takes into account in her study of commitment in the context of utopian communities. However, leadership is not named as one of the six social processes (sacrifice, investment, renunciation, communion, mortification, and surrender) that underlie the three forms of commitment. Rather, Kanter understands leadership as neutral, in the sense that it can engender or destroy commitment depending on how it is exercised.

As previously noted, the Konohana ecovillage recognizes a spiritual leader, a man in his mid to late sixties called "Izumo." This was a fact that I was unaware of prior to arriving at the community, and there is no explicit mention of a spiritual leader on the community's website or blog. I first encountered Izumo working with bees in the community's apiary during my tour of the premises on my first day with the community. My tour guide introduced him to me as their resident beekeeper and mentioned that he was also their spiritual leader. As the weeks went by I began to notice the special privileges afforded him, and the important role he played within the community. For instance, at evening community meetings Izumo would often give long and meandering lectures on the topic of the universe and the significance of Konohana's place within it. At times, he would draw diagrams on a large whiteboard illustrating astrological configurations and their cosmological meanings. On other occasions, Izumo would spend time presenting slide shows with photos of his daytrips to spiritual sites, and lecture the community

about the significance of each place. In a community where members generally work long hours every day of the week, Izumo's flexibility with his time was indicative of great privilege.

I also observed a range of interactions with other members that signaled to me Izumo's preeminence within the community. At evening meetings, for example, it was not rare to see Izumo reclined on a floor mat while two women performed a full-body massage on him. Sometimes this even occurred during the course of one of his lectures. Such special treatment emphasized his respected status in the community hierarchy. Additionally, I noticed the high frequency with which community members spoke about him. While the language barrier prevented me from catching the meaning of the gossip I overheard, I did hear his name come up regularly in casual conversations. More than one community member told me that Izumo had divine knowledge of the universe and insight into humankind's role. Izumo also told me this himself in the two extended interviews that I conducted with him during my stay. Access to the spiritual leader was seen as a great privilege, and my interviews with him were scheduled far in advance and announced to the entire community at evening meetings.

Izumo's power within the community and his top-down leadership style serve to reinforce the two social processes that Kanter identifies as underlying moral commitment: mortification and surrender. Recall that mortification is the process whereby individuals acquire a new social identity based upon the power and meaningfulness of group membership. At Konohana, Izumo leverages his position of authority to ensure mortification through his dual emphasis on the members' collective identity as members of the Konohana "family," and also their collective identity as "ecovillagers." Kanter writes:

Mortification processes provide a new set of criteria for evaluating the self; they reduce all people to a common denominator and transmit the message that the self is adequate, whole, and fulfilled only when it lives up to the model offered by the community. (1972:103)

In the case of Konohana, the new identity of “ecovillager” involves members embracing a lifestyle model that emphasizes simplicity and environmental sustainability, qualities they view as virtuous and in line with divine intentions. As members of the Konohana “family,” individuals form identities connected to their roles as members of a large and complex familial unit. This involves, of course, the adoption of new practices that counter existing cultural norms around monogamy, childrearing, and financial practices.

Izumo supports the process of mortification through his lectures at community meetings, and his role as community disciplinarian. Individuals who cause conflict or struggle to live up to the norms of the community are typically referred to him to be reprimanded. Likewise, individuals deemed by Izumo as model community members, are generally afforded greater authority and respect, and may even be called upon by Izumo to give their own small lectures during community meetings. In this way, Izumo’s authority serves as both a carrot and stick in encouraging members to embrace their new identities to the fullest extent.

The second process that Izumo’s charismatic leadership supports is surrender, which refers to the association of decision-making with that of a higher power (1972: 74). Several Konohana members told me, for example, that Izumo acts as a “channel” for divine intentions which he then communicates to the rest of the community. In my interviews with him, Izumo claimed to have received divine knowledge directly from Buddha through dreams. Izumo also projects a particular vision of the global ecological crisis and Konohana’s role in being part of the solution. Central to this vision is the conviction that humankind’s relationship with the earth and its natural systems is fundamentally broken. Izumo and other members explained to me that only through “spiritual alignment” with the will of the universe can this way of relating to the

earth be repaired. Such spiritual alignment is understood as achievable by following directives channeled through spiritually gifted individuals such as Izumo.¹⁷

During my tenure with Konohana, I observed Izumo's charismatic authority as highly connected to his role as the community's spiritual guide. In following Izumo's prescriptions, Konohana members internalized his spiritual ideology and values, providing them with a framework that makes their life and work in the community seem important and directly connected to a higher purpose. This acceptance of Izumo's connection to a higher power both legitimates his leadership in the eyes of the members, and also serves to reinforce moral commitment to the community overall through the social process of surrender.

In sum, if we return to the central research question of what circumstances lead individuals to voluntarily choose to live in a total institution, it is evident that moral commitment is an important factor to take into account. As the case of Konohana demonstrates, charismatic leadership is one type of commitment mechanism that can function to reinforce social processes—mortification and surrender—that engender this type of commitment.

¹⁷ Izumo was Konohana's main spiritual leader, but the community also recognized other community members as possessing spiritual gifts. One of these individuals was a six-month-old baby fathered by Izumo. Even though the child was non-verbal, she was considered spiritually enlightened and I was told that the child communicated messages to her mother telepathically.

7.0 THE ECOVILLAGE MOVEMENT AND TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS: A NEW COMMITMENT PROCESS

The previous sections have focused on several major types of commitment mechanisms present in Konohana Ecovillage: quotidian rituals and group practices, investment and sacrifice, and charismatic leadership. This final section considers another potential mechanism that has been largely overlooked in existing literature on commitment. Put simply, it is the commitment that arises on the local level as a result of ties to larger, transnational social movements. In the case of Konohana, the relevant larger movement is the global ecovillage movement.

In the context of the global ecovillage movement Konohana is considered a model of success due to its self-sufficiency in terms of local agriculture, low carbon footprint, and longevity (twenty plus years since its founding). These aspects have led to the community being featured in several documentaries and articles. Even the *International Directory of Intentional Communities* (the most comprehensive inventory of its kind) notes that the Konohana ecovillage has received high recognition for its self-sufficiency based in organic food production, and as a “harmonious community” grounded in common economy and spirituality. In turn, this publicity has made Konohana a destination for people interested in learning about ecovillage life and practices. Far from being an insular community that shuns the outside world, Konohana actively coordinates with other ecovillages around the world, sending its own members to conferences held by larger organizations such as the Global Ecovillage Network. Some of Konohana’s

members have even served in leadership roles such as president of GENOA (The Global Ecovillage Network's Oceania/Asia).

During my time at Konohana, I had the opportunity to observe meetings where community members video chatted with representatives from other intentional communities in Japan affiliated with the Yamagishi movement, as well as with individuals living in ecovillages in China. Konohana's interest in cross-cultural exchange has also resulted in their hosting of scholars from around the globe. I learned, for example, that I was at least the third U.S.-based researcher to spend time at Konohana, and during my eight weeks with the community I became acquainted with a Japanese graduate student who was in the process of writing a paper about the community.

Konohana's openness and connections to a large network of ecovillages may reinforce member commitment at the local level in several ways. First, there is the sense of collective identity that Konohana members share with other ecovillagers around the globe. Nearly all of the problems that the ecovillage lifestyle claims to respond to are transnational in scope—resource depletion, deforestation, climate change, etc.—and as a result there is a deep sense of camaraderie with other people attempting to create alternative, ecologically sensitive communities. Haenfler (2004) describes this connection between collective identity and individual motivation to live according to principles:

The values and meanings inherent in a collective identity encourage individuals to live an integrated life, a life in line with their values. People experience unease or even cognitive dissonance when they realize their actions contradict their values (e.g., Can I call myself an environmentalist if I don't recycle? Can I call myself a feminist if I don't attend the local Take Back the Night march? (1994:796).

In this same way, members of Konohana strongly identify with the identity of “ecovillager” and work diligently to live up to the values embodied in that moniker. Thus, my observations lead me

to preliminarily suggest that the process of reinforcing collective identity strengthens members' commitment to their local community and the movement at large.

A second potential connection between commitment at the local level and the community's ties with a transnational movement is the notion of accountability. The very fact that Konohana is so lauded within the Global Ecovillage Network as a "model of success" comes with its own set of pressures – namely the pressure not to fail. Konohana members are acutely aware of their status as a model community, and strive very hard to achieve rigorous sustainability goals while also proving financially soluble, and socially cohesive. Media attention, such as has been experienced by the Konohana community's feature, can also add to the accountability pressure in the sense that communities in the public eye may feel that they have a duty to use their spotlight to further the goals of the larger movement. On the individual level, this accountability pressure may translate to higher levels of commitment to the community and its goals.

8.0 CONCLUSION

This study provides a number of insights into the question of how commitment is sustained in the context of high-commitment movement communities that function as total institutions, and why some individuals may voluntarily give up some measure of personal autonomy to live in these types of communities. Drawing upon the case of Konohana Family, a Japanese ecovillage, I demonstrate that commitment is sustained through four mutually-reinforcing mechanisms: quotidian rituals and group practices, investment and sacrifice, charismatic leadership, and embeddedness within transnational movement networks. The analysis presented here describes specific examples of group practices and structures (such as cohabitation, collective childrearing, financial investment, emotional investment, and charismatic leadership) that function to create and sustain the three main forms of commitment identified by Kanter (1968,1972): affective, instrumental, and moral commitment.

This thesis, however, also attempts to expand on Kanter's contribution with a an additional type of commitment mechanism, embeddedness in transnational movement networks. Although Kanter's study of nineteenth century utopian communes was exhaustive in many respects, her sample did not reflect the more recent phenomena of communes connected to transnational movements (such as ecovillages), which creates the potential for reconceiving commitment in new and different ways. In theorizing about the possibility of this new type of commitment mechanism, I sketch some preliminary ideas regarding how individual commitment

to social movement communities may be strengthened and maintained through ties to broader, transnational movement networks. Two potential ways that this may happen include first, the link between collective identity and motivation (the hypothesis being that people who start to identify as an “ecovillager” may feel more connected to the wider movement and, as a result, more committed to their individual ecovillage). The second potential mechanism concerns accountability pressures—the more well-known a social movement community and its members become, the more they may feel pressure to succeed at their stated goals for the good of the wider movement, resulting in increased levels of individual commitment. In conclusion, I hope that future research on this topic might provide greater insight into the mechanisms that sustain commitment among and between transnational movements. The interconnectedness of the issues facing the planet and its most vulnerable people suggest that in order to make any meaningful impact, movements must increasingly reach across state borders to engage supporters.

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