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**The Value in Imperfect Endeavors: Exploring Postcapitalist and Prefigurative Practices at
East Wind Intentional Community**

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Abstract

From the emergence of modern capitalism, people have searched for alternatives through building communal societies. The 1960s hippie movement in the United States inspired a surge of communal living, centered around non-violence and living in balance with the environment. The East Wind Intentional Community, an income-sharing egalitarian commune in Missouri, was born of this movement and still exists today, as people continuously look for ways to escape the “rat race” of mainstream society, 9-5 jobs, and economic insecurity arising from a globalized and neoliberal economic system. My research, grounded in interviews and participant observation, focuses on East Wind’s relationship with capitalism and how its members practice a less exploitative present and future for themselves. Using a constructive lens of prefigurative politics, I argue that outsiders should stop judging intentional communities with outcome-oriented frameworks and comparisons to utopia, and I advocate we instead look at the processes and relationships present in these postcapitalist systems. When looking at prefigurative politics and postcapitalism in relation, one sees that complexities and contradictions are not indicative of failure, and imperfection is inevitable. I discuss the prefigurative processes that East Winders engage with in order to live their values of autonomy and egalitarianism, the tradeoffs involved in decentralizing power, and the contradictions and complexities in management within community. I weave postcapitalist theory throughout to show how East Winders still participates in capitalism but engages in daily practices to live less exploitatively and more equally than the capitalist “status quo.” Finally, I conclude that with a prefigurative postcapitalist framework,

communities such as East Wind can be realistically understood as successful, serving as a model of what is possible for the rest of American society.

I. Introduction: Looking at East Wind Through a Prefigurative and Postcapitalist Framework

“East Wind is not utopia, but most who live here appreciate not having to deal with a ‘boss’ and having a great deal of autonomy in how they lead their life.” - East Wind website

“Don’t expect utopia; each place has its flaws. I like East Wind’s flaws better than anywhere else, which is why I’m here.” - LJ

The East Wind Intentional Community in the Ozarks of Missouri has been pitted against ideas of utopia since its founding in 1974. In 2005, *National Geographic* published an article criticizing East Wind, titled, “Not Quite Utopia”, painting its complexities as a mark of socialist and utopian failure. Similarly, community members expressed extreme disdain over *The Kansas City Star*’s article, “Dark Rituals? Orgies? See the reality of a hippie commune deep in Missouri’s Bible Belt” (2017), which provided a platform for fanatical rumors. A more positive article featuring East Wind was published by *The New York Times*, “The New Generation of Self-Created Utopias” (2020). It was evenly measured and fairly captured much of the community, yet called self-governance a “burden,” which contradicts the evidence I gathered in my research. One thing these publications make clear is that East Wind struggles to be understood by the outside world on its own terms.

In addition to much journalistic curiosity, utopia and intentional communities have also been frequently researched topics in academia. One critical piece of scholarship, “The Illusion of Permanence: Work Motivation and Membership Turnover at Twin Oaks Community” by Hilke Kuhlmann (2000), focused on East Wind’s sister community and helped inspire this study.

Kuhlmann argues that Twin Oaks Community is certainly not a utopia nor is it a successful alternative to capitalism, and its longevity should be attributed to its high influx of energetic, but soon disillusioned, new members. She says its labor system fails because it lacks personal incentives and prevents efficiency, creating tension and resentment between members. As sister communities, the labor system at Twin Oaks is highly similar to East Wind. Using Kuhlmann's research as a launching point, I explore whether or not these critiques also apply to East Wind to better understand its viability as an alternative to capitalism.

The East Wind Community is made up of about 70 people who live together on 1,200 acres of shared property in Missouri, collectively pool their resources, and commit to contributing 35 hours of labor a week to maintain community¹ and run their multi-million dollar nut-butter business. While East Winders often describe themselves as somewhere between "hippies and hillbillies," they frequently reject labels from outsiders, especially ones reminiscent of utopia. Intrigued by the alternative, outsiders to community, whether scholars or journalists, often seek to identify intentional communities either as successful or unsuccessful through an outcome-oriented framework as a way to make sense of their lifestyle. When a community falls short of utopian perfection, arguably an inevitability, they are labeled as unsuccessful.

So if utopia is not the marker of "success" at East Wind, then what should be? When I started this research, I wanted to know if East Wind *successfully* achieved egalitarianism and *successfully* departed from capitalist values, relations, and modes of production. However, I quickly learned that trying to label the community as successful or unsuccessful through the same lens that other outsiders have used would water down the reality of East Wind and erase the

¹ At East Wind, I learned the word "community" references East Wind specifically and is usually used without an article preceding it. For example, members would say, "Matt left community yesterday" instead of "Matt left the community yesterday." I used this language in my paper to accurately reflect the nuances in East Wind's language.

nuances and complexities the members communicated to me. The success of an alternative economic system and community should not be measured by an outcome-oriented framework rooted in capitalist values, nor should an intentional communities' mark of success be that of reaching or nearing the unattainable standards of utopia. East Wind's process of producing a countercultural lifestyle outside of the bounds of mainstream American society results in tensions and contradictions, but these complexities are not indicative of failure the way a capitalist framework has led people to conclude.

In its stated mission, East Wind strives to produce social relations and an economic system free of hierarchy, inequality, and exploitation of people and the environment. The community's commitment to living non-exploitably and autonomously is a constant process constructed through members' daily actions, the community's governing structure, and the labor system. In the book, *'Organizing now the way you want to see the world later': Prefigurative Politics*, Chris Dixon (2014) writes of the importance of prefigurative politics in the struggles for social change and social justice. Dixon defines prefigurative politics as, "...activist efforts to manifest and build, to the greatest extent possible, the world we would like to see through our means of fighting in this one" (83). Since East Winders are intentionally living in a way that aligns with their values, hopes, and visions for the future, I argue that East Wind is participating in prefigurative politics (Dixon 2014). Dixon also emphasizes that engaging in prefigurative politics inevitably leads to contradictions, as the injustices of the outside system one is protesting against will always leak in (103). It is impossible to exist completely independently of the outside world, a point that East Winders repeated to me again and again.

In seeking to understand East Wind's relationship with capitalism, and departure from capitalist modes of production and social relations, I found that this answer cannot accurately fit into a binary of capitalism and anti-capitalism, and instead lies with postcapitalism as a process. While Alan Mairson for *National Geographic* (2005) wrote, "The fact that a capitalist enterprise is supporting a socialist commune is an irony not lost on East Wind's founders" (116), I argue that the business's existence is a necessary contradiction, not an irony, and a direct result of how permeating capitalism is within America. Most East Wind members believe that it would be impossible to survive without engaging in "the capitalist game," but that they still may have reached an alternative to capitalism within community itself through the ways they use their money. This idea aligns with theories of postcapitalism articulated by J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006). A postcapitalist praxis explores ways to transform communities and people in order to live within, or even beyond, capitalist economies in a less exploitative way. This framework arose as a constructive and more experientially-based alternative to anti-capitalist praxis. Anti-capitalism, stemming from the works of Marx and Rousseau, is, "...primarily defined by what they oppose: capitalism, neoliberalism, globalization, and transnational corporations" (Schmid 2019, 5). Meanwhile, postcapitalism identifies diverse organizations and economies that use non-capitalist practices and resist overconsumption, commodification, and human and resource exploitation, showing that alternative economic systems within capitalism are viable and do already exist (5). It includes barter markets, Universal Basic Incomes (UBI), community gardens, community-supported agriculture, land trusts, eco-villages, and cooperatives. Paul Chatterton and Andre Pusey (2019) build upon this framework and describe the process of

postcapitalist autonomous projects and the role of prefigurative action in these projects, which closely aligns with communities such as East Wind (28, 37).

Together, prefigurative politics and postcapitalist theory build a constructive framework that, when rooted in ethnographic research, accurately understands income-sharing egalitarian intentional communities by creating space for complexity, diversity, and hope. My research incorporates the perspectives and experiences of community members while honoring the complex processes they engage in to practice alternative ways of living and build a better future. The community's participation in capitalism and simultaneous fight against capitalist norms, values, and exploitation illustrates East Wind's existence as a postcapitalist project as they push against the status quo, and illustrates that contradictions that arise within community are actually indicative of a significant departure from the hegemonic system. To push for an alternative, the community uses prefigurative processes, which focus on using just means to build a more ideal future. The prefigurative processes manifest in daily rituals and actions that members engage with to live their values of autonomy and egalitarianism. Intentional communities such as East Wind serve as a model for the rest of American society; they show that an alternative, autonomous, and egalitarian lifestyle is viable within a capitalist system when disregarding the unattainable standards of utopia. My research illuminates the crucial role of prefigurative politics in postcapitalist spaces, with a focus on process, relationality, and the inevitability of imperfection. Using this framework, this research presents an argument in support of imperfect endeavors that seek a life beyond the capitalocentric imaginary².

² Chatterton and Pusey (2019) describe the capitalocentric imaginary as the limiting view that capitalism is the dominant economic form. Capitalocentrism holds capitalism as the only viable economic system and gives no space for identifying, imagining, and building something beyond it, further reinforcing the capitalist hegemonic system (34).

II. Methodology

When looking to begin ethnographic research on intentional communities, I chose East Wind in southern Missouri as the case study site because it is a well-established income-sharing egalitarian community that has consistently had around 70 members since its founding in 1974. It is a member of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities [FEC], and sister communities with Twin Oaks in Virginia, which is also a prominent community frequently researched in academia.

I approached East Wind with my research idea over email during the Covid-19 pandemic and they invited me to attend a visitor period in the coming months if conditions were amenable. I stayed in touch with the membership team, and in June of 2021, I flew from New York to Springfield, Missouri to live in the community for two weeks. Upon settling into East Wind, I contributed to the labor quota while conducting interviews and participant observation to attempt to build the fullest picture of the community and their labor system that I could. At the suggestion of a community member, I posted a memo on the community board to explain my research and find interview participants. While some community members expressed they had been “burned” by research and publications conducted by outsiders in the past and gently expressed hesitation, many also seemed to view my presence as an opportunity to have a more accurate piece of academic work written about them. I conducted 11 interviews, 10 of which were with members that had been there for over two years. Included in the interviewees were one of the community’s founders and two long-term members who joined in the 1980s and 90s. I have taken precautions to ensure the anonymity of participants, including changing all names, as well as other identifying details when necessary.

I want to acknowledge the identity factors that my research fails to address, including race. Black, Indigenous, and people of color are at the forefront of the movement towards a more just and equitable American society. East Wind Community is primarily white, and while I cannot conclude what factors contribute to the community's lack of racial diversity, it is important to note that East Wind's home of Ozark county is 96.4% white ("U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Ozark County, Missouri" 2019). It is politically and socially conservative, exemplified by the confederate flag flying in the yard of the community's neighbor. It is highly probable that this area does not feel safe nor welcoming for many BIPOC people, contributing to East Wind's lack of racial diversity. Other forms of diversity exist in the community, including sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, and economic class prior to moving to community. While I did not research the roles of many identity factors at East Wind, I do not want to detract from the necessity and importance of racial diversity within intentional communities.

Additionally, while my research primarily focuses on intentional communities in the context of the United States, communal living has a rich history in a variety of cultures across the globe, predating U.S. and Western European communities. My focus on American income-sharing intentional communities arises from my experiences growing up in American mainstream society, and my interest in understanding these communities as a departure from, and alternative to, American capitalist culture and modes of production.

III. East Wind in Context: The Complicated History of Intentional Communities and Capitalism

Intentional communities far predate capitalism, but the rise of capitalism during the past few centuries has changed the course of communal existence (Metcalf 2012, 22). Intentional communities encompass vastly diverse lifestyles and experiences. Scholarship generally defines an intentional community as a group of at least five people voluntarily living together in order to address, and attempt to counter, inequities or social problems they see in “mainstream society.” Communities purposefully aim to construct an alternative lifestyle set apart from society, and may also unite around a common spiritual or religious goal (21). Their commitment to living alternatively occurs within their daily rituals and routines, their economic system, their governing system, and the relationships they hold with each other. This commonly looks like sharing resources, responsibilities, or other parts of their lives with each other, similar to a traditional nuclear family in the United States.

As far back as 525 BCE, long before the advent of capitalism, the first recorded intentional community, Homakoeion, existed in current-day Southern Italy. Bill Metcalf, a scholar of communal societies, explains the members did not have private property, were all vegetarian, and united around a shared vision of a better society than the mainstream. In the fourth century CE, Christian monasteries developed, and remain a prevalent form of intentional communities today. Heretical communities developed centuries later, many of which still exist, including the Anabaptist, Amish, Mennonite, Bruderhofs, and Hutterites communities. They can be found across the North American, South American, and European continents, as well as in Japan and Australia (Metcalf 2012, 22).

European colonization of America and the rise of capitalism in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries altered intentional communities' functioning. Globalized and industrialized capitalism complicated communities' existence as an isolated entity by necessitating the maintenance of a relationship with the outside world and the very system they were trying to find an alternative to. In his exploration of the history of American communes, Oved Yaacov (1998) attributed the wide-open American frontier and religious freedom as a major factor in the abundance of independent communities that existed in the early United States (3). Yaacov's analysis notably fails to acknowledge that most of the "available land" in the frontier was already settled by Indigenous people, who were forced off, killed, and cheated for American settlers to expand. Yaacov does address that most intentional communities established in early America sought to reach a more ideal society, which was a manifestation of popular utopian thought in Europe. The New World was seen as the perfect place to create an isolated alternative community and pursue utopian dreams, which was both used as motivation for, and justification of, colonialism and colonial projects (4-5).

In response to the social unrest and environmental degradation arising from a transforming capitalist society, both transcendentalism and secular thought had an immense influence on the American utopian movement in the 18th and 19th centuries. Transcendentalism, born of a multitude of philosophers and authors, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, was a popular New England-based mystic philosophy greatly concerned with social reform movements (Andrews 2017, 31). Religious communes, inspired by transcendentalism, were highly prevalent, including the well-known Shaker and Oneida communities in Upstate New York, both of which thrived for generations (Yaacov 1998, 8).

Robert Owen introduced more secular utopian ideas into American society in the 1820s, theorizing that communal living would create social harmony and economic security (9). In the 1880s, social reform movements and ideological upheaval in reaction to the social problems created in an increasingly industrialized and capitalist America revitalized utopian thought and community experimentation (6). Due to the permeating and saturating nature of capitalism, communes could no longer be completely isolated from the rest of society. In the 1890s, American socialists created communes to serve as political bases (13). Utopian communes were later removed from the socialist agenda, as many believed that attempting to separate themselves from society was actually harmful to the movement, and to effectively help everyone, the fight for socialism should take place within the political and economic realm of mainstream society (14).

When East Wind was founded in 1974, the hippie movement born in the 60s was in full swing. Hippie counterculture was defined by the anti-war, anti-sexism, and environmentalist movements, and, stereotypically, “sex, drugs, and rock and roll.” Many of these attitudes were anti-capitalist in nature, recognizing the role of profit-maximization and commodification in perpetuating war and environmental degradation. The back-to-the-land movement was one sect of the 60s and 70s counterculture and environmentalist movements, focusing on pastoral myths and reconnecting with the environment. Primarily middle-class white Americans fled to the countryside to embark on rural farming endeavors as an escape from urban industrial life. Drawing inspiration from utopian theories, many back-to-the-land counter culturists created communes based on farming and sustainable living or joined existing ones (Edgington 2008, 280-2). Communes started in the 1950s and early 60s, including Drop City and Tolstoy Farm,

largely contributed to this increasingly popular subculture that soon turned into the widespread hippie culture (Miller 1992, 74). East Wind Community was just one of the hundreds, possibly thousands, of communes established in this time, joining the movement to create a society that was slower, less exploitative, more peaceful, and more environmentally responsible than the one they sought to leave behind.

IV. A Day in the Life at East Wind Community

At East Wind, a large appeal of communal living is that every day can look different for every single member. Unless members have a self-scheduled morning shift at the ranch or nut butter factory, when they start their day is up to the individual. Most members seem to start around 7 am, first enjoying a cup of coffee on the porch of Rock Bottom, community's dining hall, and popular hang-out spot, and then beginning work early to beat the summer heat. There is a variety of work that needs to be done across community, ranging from gardens, compost (composting human waste), ranch, building maintenance, to town trips. Some of this work is split into shifts that people sign up to do weekly, such as vegetable harvests, milking the cows, processing fresh food, cooking lunch and dinner, cleaning common spaces, taking care of children, or certain positions in the business, like answering phones. Members are required to contribute about 25% of their labor hours every week to fulfilling their Industry Quota (IQ), usually completed by working in their nut butter business. If a member or visitor wakes up and does not know what work to do that day (a position I was often in) they can check the bulletin

board in Rock Bottom for notes from managers asking for help and people looking to have certain shifts covered. As East Winders say, there is always somewhere to “plug-in.”

If a member wakes up sick, they can get labor credit for their sick time. Exemplifying the relationship present between health, self-care, and community care, going to doctor’s appointments outside community is also creditable, and covered under East Wind’s healthcare system. In East Wind’s efforts to establish equality, people are expected to work only to their own ability, which they determine as a community. New parents have a reduced labor quota and there is a retirement system in place that decreases the labor quota every year after a member’s 50th birthday. Some members take advantage of that and work minimally, while others continue to do as much work as they can. While East Wind is not perfect, it is further in the direction of equality and tolerance when compared to the rest of American society, and especially their surrounding community. While every member of East Wind receives food, shelter, healthcare, and a consistent income, 22.7% of Ozark county is living in poverty (“U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Ozark County, Missouri” 2019).

At noon, the bell hanging on the porch of Rock Bottom is rung to notify community that lunch is ready. Members slowly trickle in from across the property to eat a mix of last night’s leftovers and freshly prepared vegetables, grains, meat, and bread. The prepared food is nutritious and abundant, but members are free to make their own meals as well. After lunch, a kitchen cleaning shift begins, a new shift starts at the factory, a town trip may leave, and some members may decide they are done for the day. Maybe they will use that afternoon to float down the creek around the property or hike East Wind’s extensive trails. If members work over quota, they can bank vacation hours. Full members also receive three weeks’ worth of vacation time a

year, so many members have a consistent bank of hours to draw from. They may use those hours to leave community to visit family and friends, travel, or take extra days off of work here and there. Members get \$150 of discretionary fund (DF) a month, funded by the nut butter business profits, as well as their share of extra business profits at the end of the year if there are any. Some members save that money for a vacation or spend it on beer, tobacco, and items not provided by community, such as cellphones.

There are usually community meetings scheduled a few afternoons a week, which can also be found on the community bulletin board. The meetings are voluntary but labor creditable. Anyone can propose a meeting to be called for a variety of reasons if they can get the signatures of 10% of voting members, and volunteers for scribe and facilitator. Community meetings are a large part of East Wind's governing system of direct democracy, helping to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to voice concerns and propose legislation. Meetings typically end in proposals, votes, or setting a date for another meeting for further discussion.

At dinner, the bell can be heard once again, and most everyone gathers at Rock Bottom to enjoy dinner buffet-style. After dinner, some members hang around and talk for a while, or go back to rest in their dorm-style rooms. Many of my conversations with community members occurred around mealtime, and it felt like one of the most community-oriented points of the day. People shared what they worked on that day, and I would often hear members express their appreciation, frustrations, and experiences related to that work. When lucky, I caught a conversation with long-term members about East Wind's beginning years.

East Wind was founded by a group of communards, many of whom were living in the newly formed, but highly popular, Twin Oaks Community in Virginia. They hoped the

community movement would continue to grow, and set a goal of reaching 750 members at East Wind. One of the founding members who still lives at East Wind, Elizabeth, dropped out of college to help create the community. She was inspired by the social-political movements of the time, and said living in community was a protest against, “nuclear families, middle-class America, 9-5 jobs, two-car garages, and three kids.” While Elizabeth and her peers were certainly inspired by the hippie movement, she said that they were not all hippies, and they did not tolerate the “tune in, turn on, drop out” attitude either. You either worked your fair share, or you left community. Elizabeth believes this is one of the reasons that East Wind outlived many other communes created at the same time. Today, East Winders note that “mid-western sensibilities” certainly bleed through to the community. Many members come from blue-collar backgrounds, and almost everyone works hard to support their fellow community members. There is no one type of person at East Wind, and the diversity of background, interest, and personality makes the culture vibrant and ever-changing.

V. Closing the Gap: The Necessity of Prefigurative Politics in Enacting Egalitarianism and Autonomy in Postcapitalist Spaces

“We’re protesting quietly by doing this sort of lifestyle that feels the most aligned with our values.” - Sam

Liberty and equality seem to be in constant tension in American society, but at East Wind, it is *because of* the community’s commitment to egalitarianism that they have so much autonomy, not *in spite of*. East Wind’s engagement with prefigurative politics means they are enacting processes and actions every day in the spirit of autonomy and egalitarianism, a process

that is bolstered through their existence as a postcapitalist community. Mainstream American culture and politics see these values as necessarily at odds with each other, and most people do not incorporate these values into their daily lives, rituals, and routines. Samuel Huntington (1981) discusses the gap between American political ideals and reality and believes the 1960s social and political movements, which were primarily anti-government, and the same ones that inspired the hippie movement, made this apparent. He argues the American values of democracy, liberty, individualism, and egalitarianism are anti-government, anti-authority, and anti-hierarchy in nature and therefore delegitimize American governmental structures. As a result, there is always a discrepancy and contradiction between American political ideals and actual institutions and practices (4). By enacting prefigurative processes within their communal structure, as well as personal lives, East Winders work to close the gap between their stated ideals and lived reality.

Specifically, the community's commitment to establishing egalitarianism is built into its governing structure, labor system, and legislation. With an emphasis on self-governance and direct democracy, every full member has the ability to propose meetings and changes to their bylaws and the core document, Legispol, which can be amended with a two-thirds majority. The Community Board, made up of four random members and one elected member with one-year terms, meets weekly and makes consensus-based decisions, but these decisions can be overturned through submission of written concerns by 10% of full members. By completely sharing income and resources, East Winders ensure that every member has equal means and everyone's needs are met. Additionally, the labor system is constructed in a way that intentionally values every single hour of work the same, whether it would be categorized in the mainstream as "skilled," "unskilled," "physical," or "emotional" labor. If the majority of

community determines an activity is beneficial and necessary to maintain their lifestyle, then the work is labor creditable. Because the needs of every member are met equally and every hour of work done by every member is valued the same, each member is given the same time and resources to choose their work, structure their lives, and pursue their passions as they wish. For example, if cooking, cleaning, and childcare were not shared responsibilities and considered labor creditable, then the onus would most likely fall on women, as mainstream society demonstrates. This uncredited labor would cause nearly half of the community to have far less free time and resources than the rest of the members, and therefore far less autonomy. However, this philosophy of one hour of work equals one hour of work “no matter what” is not always seen as fair by all members. I witnessed tension between members expressing that the stress or exertion necessitated by certain work is not equal to other work, or some is less essential to community than others, and therefore less valuable. In response, other members would agree or argue for the value in that work in gentle disagreement. Members constantly engaged in processes of analyzing, discussing, and committing themselves to their egalitarian labor structure and philosophy.

The governing and labor systems are direct manifestations of the commitment of East Winders to equality as a prefigurative process, reflecting a commitment to direct democracy and income-sharing. As Dixon (2014) writes, “The core idea here is that how we get ourselves to a transformed society (the means) is importantly related to what that transformed society will be (the ends). In other words, the means prefigure the ends. To engage in prefigurative politics, then, is to intentionally shape our activities to manifest our vision” (84-85). These activities also fit within a postcapitalist framework because they resist practices common to the capitalist

“status quo,” such as individual resource accumulation, private property, commodification, and socio-economic stratification based on money, skill, and knowledge acquisition (Chatterton and Pusey 2019, 41). Together, it is clear how prefigurative action is a necessary and imperative component of postcapitalist projects and vice versa. The means through which East Wind members seek to build and uphold an egalitarian society consciously resist capitalist practices within a capitalist system.

However, it is important to recognize that postcapitalism is not the “be-all and end-all,” and it will not fix all of human suffering. Chatterton and Pusey (2019) argue that, “...postcapitalism is not a roadmap for a utopian future,” because capitalism is not the only condition that creates inequalities, strife, and unjust scenarios (28). Natural disasters, sickness, war, racism, and sexism are also vehicles of inequality and suffering. While postcapitalist projects strive to create a better future, they should not be equated with utopianism because they accept the inevitability of imperfection, and recognize the unrealistic standard that a utopian label sets. East Wind members still experience conflict, inequality, and pain, despite remedying many capitalist influences.

Autonomy and freedom look different to every member, but whether that autonomy manifests in self-governance, self-managing and choosing their work, or having abundant free time to travel or pursue passions, it is clear that being autonomous and feeling free is immensely important to most members. For Alex, getting to decide what work they want to do and when they want to do it is one of the most rewarding aspects of living in community. It gives them the opportunity to pursue an artistic passion they have been interested in for a long time. Olive is deeply invested in East Wind’s gardens and growing food, and he enjoys the freedom he has to

choose to do this work every single day. Jack says the manageable labor quota gives him the free time to study what he is interested in, and he has been doing that at East Wind for the past 35 years. For John, having autonomy over one's labor was a motivating factor to move to community in the first place. Lou values that they're able to bank vacation hours and are given two months of leave a year, and they use that flexibility to travel often. These were just a few of the many experiences centralized around autonomy in community that were shared with me.

Chatterton and Pusey (2019) describe one branch of postcapitalist theory called autonomous perspectives, which I argue closely applies to income-sharing egalitarian intentional communities like East Wind. Autonomous perspectives are organizations that challenge capitalism, are critical of the "nature of the state," and employ political autonomy by self-managing their resources (37). Benedikt Schmid (2019) builds on Chatterton and Pusey, writing, "Autonomous perspectives emphasize self-managed projects that exist and thrive within capitalism's temporal, spatial, and institutional interstices. Theory and practice of autonomous approaches revolve around prefiguration— the pursuit of micropolitical tactics and the creation of alternative spaces in the here and now— as opposed to the 'politics of waiting'" (5-6). Engaging in prefigurative politics is a crucial aspect of autonomous postcapitalist enterprises, which is clear at East Wind. East Winders challenge traditional capitalist values by rejecting unlimited profit accumulation and business expansion, as well as equally distributing their money and co-owning their business, yet they still certainly participate in the capitalist system. Members are generally critical of the state and try to mitigate government involvement in their community as much as possible. Additionally, East Winders manage their own resources to ensure political

autonomy, and they facilitate autonomy for every member through their egalitarian practices, as is necessary to an autonomous project.

Life an East Wind confirms Schmid's (2019) observation that autonomous projects inevitably entail contradictions, as they exist within a capitalist system yet simultaneously use prefigurative processes to create an alternative to capitalism (5-6). When I asked members if they saw their business as capitalist, nearly all said yes without hesitation. John even said it would be an "illusory" to think otherwise. But then some members, including John, expanded on that answer and said that since community tries to mitigate their participation in the capitalist system by functioning more ethically than mainstream businesses, and because the money they make is distributed equally within community, the community itself is not necessarily capitalist. Sam commented, "...we can't fully take ourselves out of that system because of the nature of human society at this time, but we choose to do differently, where nobody is making more money than anybody else and everybody equally owns this business...". The goals of East Wind's business are not traditionally capitalist; they want to make as much money as possible for less work, but not at the cost of their own free time, wellbeing, autonomy, health, or the environment. In contrast, these are often considered "necessary" costs, or collateral damage, in a neoliberal capitalist setting, in order to achieve a certain level of profit that will then stay concentrated with a small number of people.

While East Winders want to maximize profit, it is not for the sake of just making more money, it is *actually* necessary to fund their community. Robin, one of the business managers, discussed this. She said that in her previous life in the corporate world, the goal was always to make more money, and the ability to turn a profit was the only thing that made you valuable to a

company. The difference is, at East Wind, if they want to expand the business or sell more products, they have to decide if everyone even wants to work more. They have turned down potential customers because they just do not have the capacity or the drive to increase their work dramatically, and are not in need of more money. Robin appreciates that her health, wellbeing, and time are priorities, rather than potentially collateral damage.

Because of East Wind's commitment to ensuring individual autonomy and equality of political participation and resources, the community itself cannot be a conducive environment for capitalist norms and values to thrive. Chatterton and Pusey (2019) argue capitalism is inherently incompatible with maintaining equality and autonomy because it creates economic classes with vastly unequal resources, property possession, and generational wealth. Those with fewer resources than others have diminished individual freedoms and are blocked from equally participating in a democratic system (29). East Winders fulfill their commitment to their values through prefigurative politics, illustrating the necessity of prefigurative action in postcapitalist spaces.

Many East Wind members I interviewed articulated the unlikelihood of achieving complete economic equality while still existing within a society built on stratified socioeconomic classes. A postcapitalist praxis understands the porosity of postcapitalist projects, in the sense that their very existence is predicated on capitalist relations. To say these projects are porous is to recognize they cannot exist in complete isolation, as postcapitalism and capitalism are not mutually exclusive conditions. They are simultaneously separate and intertwined, and their relationship may ebb and flow (Chatterton and Pusey 2019, 28). To prefigure means to accept that the "outside world" and its exploitative aspects will seep into even the strongest communal

spaces. Many East Wind members articulated this as well and point out that intentional communities that have attempted to live completely autonomously and isolated from society almost always fail. Additionally, trying to avoid all contradictions can lead to absolutism and perfectionism, which can create dangerously high standards, and cause exclusion and intense scrutiny of members (Dixon 2014, 100-1). In postcapitalist spaces like East Wind, it is necessary to accept the inevitability of contradiction and imperfection.

While recognizing that money and economic resources will influence life at East Wind, community still does its best to prevent the inequalities that arise from economic differences. One way they do this is by disallowing members to use any money saved from outside the community while at East Wind. Members can use outside resources while on vacation or leave, but they are expected to only use the \$150 DF a month while in community. Members are also not allowed to run or participate in an income-generating activity while living in community, unless that money is turned over to be shared. This system is run primarily by honor and not a centralized force, but living so intimately in community lends a certain social pressure that helps enforce these rules.

The ways in which money is intricately involved in the ability to join and leave community exemplifies how East Wind does not exist in a bubble completely separate from the outside world, and that postcapitalist practices cannot eradicate capitalist influence completely. However, members had some differing opinions on these issues. Elizabeth discussed how it takes a certain amount of resources to visit East Wind, such as money to travel and the ability to take three weeks off of a job to complete the visitor period. Alternatively, a member told me that those who have almost no resources and no job will come because they may see no other

appealing options to go forward. Where leaving community is concerned, one member recognized that since they have significant money saved up from their life before East Wind, they have the freedom to leave community and re-enter society whenever they want, and they actually plan on leaving soon. Community attempts to alleviate this inequality by granting “leaving loans” to those that need them. Another member acknowledged that outside resources are still a factor at East Wind and can create inequities, but he thinks that members that complain they are “trapped” in community are just irresponsible with their DF and the money they get from profit-sharing. He believes community does provide reasonable monetary assistance to leave, and it is personal irresponsibility that can hurt members. Community members' discussions of how money is relevant in joining or leaving community exemplifies their grounding in the fact that East Wind has not completely eradicated, and most likely will not be able to eradicate, economic inequalities.

VI. Understanding Tradeoffs: The Tension Between Autonomy and Decentralization

“There’s tradeoffs and it’s a sliding scale depending on what your needs are and what your experiences are... There are some compromises that you make, some are easier to wrap your head around but some are harder to wrap your head around... The things that make it acceptable for some and not for others is that the people are making value judgments... Can I accept this?” - Mac

Autonomy is deeply intertwined with and dependent on power decentralization at East Wind, but a decentralized structure also presents tradeoffs that members must accept to enjoy that autonomy, again displaying a naturally constrained and even contradictory reality.

Prefigurative politics do not exist within a binary of success and failure; they live within a constant contradiction. Dixon (2014) describes:

...The new modes we create for living, relating, and organizing always come up against the dominant social order. We can't bring a new world into being as long as current systems call the shots. And yet we can't bring a new world into being unless popular movements can envision and create something new here and now. Prefigurative activities, in sum, are always constrained and always necessary. (83-84)

Several members articulated that, for them, autonomy looks like living without hierarchies and within a decentralized structure, in line with Huntington's (1981) claim that personal liberty is anti-hierarchical and anti-government in nature. Several members mentioned the importance of the decentralization of power and government in community. They expressed that decentralization helps to ensure that both autonomy and egalitarianism are protected because, within a decentralized structure, one person does not have the means to make decisions for all of community, have more political power than anyone else, or have the ability to overpower the minority. Olive supports decentralization because he believes it helps ensure community resilience since it allows for experimentation. John also values decentralization but recognizes this is not shared community-wide. He says there are definitely members, especially older members, who have been staunch Marxists since day one. However, "I've never wanted that, that sort of large organization socialism. Decentralization is really important because the more individualized things are, the less power can be used abusively. Because all power can be abused, regardless of the setup or the ideology behind it." John sees the centralization of power as dangerous to his values, like autonomy, and also highlights the diversity in political beliefs at East Wind.

The decentralized labor system enables members to have the freedom to pick the work they want to do. A Labor Manager keeps track of the hours members work, and there is legislative protocol in place if a member gets very behind on their hours, or “in the hole,” but the main policing and enforcement mechanism for fair labor share is community itself. Social pressure, or feelings of obligation to each other, is one motivation for members to fairly contribute their labor. In our interview, Mac told me that having 70 people’s eyes on you is effective at keeping people “plugged-in.” Due to the intimacy of community living, people can usually tell if a member is not doing a lot of work and lying about fulfilling their quota. Social pressure is an informal and decentralized method of accountability that relies on social and cultural norms, rather than one person or a group of people wielding enough power to enforce the rules.

True to the theme of East Wind, this decentralized system of enforcement, power, and authority is imperfect. Indeed, a prefigurative praxis emphasizes the danger and toxicity of perfectionist mindsets and absolutism in these spaces (Dixon 2014, 102). Because the processes used to maintain autonomy and decentralization cannot be flawless, many East Winders openly acknowledge and accept tradeoffs, and even offer critiques. For example, Mac says one of these tradeoffs is that work can take longer to get done because their system does not reward efficiency. Sam believes that because community shares all of its resources, there is a lot of emotional and social labor needed to discuss and compromise on what they do with the resources. Jack told me because labor is mostly unassigned, things tend to “fall apart” until someone jumps in to do it.

John also pointed out that issues can arise from the lack of an efficiency bonus, but he believes this is necessary to preserve the freedom community desires. He observed that freedom is necessarily messy, so mistakes are made and there are inefficiencies in how they spend money or do work. This is a tradeoff the community chooses to make, because, on the other side, “totalitarianism is orderly.” If community decided efficiency took precedence over freedom, East Wind would slide closer to a hierarchical and centralized system with concentrated power. LJ also articulated this idea. He said he understands that the freedom he appreciates so much is a double-edged sword, “...It goes hand in hand, the freedom that allows me to enjoy all this autonomy is the same freedom that allows other people to maybe not do as much, and so you can’t have one without the other.” The messiness that comes along with decentralization and autonomy creates a tradeoff situation that most East Winders believe is still far better than the tradeoffs most are faced with in mainstream society. This messiness also exemplifies their understanding that striving for absolute perfection is in fact harmful and antithetical to creating a better future.

Because the personal freedom to choose work is not absolute, certain labor is mandated for all members. Living in a community that prizes autonomy yet requires certain work may seem contradictory, but as a prefigurative lens recognizes, it is a necessary contradiction. The attitudes surrounding mandated labor vary. Cleaning up the kitchen after meals, known as HtA, is not a very disliked mandated requirement, and during my stay, some members were actually petitioning to make the work voluntary because they think it would still get done. Industry Quota (IQ) is another mandated responsibility that is fulfilled by doing work for one of East Wind’s businesses, which is most often done in the nut butter factory. It varies from week to week, but

typically members are required to contribute around eight hours a week for IQ. Working in the factory is generally disliked, if not despised. While complaining about the heat in the factory, one member called the conditions “inhumane,” and older members said the work is too physically demanding for them. In our interview, Jack called factory work “mind-numbing” and antithetical to the type of outdoor work many people at East Wind seek out. However, many members said they also recognize the necessity of the work and the factory’s role in generating an income for the community, and they complete their IQ with little fuss.

Members have a complicated relationship to IQ work because they recognize it is necessary to community’s survival, but since it is mandated, it partially undermines full autonomy. Even though most members seem very dedicated to completing their fair share within community, factory work may be too undesirable for everyone to willingly complete. This situation exemplifies the limits to enacting certain values, like complete autonomy, within postcapitalist spaces. Running a business and making money is essential to East Wind’s survival, so mandated work exists even though it does not align with all of community’s ideals. Community’s acceptance of participating in the capitalist system by running a business must come with the acceptance that working in that business is also necessary. The complexities present in postcapitalist spaces that engage in prefigurative processes exemplify what it means to be an “imperfect endeavor,” without connoting those imperfections with failure.

VII. Pushing Against the “Status Quo”: The Complexities and Contradictions of Decentralization and Management

“I see East Wind as being necessarily capitalist because we exist inside a capitalist world system ... and unless you have independent wealth somehow, there is no way to get your needs met without participating in that system... But inside East Wind, nut butters creates a bubble, and inside that bubble we are not capitalist. We hold all of our property in common, we’re, at least ostensibly, not competing with each other; we share most of the resources, we self-govern, and make our own decisions, and in general, we cooperate... In many, many ways we are not capitalist.” -LJ

The decentralization of power at East Wind, while highly valued, presents certain challenges that signal the community is approaching the limits to what they can do in opposition to the outside capitalist system, as Dixon (2014) argues about prefigurative politics (103). Most importantly, perhaps, East Wind has no leader, but at the same time does not embrace anarchism like some other members of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities. In contrast, Acorn Community, East Wind’s smaller sister community, with which East Wind shares a few founding members, is explicitly anarchist; their website states that they are non-hierarchical and prefer, “a calm anarchy to prevail” (Acorn Community n.d.). At East Wind, some influence and responsibility are concentrated with the managers, who have a decent amount of power to dictate budgets, create policy, determine IQ, and verify labor hours. However, members do not necessarily see managers as bosses and do not think the position is comparable to the role of a traditional boss in a capitalist workplace. Management positions, such as Kitchen, Building Maintenance, Autoshop, Garden, and Business, are accessible to everyone and can be turned over in elections every year, and managers can also be fired by community if necessary. Many members told me of their disdain of bosses and desire to never have a boss again, so if they regarded managers as bosses, the position likely would not still exist.

Having managers in a community that values decentralizing power creates tensions. East Winders decentralize power by having no central authority, which allows for a certain amount of chaos and inefficiencies to occur, but has also decided that a certain amount of power concentration in managers is necessary for everything to run in their community. That contradiction is what members have determined to be necessary for their survival, enabling them to continue striving daily to live an alternative and non-exploitative lifestyle. Managers exist as a balance in community between decentralized power and maintaining their preferred level of efficiency and order.

A major issue I observed and heard about frequently was manager burnout. Members, typically newer and energetic ones, step up to the position for a variety of reasons. Many said they were motivated to run for a management position either because they were passionate about that particular area of work, felt like they had the extra capacity and wanted to help community out, or saw inefficiencies and mistakes being made that they thought they would be able to improve upon. The mental and sometimes physical intensity of certain management positions can quickly wear a person out. Managers are the go-to people for complaints and issues and may receive fewer thanks and appreciation than other members, which can cause managers to have to exert more mental and emotional labor in their day-to-day life than others. A few members told me that coordinating labor can be arduous, as well as even getting enough help. When some managers cannot gather as much help as they need, they usually end up doing that work themselves. This was Olive's experience, who also said since training people is time-consuming and they may not even stick with that work, sometimes he would just rather do all the work himself. I also spoke with LJ, a newer member of the General Management Team. He was

motivated to run for the position because he really believes in East Wind, and his dream is to potentially expand the community and become more self-sufficient. He recognized the contradiction of making more money in order to potentially not have to run the business anymore, but he said money is needed to catalyze that vision. LJ also recognized the added responsibility and stress of the management position, and it already seemed to be weighing on him. He was working with the Sanitation Manager because she was consistently struggling to get enough people to do sanitation shifts in the factory, and would end up doing many of those shifts herself. LJ said the fact that she was stressed out and potentially burning out also stressed him out, exemplifying the extra emotional labor he was enduring in his management position. The last day I was in East Wind, the Sanitation Manager resigned.

LJ shared a saying with me that he was told from another friend in community, “At East Wind, there’s opposite gravity here, where shit rolls uphill,” meaning, “the more responsibilities you take on, the more problems you have.” He believes there comes a point for some managers when they realize they have, “intense responsibility and no tangible benefit,” and so they decide that the position is not worth the added stress anymore, or they reach burnout and resign.

Founding member Elizabeth and I talked extensively about these disincentives to managing in community, and these discussions, alongside community observations, signal that East Wind is facing a significant problem. The community has yet to find a way to reward management that does not elevate one person’s status over others’ or give them more resources, such as money or a reduced labor quota. She tossed around the idea of enlightened self-interest- the understanding that if you do not step up then the community may fail and you could starve, so it makes sense to take on a position of responsibility- but she does not actually know how far

or deeply that can motivate everyone. Elizabeth also said, on the flip side, community tends to not want people in management who are too eager to take on the position either. She believes their culture is not amenable to someone coming in and thinking they could do a job better than others and trying to direct each other around. And even if they have good intentions (and good ideas), Elizabeth thinks they “can screw it up bad.” This culture diverges from that of a conventional capitalist workplace, which rewards drive and productivity.

During my two-week stay, I witnessed the issues that arise from power distribution in management, as well as community attitude towards some management positions. A conflict occurred between members of the General Management Team (GMT) and community, where eagerness to potentially expand the business, a breakdown in communication, and differing intentions regarding a television advertisement resulted in resentment, tension, and even a manager offering to resign. Certain GMT members wanted to pay for a business advertisement, but many other community members disagreed with the decision. They felt it was either pointless because they are not looking to expand the business, simply not a good allocation of their money, antithetical to their alternative business values, or members did not want to be filmed and put into any kind of spotlight on television. The filming for the advertisement occurred at the end of my stay, resulting in some unhappy members. The day I left East Wind, a notice was put up, calling for a community-wide meeting to discuss the conflict and the discrepancies between community’s goal and GMT’s goal for the business.

Management seems necessary to East Wind’s functioning but presents a large issue that has yet to be entirely resolved, as clearly shown with manager burnout and in the conflict between GMT and some of community. I discussed potential resolutions with many members

during my stay and observed others discussing the issue between themselves. Some managers of seemingly less intense positions said they do enjoy that work and do not actually run into many issues. Others who held managerial positions in the past said they avoided complete burnout by taking leaves from community and stepping back from the position when necessary. John told me that taking a break from community is great for a reset, and people who never leave community tend to lose sight of the bigger picture and fixate on small problems. Olive was thinking about possible ways to fix the problems with management, and he said he may be okay with some kind of incentive because the positions are accessible to everyone, but that may oppose their egalitarian values. Elizabeth said that maybe just showing extra appreciation to managers and complaining less will help prevent burnout, but overall she says, “responsibility is a big fat problem that our labor system can’t seem to solve.”

At first, these issues concerning management and taking on extra responsibility seem discouraging. It appears to be a significant problem at East Wind, and likely in many other communities with similar labor systems. However, a prefigurative lens offers a different reading. The complexities and messiness that come with having positions of extra responsibility in a non-hierarchical egalitarian community is actually a signal that East Wind is reaching the limit to what they can do in opposition to the outside world while still existing within the greater capitalist system (Dixon 2014, 103). East Wind’s labor system, including management, does not incentivize or reward work the same way American society typically does. Taking on extra responsibilities and leadership positions in American workplaces is usually synonymous with more money, more benefits, or even the possibility that taking on more work could be rewarding in the future. East Winders remain committed to one hour equaling one hour of work, no matter

the type of work the member does or the energy put into it, which is in direct opposition to American society's wage inequality, career hierarchy, and economic class system. While still participating in a capitalist system, East Wind members are trying to find a less exploitative alternative to the traditional capitalist enterprise, epitomizing community's role as a postcapitalist organization. The problems arising out of not using materials or money to incentivize managers exemplify that East Winders are pushing against the status quo. It seems that they would rather have the issues they are currently facing than introduce money or resource inequality into community to try to solve them. Community is employing prefigurative processes by using as non-exploitative means that align with their values as possible, in order to push the boundaries of what capitalism has normed.

Regarding responsibility in their labor system, East Wind may have reached a boundary to what is possible while still existing within a capitalist society partially because most members have been raised with a capitalist mindset. Elizabeth said that many members, whether consciously or subconsciously, seek a reward for taking on extra responsibility as a manager because they were indoctrinated with a capitalist mindset from birth. This mindset makes it difficult to always feel fulfilled participating in East Wind's labor system because community does not incentivize or reward taking on more responsibility and stress. It is not the members' fault that they were raised in a capitalist society that equates workplace responsibility with reward, and it takes a conscious process of unlearning capitalist culture to let that go. However, there are still definite issues with communication, how managers are treated by other members, and motivating non-managers to step up to help more, so managers' mindset is only one small

piece of the puzzle. Because building a postcapitalist space is so complex, East Wind's issues surrounding management are multi-dimensional, necessitating multi-dimensional solutions.

As far as finding that solution goes, Dixon (2014) argues that when limits are reached, experimentation with prefigurative activities can actually shift and change the limits (104). Experimentation involves failures and setbacks, but these failures overall benefit an organization because experimenting can help discover new processes capable of pushing past a seemingly impenetrable boundary. As complex and discouraging as East Wind's problems with management and responsibility may seem, it shows how far they have come from the status quo, and gives community an opportunity to experiment with their own system and processes to push even further away. East Wind's website states that its bylaws are, "intentionally minimal in their restrictions," in order to allow for experimentation. Through my conversations with Elizabeth, Olive, and other members, it was clear that community members are thinking of and discussing new ways to experiment and solve this issue. It may be difficult to get the majority of community on board for a major change, but that discussion is being had. Prefigurative politics display, once again, how understanding a project or organization outside of a binary of success and failure can illustrate its achievements and true potential. Being and building a postcapitalist enterprise is a dynamic process that will ebb and flow and experience setbacks and complex issues. Judging an entire community through one issue captured in a two-week span of time is short-sighted and limiting. Rather, understanding East Wind as a prefigurative process, imperfect but still more equal and autonomous than most of American society, is constructive and truer to community's lived experiences.

VIII. Conclusion: The Legacy of an Imperfect Endeavor

“45 years is not enough to tell what, as a social experiment, what we’ve done here. But as an educational social modeling, it will, in the long run, be our biggest success, because literally thousands of people have come through the federation communities, and gone off and learned things about themselves personally or how to act differently in the outside world.” - Elizabeth

East Wind Community reveals that there is immense value to be found in imperfect endeavors. As this research shows, one is able to better recognize this through a constructive framework of prefigurative politics and postcapitalism. At East Wind, members engage daily in practices of autonomy and egalitarianism. They seek a balance between their commitment to decentralization and necessary management tradeoffs in a persistent effort to break from the capitalist status quo. Life at East Wind also suggests that an alternative to mainstream society is possible by relinquishing expectations of utopia. Building a postcapitalist space that is less exploitative, more autonomous, and more equal than American mainstream society is complex, but its complexities do not make it any less viable.

The framework used in this research contrasts with that used in Kuhlmann’s (2000) previous research on Twin Oaks, and it arrives at different conclusions. Kuhlmann argues that the community’s high membership turnover was primarily due to dissatisfaction with the labor system arising from frustrations among members, feelings of unappreciation, and lack of an incentive or reward to work hard. Following this logic, Twin Oaks’ membership turnover signifies that the community has not successfully achieved a viable alternative to capitalism (159). Kuhlmann also claimed that a cooperative system rooted in working for the common good

is therefore unlikely to be successful; rather, the competition and reward system of the traditional capitalist workplace is a necessary motivation for most people (166). Despite its interest in alternatives, Kuhlmann's work ultimately assumes a capitalocentric lens, unable to imagine an economic alternative and equating complexities and contradictions to failure.

Kuhlmann is correct in that intentional communities, including East Wind, experience high membership turnover. However, most East Winders actually do not attribute the majority of their turnover to dissatisfaction with the labor system. Rather, they recognize that a multitude of reasons can cause a member to leave, including the remote location of community and subsequent feelings of isolation, wanting to meet new people, desiring a different place to start or raise a family, or simply not wanting to settle down in one place forever. American society lives in a moment of mobility and flexibility, and for many, that does not change when joining a community, especially as a young person. Several members told me that they do not expect young people to stay at East Wind for the rest of their lives, nor should they. Robin said young people should be jostled around by the outside world, see what is out there, and then decide if they want this to be their permanent home. Mac, a young man himself, told me he does not intend to stay at East Wind forever. He does not want to leave because he is dissatisfied in any way, rather, he just wants to experience a larger diversity of places and people than he can get at East Wind.

East Winders repeatedly told me how joining community, even for a short amount of time, forever changes a person. The perspectives and experiences one gains from communal living cannot be learned in mainstream society, and members take that knowledge with them wherever they go. Elizabeth discussed how communal experiences can be put to use

incorporating more cooperative and non-capitalist practices in mainstream society. Even Elizabeth herself, a founding member of East Wind, left community as a young woman. During her time away, she sought out or built community spaces wherever she went, spreading postcapitalist ideas throughout her journeys. The impact ex-members have had on American society is immeasurable, but they have undoubtedly contributed to reducing exploitation and increasing community spaces, rather than the other way around.

In other words, East Winders do not see their community as isolated from the outside world. This porosity is a two-way street. As discussed throughout this paper, capitalism seeps into East Wind and therefore necessitates interaction with it, but through those same channels, ideas of capitalist alternatives also reach mainstream society. Because people come and go through East Wind, those outside of community are introduced to postcapitalist ideas where they would not have been before. People are shown and taught that alternatives do exist within America, and exposure to these ideas and lifestyles can start to chip away at the capitlocentric imaginary. East Wind is successful in serving as a model for the rest of American society, showing that living beyond the exploitation of our capitalist system is viable. Elizabeth believes, “Our biggest legacy in the long haul would be all the people that have gone off and lived the rest of their life a little bit differently because they find out that it’s possible,” and upon conclusion of my research, I would certainly agree.

Appendix

I offer here significant quotations relayed to me in my fieldwork at East Wind, which elaborate on and give further dimension to key themes in this paper.

Community Values

“It's almost like a moral thing, where I didn't think it was possible to practice moral livelihood inside mainstream society because the foundation of it is exploitative. So [I'm] seeking to move closer to right livelihood and a better way to do things.” - LJ

“There's no bosses here. You're free to choose what you do, when you do it, how you do it. And I'm a very autonomous person so I really appreciate that freedom... I don't know if I could ever go back to having a boss and putting up with all the petty injustices that go along with that.” - LJ

“Out there, there's so much hierarchy, so much pressure, so much obligation. In here, you don't need all those, and I don't have them.” - Katrina

“There is no such thing as equal. I think that's just in name and ideology only... everybody has varying skill sets and come from different class backgrounds and education backgrounds, so equality of access to resources on the farm is more of what we are trying to strive for, and equality of participation in the government.” - John

“...That's one of the things that I think is really beautiful about community... your mental health, you, become a higher priority than your job. And moms here have the top priority.” - Robin

The Meaning of Work

“I really enjoy how immediate the returns on work are here... it's very concrete where you see the fruit of your labor and you know that it's gonna benefit community in a material way... I find that a job well done is its own reward.” -LJ

“For me, it’s not labor. It’s life.” -Katrina

“I don’t want to be a manager... and I don’t want people working for me or under me, I’d rather work with people... rather than for someone or trying to work my way up the hierarchy...” - Jack

“One of the things I was able to do, and for which I’m eternally grateful for East Wind, is I went from a life of surviving, just getting by; I had to work multiple jobs just to pay rent and put food on the table, to having an opportunity to live a life where I could thrive and to grow... I didn’t want to defer gratification to the day that may never come... I was going to do all the things I wanted to do and not wait to retire to do them.” - Drew

Postcapitalist Ideas

“One of the main reasons that this place has survived is because of the system of economics and the recognition that we need to work within a capitalist structure to a certain degree, while also, we can still do better, we can still create structures in which are striving to do better, even if that [working within capitalism] is a reality...” - Alex

“It’s the best and most efficient system that I’ve been exposed to, but it’s still an imperfect system... it’s a giant leap and bound in the right direction.” - Mac

“People want to be comfortable here. They don’t want to be martyrs. Maybe the founders would have been okay being a martyr, but most people here just want to have their needs met, want to not work too much, be able to go to the creek, be able to drink a beer- I feel like that’s a big philosophy. Just have a nice, easy life. And to do that, we engage with an exploitative structure and turn sideways because we don’t want to make the sacrifice to do better. I think East Wind does, in many ways, make sacrifices to do better, and I think there’s many ways in which we could sacrifice more to face that. So I think it’s this balance of ‘what are you willing to do, what are you willing to sacrifice?’” - Alex

“One of the major reasons for people coming and not staying... they didn’t realize how alternative, how different, it was going to be, and grew up in a capitalist culture where they didn’t realize what kind of sacrifice it was going to be, to say, not have their own car, not be able to get away from people you live and work with, not be able to go out all the time, have

no privacy... income-sharing sounds really good until the first time you don't get what you want or think you need." - Elizabeth

"[People] have been taught to be upwardly-mobile and you have got to be intentionally downwardly-mobile to do this, depending on what economic class you start from." - Elizabeth

Community as Prefigurative Politics

"There's always going to be interpersonal conflict. There's not a system that wouldn't happen in. And so just trying to maintain the least amount of violence, and the least amount of aggression and pettiness as possible, I've seen a vast improvement. It's really encouraging." - John

"I think I wasn't expecting something, but still I had an image, a preconception, of community, of people living together, like having a same goal, or having same ideas... something same. But that's not at all the case." - Katrina

"East Wind makes you tougher... It's hard physical labor, and it's beautiful and it gives you a toughness and a grit to you. But on the same hand, it also makes you softer in a way. It makes you more empathetic because part of living with 70 people is that you learn to relate to those people a lot better, and there is an ability to communicate and open up and be able to have dialogues and resolve issues and stuff." - Mac

The Legacy of East Wind

"I think I really benefited from having two bouts of membership here... having had other experiences in other places... now my being here this time around, I feel so much more like I'm not going anywhere. I don't like absolutes in general, but I really kind of feel in my heart that this might be my forever home." - Sam

"I'm still glad I didn't get married, have babies, and live in the suburb. Or I didn't become an IB executive or any other bullshit I might have done. So for me, it's personally rewarding that I'm still proud of the decisions I made as a very young woman, both what to do and what not to do." - Elizabeth

“Once the community bug’s really bitten you, you’re never going to be out of it, like that smell doesn't wash off. Like that level of sharing and intimacy, if you enjoy that, then you won’t go back to living in an apartment working a bullshit job. Even if you have to, you’re gonna have a closer network of friends and view things differently.” - John

“You get someone who had a bad 9-5 job and goddamn horrible marriage and finally gets out of whatever middle-class American bullshit and comes here and goes, ‘oh my God, freedom and security, I’m in heaven!’ But then you get some kid who’s just out of college or been sleeping on their parents’ couch for three years and never really had a job... they may or may not find what they’re looking for here, because they don’t know what they’re looking for.” - Elizabeth

“[One of the most rewarding aspects of living here is]... believing that, aside from how many people that lived here and been happy, that the number of people that have come here and been envisioned by, or enlightened by, or inspired by, an alternative lifestyle, particularly an economic one, have gone off and done shit that they wouldn’t have. So serving as a model, which was one of the big goals to begin with, has worked, way more than ‘this has become a movement that hundreds of people will join.’ Still, if people are looking for an alternative, they can still find one.” - Elizabeth

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