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Durkheim in the Neoliberal Organization: Taking Resistance and Solidarity Seriously

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Abstract

Durkheim's contributions to organization studies have so far been decidedly marginal, and largely concentrated on culture. In this paper, we draw upon his theory of anomie and solidarity to show how a Durkheimian view of contemporary organizations and work has special relevance today for debates about how workers, particularly middle managers, can reshuffle a capacity to resist neoliberal efforts to profoundly disrupt their working conditions, in particular their autonomy to define what is a job well done. We show how Durkheim's insights can account for the unexpected rekindling of forms of social solidarity in highly competitive and individualistic organizational settings, through dissident efforts that convey a renewal of a certain work ethos severed by neoliberal managerial policies and practices. Recent studies on resistance confirm Durkheim's view that forms of collective activity, resembling supposedly 'old' mechanisms of former days, continue to exist and develop in contemporary societies and organizations, in response to pressure to put people in situations of inter-individual competition that disrupts social relationships.

Keywords

anomie, Durkheim, enclaves, middle managers, resistance, solidarity

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Introduction

Studies of resistance in organizations have largely concluded that it is impossible to effectively resist contemporary regimes of control (Fleming & Spicer, 2014; Vallas & Hill, 2012), particularly cultural (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011; Willmott, 2013) and technical ones (Kamoche, Kannan, & Siebers, 2014). However, a scattered body of literature has begun to show how certain characteristics inherent to neoliberal organizations might actually facilitate the emergence of collective forms of resistance (Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2010). This smaller body of literature reveals an interesting paradox, since most neoliberal reforms are specifically designed to weaken collective forces by fostering individualism and splintering work collectives that might otherwise provide support for dissident initiatives. In this paper, we argue that combining Emile Durkheim's analyses of *anomie* and *solidarity* offers an excellent means to understanding this paradox.

One of Durkheim's foundational observations is that individuals spontaneously look for company: they seek out groups in which they feel a sense of belonging. For Durkheim, social ties of solidarity are fundamental to producing meaning in people's lives, and the bedrock of social ideals and values. Solidarity, defined as our attachment to others, is for him the very source of human morality (Jones, 2001, p. 97, Miller 1996). Group solidarity develops when individuals share common goals and values that allow them to coordinate their division of labour almost spontaneously. Group solidarity is 'social glue' which binds people together and encourages them to make individual sacrifices to achieve common goals. Anomie develops in a group when these shared values and goals fade away, leaving nothing to regulate relations among its members (Durkheim, 1893).

Recent research (for example, Sayer, 2015) strongly suggests that current neoliberal measures in organizations generate and reproduce anomie in two ways. First, they are designed to weaken or break down existing groups in workplaces by

fostering isolation and increasing competition. Second, the new ways of working they have introduced and the new values they have cultivated are at odds with those of the traditional Fordist regime and of welfare states, giving rise to tensions between the two value systems in the workplace. This has stimulated a sense of confusion in goals and values while increasing the sense of fatality and alienation that are characteristic of anomie (Acevedo, 2005; Merton, 1934). The dismantling of the Fordist regime has had an impact at the scale of organizations, but its effects on everyday life at work have been pervasive and harsh, silently destroying the *miracle of morality* (Donskis & Bauman, 2013). In Durkheim's view, though, individuals constantly look for togetherness. This means that from a Durkheimian perspective, anomie does not prevent solidarity emerging as a sustainable, if fragile, social phenomenon. This, then, is the central argument of this article: solidarity emerges even in the most uncongenial of circumstances, and it is sustained through episodes of collective resistance in which individuals encounter and experience the dislocation and isolation engendered by anomie.

For Durkheim, anomie and solidarity are analytically separable but ontologically conjoined; the structures of social relations in which they are jointly embedded necessarily entail a mutual dependence which can be constituted and reconstituted in various ways but cannot be obliterated. This process of reconstitution is dependent on the 'contextual dynamics' that stand out in different socio-historical situations, as well as on the mechanisms through which they are mediated and filtered. Studies that have explored collective resistance in neoliberal organizations (Courpasson et al., 2012; Laine & Vaara, 2007) show that solidarity does remain possible in these organizations, at least among individuals in middle managerial and professional positions and roles. Individuals occupying these roles are prepared to fight for what matters most to them. For them, this tends not to be for better working conditions or moving forward in their careers, but rather, for the meaning of a *job well done*. They are brought together by 'old fashioned' values of work and

togetherness, and for the most part organize secretly, in order to avoid openly challenging top managers. The goal in these episodes of resistance is to influence what organizations really do; in other words, what they as individuals do collectively, and how they understand their role in society. Through these episodes, they also build interpersonal bonds and solidarity networks that endure beyond them. Thus, our aim in this article is not simply to suggest how Durkheim's work is relevant to the study of politics in neoliberal organizations. Rather, we seek to creatively develop his views around an examination of the significance of collective resistance *within* these very disaggregated organizations. Our central argument is that a Durkheimian analytical lens forces us to re-embed workers in the moral context of their work, and to analyse resistance as a moral effort aimed at *taking back control over the content of work*. Durkheim's views on anomie and solidarity encourage us to analyse collective resistance in the workplace not only as a product of intra-organizational tensions but also as necessarily linked to the very structure of the neoliberal system and how it infiltrates and transforms relationships among individuals.

We have chosen to focus on middle-level managers and professionals because the very positions they occupy within neoliberal organizations directly and acutely expose them to contradictions and tensions between corporate rhetoric and operational reality – particularly those that seem to signal the destruction of any remaining shreds of social solidarity and cohesion. Above all others, these are the organizational actors who are expected to 'pick up the pieces' in the wake of the most severe forms of fragmentation and dislocation produced by the policies and practices most characteristic of neoliberalism, such as marketization, financialization, outsourcing and surveillance. These policies and practices are embedded in the political rationality on which neoliberalization depends both for its ideological legitimacy and its operational viability. And it is the middle managers and professionals who must cope with the inevitable 'gaps' – not to say 'chasms' – that

open up between the 'neoliberal promise' and what it actually delivers in everyday organizational life.

This 'rhetoric/reality fissure' is of course a well-known phenomenon within mainstream organizational research. However, we contend that this research has consistently underestimated, if not marginalized, the 'anomic fallout' from neoliberalization, along with the strength of its impact on middle-level managers and professionals. Members of this group are expected to find ways to mitigate and contain the worst excesses of neoliberalization within organizations. Mainstream organizational research has also tended to ignore the ways in which this work of mitigation and containment can become an opportunity for middle managers and professionals to rebuild enclaves of social resistance and solidarity within the corporate organizations that employ them. The very work of adapting the corporate organization to neoliberal policies, programmes and practices brings middle-level managers and professionals to engage in often secret and even subterranean practices through which they seek to protect the values and norms associated with 'a job well done' while simultaneously counteracting the destructive impulses of neoliberalization.

In light of this, our paper argues that it is time to study the new forms of solidarity that have arisen in the neoliberal workplace, and the new forms of resistance they have engendered as members of these workplaces search for hidden or secret communities and forge ties of friendship. Friendship, defined here as the production of social patterns that shape joint solidarities and co-belonging (Westcott & Vazquez Maggio, 2016), particularly during episodes of resistance, is a unique way of understanding how people engage and resist in their everyday working lives while simultaneously becoming aware of the wider socio-economic structures in which their workplaces are embedded (Webster & Boyd, 2019). Friendship, often a consequence of acts of resistance, therefore also helps generate stable infrastructure for moments of solidarity and resistance. The paper offers an invitation to further explore these topics from

an engaged scholarly perspective which focuses on the accelerating pace of neoliberalization and the increasing dislocation and isolation it is reproducing in all forms of corporate organizations across many sectors.

Durkheim, Anomie, Solidarity and Work

This section will define the core concepts used in this paper and explain why we believe a Durkheimian approach can help us to better understand how solidarity and resistance relate to each other in new ways within neoliberal organizations. As described in the introduction, neoliberal measures in contemporary organizations foster anomie by destroying shared values and meanings. However, as Durkheim argued, humans seek out others who share their values. In so doing, they are able to reconstitute new forms of solidarity that allow them to form new communities. As we shall see in the following section, by pushing individuals to seek solace in solidarity, the anomie created by neoliberalism actually creates opportunities for the formation of new collectives able to resist its effects.

Anomie as a state of moral confusion

Although scholarly use of and reference to the concept of anomie is ‘dying’, as Coleman has observed, the phenomenon of anomie has only continued to grow as neoliberal measures are imposed more and more broadly (Coleman, 2014, p. 7). Rates of depression, anxiety and other forms of mental illness have reached unprecedented heights in the United States (Twenge, 2006, p. 105), for example, as have mass shootings and military and police suicides. According to Ritzer and Goodman (2004, p. 173), anomie ‘refers to the lack of regulation in a society that celebrates isolated individuality and refrains from telling people what they should do’. This seems a particularly accurate description of neoliberal organizations, where the ‘taste for altruism’, the ‘forgetfulness of self and sacrifice’ (Durkheim, 1893, p. xxxiv) appear to be ‘ethical phantasmagori,’ flickering in and out of

our everyday consciousness and experience. As Durkheim observed, the division of labour, ‘by its very nature, may [. . .] exert a dissolving influence’ (Durkheim, 1893, p. 295), leading individuals to feel a sense of moral confusion, of ‘not knowing how to properly behave in society’ (Coleman, 2014, p. 11). As organizations become more neoliberal, the people who work in them – even when they remain employees – are treated as entrepreneurial individuals, working in isolation to maximize their own profit. This trend fosters anomie, which Durkheim described as a state of moral deregulation that arises from the absence of any communal attachment providing moral grounds and clear reasons to act, leaving people isolated and anxious. When objective experience cannot be attached to an understandable reality, anomie results (Durkheim, 1893), creating a landscape of anxious individuals bereft of moral direction, in search of something to believe in. From a Durkheimian perspective, this loss of moral direction leads to ‘internal wars’ which, as we have observed, break out in neoliberal organizations as a result of opposing moralities of work (Durkheim, 1972).¹

According to Parsons, ‘A society, as Durkheim expressed it, is a “moral community” and only in so far as it is such does it possess stability’ (Parsons, 1937, p. 389). Again, this means that anomie, which arises from a lack of stable community, is above all a moral concern. As Meštrović reminds us, ‘anomie has meaning precisely in the fact that the incorrect arrangement of social representations produces distressing psychological symptoms which eventually produce physical, organismic pain’ (Meštrović, 1987, p. 571). Anomie taken to its extreme on a personal level results in suicide (Sennett, 2006, p. xix), caused by a gradual weakening of the ‘aptitude for life’ so dear to Durkheim (Durkheim, 1897, p. 269): ‘uncertainty about the future, together with his own indecisiveness, thus condemns him to perpetual motion. Hence a state of unease, agitation and discontent that inevitably increases the possibility of suicide’ (Durkheim, 1897, p. 300). The ‘cult of individual personality’ (Parsons, 1937, pp. 333–34) at the core of neoliberal cultures is a source of anomie. The

emphasis on self so prevalent in contemporary society (self-improvement, self-advancement, self-determination, etc.) ‘produces a whole host of desires that cannot be satisfied’ (Coleman, 2014, p. 27). Already, more than a century ago, Sombart observed that the underlying socio-cultural trend toward hyper-competition often leads to anomie, a ‘restlessness, yearning, and compulsion [. . .]’ (Sombart, 1906, pp. 12–13).

Solidarity, beliefs and group formation

In the face of the moral problem of anomie, Durkheim argued that the moral authority of a solidary group, by providing a ‘buffer’ between the individual and authorities such as the State, is a necessary bulwark against the dissolving power of anomie: ‘authority for Durkheim is inseparable from family, local community, school, occupation (. . .) It is the breakdown of authority in these areas that results in, not only estrangement and isolation of individuals, but the intensification of coercion and power’ (Nisbet, 1974, p. 274). Durkheimian thinking is therefore invaluable for identifying the social modalities and mechanisms through which individuals might potentially transform the neoliberal workplace into a more collegial collective space *despite* managerial changes that push in the opposite direction, toward hyper-competition, dislocation and estrangement. For Durkheim, when cohesion is successful, individuals ‘come together (. . .) to associate with one another and not feel isolated in the midst of their adversaries,’ the result being that ‘they lead the same moral life together’ (Durkheim, 1897, p. xliv). In order to cope with and indeed to counteract anomie, Durkheim reminds us that ‘a group must thus exist or be formed within which can be drawn up the system of rules that is now lacking’ (Durkheim, 1902, p. xxxv). The Durkheimian solution to anomie, therefore, is to create special communities within the extremely isolating forces of the modern world – *Gemeinschaft* within *Gesellschaft*, to paraphrase Coleman (2014):

Once such a group is formed, a moral life evolves which naturally bears the distinguishing mark of

the special coalitions in which it has developed. It is impossible for men to live together and be in regular contact with one another without their acquiring some feeling for the group which they constitute through having united together, without their becoming attached to it, concerning themselves with its interests (. . .) this subordination of the particular to the general interest, is the very wellspring of all moral activity. (Durkheim, 1902, pp. xlii–xliii).

Group membership, Durkheim argues, is ‘a source of life *sui generis*’: ‘from it there arises a warmth that quickens or gives fresh life to each individual, which makes him disposed to empathize, causing selfishness to melt away’ (Durkheim 1902: lii). If communitarian identity was once typically conveyed by the family, it is now largely earned in the workplace. In this context, the production of moral commonalities is possible only for groups of individuals ‘working in the same industry, assembled together and organized in a single body’ (Durkheim, 1902, p. xxxv).

What holds such groups together is solidarity. The general theoretical framework Durkheim employed encourages us to see ‘solidarity’ as an ongoing social process blending everyday interactions with the active defence of broader moral principles. For Durkheim, forms of solidarity evolve with the transformation of the rules according to which individual and collective efforts are coordinated. Traditional societies, according to him, coordinate spontaneously through *mechanical* solidarity, since they share the same systems of beliefs, which provide them with the ‘interpretive keys’ to understand their purpose, their role, and others’ expectations of them. The growing diversity of beliefs in modern society requires intermediation, and more formal organization, in order to regulate these matters (for Durkheim, the State might fulfil this role) through what he describes as *organic* solidarity (Durkheim, 1893). As societies move from one form of solidarity to the other, they pass through a period of transition in which traditional points of reference are lost, creating anomie (Durkheim, 1897). We argue that organizations are experiencing just such a state of transition today: while organizations are

undeniably undergoing neoliberalization, the Fordist corporation has not vanished as completely as proponents of neoliberal ideology would like to suggest. This tension has given rise to what some have called a ‘hybridization’ of social relationships (Heckscher & Adler, 2006), which we argue leads to conflicting definitions of what constitutes *a job well done*. In other words, ongoing conflict over what it means to make a legitimate individual and collective contribution to the organizational purpose is generating anxiety and anger. This in turn results in multiple invisible collective actions within organizations, all seeking to influence the shared definition of which work ethos should prevail in contemporary organizations.

Neoliberalism and the Confusing Morale of Work

In this section, we argue that neoliberalism relies on a definition of work that runs counter to the prevailing definition in society, and that this contradiction fosters anomie by creating confusion in work relationships. According to the prevailing historical definition of ‘work’, and in line with the Durkheimian view, the workplace is a place where individuals experience belonging to a group larger than the family. Neoliberalism, by contrast, reduces work to an activity that individuals undertake to earn an income, without any other moral or social consideration. This unmooring from moral and social considerations means that neoliberal measures reproduce and reinforce anomie in the workplace. From a Durkheimian perspective, as we have explained, it can be expected that individuals in neoliberal workplaces will react to this anomie by seeking to rebuild social relationships with individuals who share their values and visions. Below, we will explore how this provides a powerful basis for resistance at work.

Neoliberal organizations seek to systematically weaken, undermine and suppress the ‘moral economy of work’ and the communal, reciprocal and ‘other-regarding’ values on which it relies, and which underpin the norms and structures through which collective

interdependence is sustained (Sayer, 2011, 2015). The finely woven, and often delicate and fragile, mesh of reciprocal interdependencies through which the performance and co-ordination of ‘good work’ are sustained is incrementally weakened as neoliberal organizations impose amoral power relations and atomizing control regimes, on which they depend for their legitimacy and efficacy. Human interdependence and concern for others are regarded as outmoded social norms that obstruct unrestrained and unregulated competition among individuals, groups, organizations, localities, regions and countries. Structurally and ideologically, these market-based exchanges are relocated by neoliberalism to a universalized institutional logic and mode of practice which ultimately results ‘*in the establishment of a general rationality, a new kind of regime of self-evident truths imposing themselves on rulers of all persuasions as the sole framework for understanding human contact*’ (Dardot & Laval, 2013, p. 150, emphasis in original).

This neoliberal purge of economic morality and social reciprocity – through the imposition of governance regimes that absolve organizational elites of any responsibility to their employees and communities that extends beyond the dictates of market rationality – saps actors of any residual conceptions of ‘fellow feeling’, ‘social relationality’ and ‘shared commitments’. The dominant corporate culture within neoliberal organizations encourages workers and managers to see these as anachronistic hindrances, which must be eradicated by the unqualified embracing of self-regarding and egocentric behavioural norms. A Hobbesian ‘war of all against all’, unconstrained and unregulated by any institutions and practices apart from hierarchical coercion and market discipline, is now regarded as the acceptable price to be paid for the new personal freedoms, autonomy and opportunities made available by neoliberal organizations, where ‘possessive individualism’, ‘creative destruction’ and ‘survival of the fittest’ are the dominant legitimating rationales (Brown, 2015; Cunningham, 2019; Davies, 2018).

Neoliberal organizations perceive all social relations and interactions as forms of market exchange, in which zero-sum games among naturally acquisitive private appropriators are played out to their 'winner-takes-all' conclusions. Stripped bare of the tacit moral understandings and ethical commitments that make associational life possible, the neoliberal organization ultimately relies on the 'cash nexus' as the only mechanism through which self-interested behaviour can be coordinated and controlled in ways that make competitive market exchanges repeatable and sustainable. At its ontological core, the neoliberal organization refuses to recognize the existence, much less the relevance, of the historically sedimented norms and traditions that shape and temporize the operation of free market rationality. Its collective memory banks, if they are not systematically erased, have been emptied of any residual concern over the shared values and commitments within which organizational practices are necessarily located and legitimated. Organizational members of all types and at all levels are transformed into isolated and atomized individuals, battling for themselves in the Hobbesian/Darwinian struggle for survival.

Research over the past four decades has traced the deterioration, not to say destruction, of communitarian links, portraying organizations as fragmented, individualistic and hyper-competitive contexts (Johnson & Duberley, 2011; Sennett, 2006). This transformation has had tremendous effect among individuals in organizations as the anomie it has engendered – again, defined here as a state of loss of common morality and goals regulating social relationships and personal expectations (Meštrović, 2010) has played out in an escalating middle managerial crisis (Snyder, 2016) and rising workplace suicide rates (Harris, 2016; Tiesman et al., 2015). This is particularly acute among managers and professionals (Pegula, 2014), whose suicides have been analysed as a form of protest (Waters, 2015) or the result of severe pressures at work (Waters, 2014). Waters (2014) has argued that deteriorating working conditions, as well as the collapse of traditional collective forms of mobilization, have created

favourable conditions for suicide, which in this context has become a new and extreme form of individualistic and anomic protest. In large part due to the overarching ideology of liberalism, according to which people should count on themselves instead of looking to others for support and accountability, not to mention benevolence and care (Held, 2006), most forms of solidarity have evaporated from the contemporary workplace, including the fraternal rituals that bind workers together as they encounter hostile conditions together. Today, the dominant model of work is the single entrepreneurial transaction, through which individuals strive to get ahead of one another instead of building sustainable relationships that are effective and efficient over the long term (Gouldner, 1954). The failures, betrayals, absurdities and inadequacies that people experience in their everyday working relationships often lead them to withdraw into themselves, rather than undertaking projects to pursue collective action. In short, neoliberal workplaces seem to have no interest in community; they do not place high value on collective action over the longer term. Instead, action is presented and promoted in terms of individual agency, with value placed on a worker's individual efforts and rewards. In this context, work distorts and even drowns out people's shared need to help and be helped; instead, interdependence and reciprocity now seem to be regarded as signs of weakness and degradation (Bauman, 2013; Sennett, 2003).

And yet, by seeking to dull these shared collective values and communal commitments, neoliberal organizations actually sharpen their members' regrets for 'the world they have lost'. The experience of working in these organizations reminds them of how exposed they now are to an unregulated, isolating and atomizing world, in which their 'ontological insecurities' regarding employment, health, welfare and wellbeing are becoming ever more severe, deep-seated and intractable. However, when the moral traditions in which organizational life is embedded are worn away by a pervasive neoliberal ideology and practice grounded in economic reductionism and radical individualism,

the collective memory of shared moral values and their central role in giving meaning to our shared organizational experiences becomes compromised, diluted and difficult to recover and revive (Feldman, 2002).

The proliferation of scandals and illegal acts in today's neoliberal organizations indicates just how detached business activities have become from shared moral values, to the point that some scholars have concluded that the neoliberal regime is incompatible with societal moral values (Hanlon & Mandarinini, 2015; Rhodes, Pullen, & Clegg, 2010). Certainly, some contemporary business activities, such as trading in cadavers (Anteby, 2010) or selling personal data (Turco, 2012) can be morally shocking. Even in firms engaging in more mundane business, however, routine managerial practices now appear less and less concerned with values shared in the social sphere (Courpasson, 2019). Competition among individuals within organizations seems more and more to be leading to disloyal relationships among individuals, with workers obsessively seeking to show that they are 'simply the best, better than all the rest', even if the price they pay for it is loneliness and isolation (Azambuja & Islam, 2019). As episodes such as the Volkswagen emissions scandal have shown, competition among businesses is pushing employees to falsify information for their own survival (Rhodes, 2016). As a growing body of research demonstrates, the targets and goals of the new neoliberal power regime put extreme pressure on individuals and organizations, even as they appear to be growing more and more deeply out of touch with the values shared by people in the wider social realm.

Historically sedimented moral traditions do not disappear completely, however: they leave behind hints of their continuing potential and relevance for actors facing deepening ontological insecurities that throw into question their existence and value in the eyes of the neoliberal organization. As we shall demonstrate further on, these traditions linger beneath the surface as political and cultural resources that actors can and do draw on to resist the encroachment of

neoliberalization and to construct 'organizational enclaves' beyond its reach. We contend that the very act of constructing these 'enclaves of dissidence' allows a diverse range of organizational actors – including the middle-ranking managers and professionals who are the empirical focus of this paper – to build potential alternatives to the organizational spaces and realities legitimated and promulgated by the dominant neoliberal ideology and practice. At the very least, they make it possible to glimpse the destructive impact of neoliberalization on our collective organizational lives, and to begin to repair some of the damage it has wrought through the revitalization of social relations grounded in the 'mechanical solidarity' which Durkheim believed were of great long-term significance to modern economies and societies. This is where we think that a Durkheimian approach is most meaningful: empirically; we know from the literature that collective modalities of resistance still exist within neoliberal settings, but so far we have not been able to capture the nature of the solidarity that is being produced through them (Beck & Brook, 2020). Durkheim, we argue, provides a framework for understanding this solidarity as an ongoing social process blending everyday interactions with the active defence of broader moral principles.

Evidence of Infra-Political Solidarity to Resist Neoliberal Measures

In organizational scholarship, studies of resistance have explored solidarity mainly as the product of material conditions or shared deprivation and oppression. Only rarely have they explored solidarity in the Durkheimian sense, as a social tie built on shared morals. We argue that this has led to undue pessimism about individuals' capacities to resist neoliberal measures. In this section, we will suggest that resistance to neoliberalism in organizations cannot be understood as most organizational scholarship has understood it, as it is based on ethical concerns that are not directly linked to the material conditions of the resisters. Drawing on empirical evidence from the research

literature, we will argue that some middle managers today are more than prepared to defend ‘old’ values of work, to help rebuild communities and shape what their firms actually do, even if this activity takes place underground, and is infra-political in nature. Their actions, we believe, must be conceived as an attempt to reconstitute certain forms of solidarity, and deserve further exploration.

Morality as the locus of resistance

Studies of resistance have consistently identified its central goal as the contestation of the degree and intensity of resisters’ subordination to both hierarchical principles and organizational power structures (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Mumby, 2005). By focusing the analytical lens on organizational hierarchies, however, these studies have often portrayed efforts to resist political and cultural control (Fleming, 2005; Fleming & Sturdy, 2011; Willmott, 2013) as wasted initiatives, which in the best case allow individuals to achieve a subjective distance from the colonization of their selves through cynicism (Fleming & Sewell, 2002), or through sickness, in cases in which they seek to challenge the system that relies on their wellbeing (Fleming, 2015). The same pessimistic conclusions resurface in studies of new technologies that are used to exert control over individuals’ expertise (Kamoche et al., 2014), or initiatives designed to influence the behaviours of white-collar workers through competition and entrepreneurial discourse (Dany, Louvel, & Valette, 2011).

Over time, a kind of generic conclusion has been drawn: if individuals wish to regain their autonomy, they must move out of ‘traditional’ organizations (Kociatkiewicz, Kostera, & Parker, 2020; Weiskopf & Willmott, 2013; Willmott, 2013). For the most part, a broad post-recognition view of defat politics prevails (Contu, 2008; Fleming, 2015), and no credible future is forecast in which politically significant emancipatory moves have any real impact within neoliberal firms. Strikingly, most such studies neglect to acknowledge that political

tensions at work are often produced by the everyday infiltration of wider neoliberal principles into employees’ moral consciousness and their capacity to maintain their communities. In these studies, resistance is viewed as an organizational-level outcome, rather than as a conflict arising from the intersection of the neoliberal system, the organizational system of control, and the individual ‘zone of tolerance’ of neoliberal rules – meaning the mental and moral inclination to accept, accommodate or dismiss these rules. Durkheim specifically addresses this complex interplay between societal dislocation and organizational disruption in this theorization of group solidarity as the moral terrain from which people seek to be protected from external forces that threaten their beliefs and cohesion (Nisbet, 1974). This explains how exogenous forces such as neoliberalism weaken the endogenous forces of social inclusion and solidarity through everyday managerial practices and decisions that deny individuals ‘the experience of mattering to others’ (Sennett, 1999, p. 25). A Durkheimian approach helps focus our attention on how everyday gestures of recognition, mutual obligation and respect are accomplished, right down to the trivial details of rituals through which meaningful mutual bonds materialize.

Upon closer examination, this consensus on neoliberal corporate disengagement is by no means ‘a seamless, monolithic whole. Rather embedded neoliberalism is deeply contradictory: Neoliberal ideology provides an intellectual and moral framework for justifying neoliberal transformations of states and economies. . . “rolling neoliberalism” is a still-dominant but deeply flawed “settlement” buffeted by crises’ (Cahill, 2014, p. 82). Organizational research has also helped us to identify and explore the places and spaces where employees resist and contest senior management’s authority to define what counts as a ‘job well done’ (Courpasson et al., 2012; Laine & Vaara, 2007). It has explored groups working together in post financial collapse Greece to redefine the meaning of work (Daskalaki, Fotaki, & Sotiropoulou, 2019). Studies such as these are more optimistic about the possible political

effects of resistance; in particular, they show that if resistance is not analysed *in tandem* with solidarity, its efficacy as a means of protection against neoliberal forces is difficult to perceive or consider. At the theoretical level, this means that solidarity should be analysed not only as a principle of association, but as a principle of life *sui generis* (Durkheim, 1902, p. lii), carrying its own moral force.

In this vein, more recent research has examined how collective efforts are *de facto* oriented toward issues of meaning and values (Daskalaki et al., 2019). Increasingly, scholars working on resistance have underlined the prevalence of moral concerns tied to acts of dissidence in organizations (Alakavuklar & Alamgir, 2017; Pullen & Rhodes, 2013). This body of research is uncovering that dissent is, to a growing degree, linked to matters related to the *moral* dimensions of work. Turco, for example, offers an account of salespeople in a maternity store resisting an initiative to collect customers' personal data (Turco, 2012). It would be difficult to draw a direct line from this episode of resistance to employees' personal interests or self-identity, or even to a control regime; rather it was a moral concern related to their view of what constituted 'a job well done'. Similarly, Courpasson et al. (2012) described how teams in a retail bank gathered evidence to contest the bank's recommendations of ways to extract more profit from customers. Here again, the employees were not undertaking action in response to a policy that was directly in their individual interest, but to defend their work ethic. More recently, Courpasson has written of insurance salespeople risking their lives in hunger strikes (Courpasson, 2017) to resist the radical transformation of their occupational culture. It seems clear there is now sufficient empirical evidence to show that resistance in organizations is increasingly triggered by moral struggles, which have little to do with any narrow understanding of employees' personal or material interests. The number of instances of political dissent in organizations in which moral concerns are central indicates that it is time to rewrite theories of resistance to account for the

infrastructures of solidarity that make it possible for workers to seize power in order to defend their work ethos.

This growing body of research also indicates that widespread distortions of how work should be done underlie anomie in the workplace. In so doing, it provides some hope, in that it highlights situations in which actors share anger about managerial initiatives and act on that anger. This suggests that neoliberal organizations still contain the seeds of firm collective moral assertions.

The resisting manager as a guardian of 'old fashioned' values

Recent research on the work of managers shows that while new organizational policies tend to ignore questions relating to occupational ethos or moral values, managers can and do organize attempts to preserve ethical narratives and practices grounded in traditions outside neoliberalism. In this way, values become a central preoccupation for some managers, who feel at odds with the 'new' organizational diktats and imperatives that neoliberal governance regimes tend to impose.

Indeed, despite policies that attempt to orient the work of teams and professionals toward more economically profitable activities, the preservation of an occupational ethos has still been observed as a goal of certain managers. Hospital nurses, teachers, police officers and others attempt to limit the spread of the 'neoliberal way of doing' in their organizations, not only because of their own interests, but also because they are concerned about the broader impact of neoliberalization on society as a whole (Bezes et al., 2011). Moreover, in some cases, their resistance actually goes against their own interests. Some authors use the term 'ethics of resistance' (Alakavuklar & Alamgir, 2017) to describe such situations, in which individuals, rather than acting in their own interest, resist in order to sustain core values that have come under threat from new ways of doing business (see also Rhodes et al., 2010). One study conducted by the authors analysed how teams resist attempts to transform

journalistic work into publicity work for media sponsors (Younes, Courpasson, & Jacob, 2018). Another, also by the authors, examined how research and development teams in the pharmaceutical industry sought to combat the authoritarian reorientation of their work goals toward more profitable activities when they perceived this came at the expense of exploring new ways to save lives (Courpasson & Younes, 2018). In these studies, managers of teams of experts in certain fields organize and engage in infra-political collective action in situations where a work ethos (Weber, 1978) that follows a social mandate comes under threat from neoliberal imperatives. In other words, their resistance is a reaction to the perception that the role assigned to them by society conflicts with the demands or expectations of their organization. In such situations, mechanical solidarity provides a strong framework to support successful resistance: in the case of journalists, the resisting team managed to keep the content of their journal from being driven exclusively by market orientations for over two years. In the case of the R&D team (Courpasson & Younes, 2018), their dissidence led to a strategic decision to resume work on a project that had been halted, and to allow researchers to define the terms of investment in the project. These and other studies (Anteby, 2010; Chan, 2009; Turco, 2012) strongly suggest that alignment with the social mandates of occupational communities and cultures can be a major concern for certain team and unit managers, to the point that they choose to resist what they perceive as violations of their work ethic. Social issues and respect for traditional social values, such as honesty and fairness or concern for the welfare and wellbeing of others, are spontaneously perceived as reasons to take risks and act against top managers' goals and injunctions.

The resisting manager as a promoter of solidarity

Increasingly, middle managerial resistance in defence of 'old' values appears to take the form of situated efforts to orchestrate collective action within specific teams. Working against neoliberal ideology's prevailing focus on individual

performance, which leads to isolation among individuals, managers attempt to resist by gathering employees into teams who share their values, then redistributing roles to achieve certain predetermined results. In this way, they are able to protect the collective from sanctions aimed at individual performance, and to begin reintegrating individuals into a broader community in which the potential for social solidarity is reawakened.

For the most part, these initiatives stay underground and infra-political (Scott, 1990). Secrecy was found to be a crucial ingredient of resistance in the studies described in the previous section, both as a way to enhance collective creativity and to cement social solidarity (Courpasson & Younes, 2018; Younes et al., 2018). These studies show how workers mobilized secrecy in order to work according to their own moral principles, forming what Simmel would call secret groups; that is, groups that function as 'an interactional unit characterized (. . .) by the fact that reciprocal relations among its members are governed by the protective function of secrecy' (Hazelrigg, 1969, p. 324). Workers engaged in this type of resistance interacted more often. Teams were socially reconfigured into closely knit groups of people, whose relationships were based on regular discussions about what really mattered to them. Their investment in secret dissidence forged bonds they perceived as vital. Secrets in organizations generate a sense of 'specialness' (Grey & Costas, 2016); the very existence of secrets puts those who keep them in an exceptional situation (Simmel, 1906). Courpasson and Younes (2018) have shown that working secretly to resist a managerial decision implies a collective vulnerability that necessitates strong bonds and trust, generating a collective spirit that encourages hard work and a willingness to succeed. This, in turn, creates more bonds of solidarity.

Modernization has been produced through a process of individuation that alienates people from one another and is detrimental to communities (Husserl, 1970). A key feature of the communal ties that resistance helps to forge is the

restoration of intersubjective relations, ‘whereby actions and strategies are not just rationally produced but are a product of a heightened perception by insurgents of each other and their place in a changing environment’ (O’Hearn, 2009, p. 498). Research on situated dissent from neoliberal ideology and its threat to a certain ethos of work has shed unexpected light on workers’ capacities to use concrete initiatives at the team level to build solidarity through collective achievement and cooperation. Creative engagement in what de Certeau calls *tactics* is a way for middle managers to engage in direct confrontation with neoliberal power. They use *tactics*, such as the secrecy described above, to manipulate events and reappropriate time and space, generating ‘wandering lines’ (de Certeau, 1984, pp. xviii–xix) and regaining control of certain aspects of work. Managers orchestrate subterranean collective actions to prove their superiors wrong, and show that other ways of doing business are possible. The literature on creativity, for example, has extensively documented instances of managers protecting their teams so they are able to work on innovations and ideas that the neoliberal logic would prefer to dismiss from the corporate agenda (Courpasson & Younes, 2018; Dooley, Tsoukas, Garud, Gehman, & Kumaraswamy, 2011; Mainemelis, 2010). Leveraging resources to allow teams to work differently to achieve organizational goals is a phenomenon that may also be observed in the academic world (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2019), and even in corporations (Younes et al., 2018). Although it is not the central goal of orchestrating this kind of collective action, it helps draw people out of isolation (Courpasson & Younes, 2018), fostering collective achievements within organizations at a time when top managers tend to push for unrestrained competition among individuals and units. Achieving small victories in aggressive and adverse conditions is experienced as empowering, ‘providing encouragement for the group to plunge further into the unknown territories of creating something new’ (O’Hearn, 2009, p. 499).

Certain groups may be identified as successful in establishing forms of mechanical solidarity that help them to cope with anomic forces.

In their work on enclaves of resistance in a bank, Courpasson and co-workers (2012) have shown how a strong occupational collective of branch managers made it possible to form a powerful internal *communal* coalition against strategic decisions that deeply affected work in branches. The authors identified a community of 10 branch managers who disagreed with the way strategic decisions affected work in their branches on the grounds that it would have a strong adverse impact on the durability and authenticity of customer relationships. This communal coalition was built on social ties forged through regular encounters in places such as bars and restaurants, where branch managers could experience feelings of friendship and solidarity and express their shared values and ethical beliefs in the importance of a ‘job well done’ as it came under attack by corporate strategies. These intersubjective relationships among branch managers were possible because the managers had known each other for so long, having spent most of their careers in the same company. The threat to their ‘old’ values did not increase their sense of vulnerability; instead, it intensified their feeling that it was absolutely necessary to take action against the exceptionally disruptive impact of new corporate policy on their branches.

The enclaves of dissidence illustrated in this section strongly suggest that the neoliberal capitalist workplace is an unexpectedly fruitful terrain for a kind of communal creation that helps to build mechanical forms of solidarity. Instead of engaging in instrumental forms of collective action in which they defend their sectional material interests, employees undertake infra-political collective action to produce outcomes that are in the collective interest, although not through the neoliberal channels advocated by top managers. The communal creation undertaken by these employees features strong physical interactions and ties and is built upon a view of work as a space that ought to nurture enduring relationships. Their solidarity is a protective and a creative social configuration, firmly opposed to neoliberal dreams of separation. This resonates with Durkheim’s idea of

solidarity as ‘the universal concomitant of group action’, strongly suggesting that while it is certainly the ‘sine qua non of collective action’ (Traugott, 1984), it is also related to a certain physical density of interactions. As Traugott points out, Durkheimian solidarity is characterized by ‘intensification of . . . integrative bonds’ (p. 325), meaning that the density of solidary ties – particularly in cases where physical co-presence is a feature of work – helps to explain engagement in communal efforts such as undertaken by the enclaves of dissidence described above.

Despite the overwhelmingly pessimistic tone of most research into the capacity of workers, and particularly managers, to resist neoliberal domination, this section has shown that there is some room for optimism. There is evidence that workers may resist successfully where they succeed in building communities that go beyond mere defensive alliances (Mulholland, 2004), apolitical spaces (Contu, 2008; Fleming & Spicer, 2007) or informal workplace interaction (Bain & Taylor, 2000). Clearly, as stated by O’Hearn in his analysis of the blanket protest by republican prisoners in Northern Ireland (O’Hearn, 2009), solidarity is built alongside community formation, ‘through processes of confrontation and repression that occur when groups attempt to appropriate and transform spaces that the authorities consider to be their realms of control’ (O’Hearn, 2009, p. 521). Here, we understand communities in the Durkheimian sense (Aldous, Durkheim, & Tönnies, 1972), as groups of individuals who share core values and a common cause, and who, as a consequence, agree to divide labour in a way that allows them to achieve this cause as a collective. This is not to say we understand such forms of resistance as collective acts that are planned or intended to stop or alter the course of neoliberalism. Rather, we argue that individuals, particularly middle managers, can organize ‘spaces’ or ‘enclaves’ within neoliberal organizations in ways that allow them to regain some degree of control over their work and lives (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Courpasson, 2017), particularly in order to

function according to their work ethos (Weber, 1978) under a regime with which that work ethos may conflict. We contend that building a community to take back control over work under neoliberalism requires engaging in infra-political activities (Scott, 1990) that challenge the disconnect between business practice and socially accepted morality, by defying the isolation and constant competition to which they are subjected.

Durkheim in Neoliberal Organizations: Searching for Hidden Communities and Understanding New Forms of Solidarity

We have shown that when oppositional neoliberal forces threaten *what seriously matters* to employees (their work ethos, the quality of inter-subjective relationships at work, and what they perceive as their social mandate), a strong sense of fellowship can arise among people sharing a certain ‘way of life’ at work. In particular, the “often overlooked horizontal, affective and moral bonds that underlie and sustain the political (Devere and Smith 2010)” (Mallory and Carlson 2014: 327) – can be mobilized to resist top-level managerial decisions. In other words, we have shown that connections among people do not arise ‘simply’ on the basis of personal acquaintance or common interests – connection also comes from defending shared principles. Using Durkheim’s work on solidarity to understand these connections encourages us to analyze groups of friends as “a collective representation and a social fact consisting of ways of acting, thinking, and feeling (. . .) friendship, like other collective representations, would involve both beliefs and practices and have both sacred and profane qualities” (Mallory & Carlson 2014: 328). Solidarity thus “carries the spark of the sacred into everyday life” (Mallory & Carlson 2014: 328). This Durkheimian approach, as per Mallory and Carlson, “reveals a dialectic between collective ideals and everyday practices” (2014: 328). in which ideals are enacted in

what people do together in their everyday lives, even in cases where they are separated. Below, we will argue that future research should further explore hidden collectives or communities and new forms of emerging solidarity alongside the infrastructures that allow ‘them/us’ to sustain these forms of solidarity in contexts where neo-liberal measures pressure individuals in the opposite direction, toward isolation.

Small community politics and the search for the hidden

The unexpected resurgence of mechanical solidarity discussed in this paper leads us to suggest that contemporary workplace restructuring might stimulate, rather than diminish, more frequent and meaningful experiences of *communitas* (Turner, 1969; Letkemann, 2002). In the face of anomie, Durkheim reminds us that ‘a group must [. . .] exist or be formed within which can be drawn up the system of rules that is now lacking’ (Durkheim, 1902, p. xxxv). Disruptive decisions that are detrimental to a specific group or team may actually stimulate the formation of community. For example, when they arouse feelings of marginalization, such decisions may reinforce group boundaries and contribute to feelings of shared difference, leading to a symbolic ‘consciousness of community’ (Cohen, 1985, p. 23; Letkemann, 2002). Specific local instantiations of the ethos of *hanging together* are the very bedrock of resistance: as they experience renewed solidary formations, people enact and give their own meaning to occupational ideologies (Hecht, 1997) different from those prescribed by neo-liberal management. Durkheim’s solution to anomie is to create communities within the isolation of the modern world.

. . .once such a group is formed, a moral life evolves. . .It is impossible for men to live together and be in regular contact with one another without their acquiring some feeling for the group which they constitute through having united together, without their becoming attached to it, concerning themselves with its interests

(. . .) this subordination of the particular to the general interest, is the very wellspring of all moral activity. (Durkheim, 1902, pp. xlii–xliii)

It follows that Durkheim develops a *political* understanding of community, rather than a nostalgic one that functions as a euphemism for conformity and closure. Conceiving of community as a ‘*diversity of practices*’ (Lash, 1986, p. 72), based on the observation that people do not always find themselves in agreement or reach consensus, is a way to ‘keep on doing politics’. Such a view of community holds open the possibility that human improvement may be achieved through something other than competition and rivalry – for example, when people protect and promote what seriously matters to them in the context of the workplace, even when such efforts are trivialized and looked down upon by neoliberal management. Rather than more anomie, neoliberalism’s disruptive reforms of the workplace may actually produce a renewed sense of shared autonomy, potentially leading to the renegotiation of meaning in the workplace as its members construct everyday realities ‘in terms of the special “stuff” with which they customarily work’ (Letkemann, 2002, p. 262; Hackman, 1990, p. 488). Thereby, beyond emotional and social disruption and the resulting anomie, practices of workplace dissidence such as those explored in this paper, which are driven by shared values and familiar meanings, may ultimately transcend the emotional and social disruption and the resulting anomie they seek to combat and actually help to strengthen and intensify the feelings of homogeneity that are supposedly being erased from the individualistic anomic workplace. These feelings, in turn, reinforce mechanical solidarity. Because members must rely on one another to successfully undertake dissident projects, hanging together becomes an ethos, a way of doing the job, of sticking to one’s values at work. Chatting over lunch or coffee, or offering support to colleagues, takes on new depth in this light, helping to establish the contours of a renewed solidarity in fluid contexts where people no longer

necessarily know each other, but where forms of ‘political friendship’ (Mallory & Carlson, 2014) remain possible nonetheless. As Durkheim himself said, ‘Doubtless all traces of common consciousness do not vanish because of the growth of division of labour’ (1893, p. 450).

Moreover, the human penchant for proximity is still an important asset in communal work (Collins, 2004), particularly in the work of resisters contesting views, ideologies and strategic decisions imposed by top managers. In this way, ‘the social is constantly inscribed in creative processes of a more individualized and everyday nature’ (Schiermer, 2014, p. 78), solidarity being invested in and animated by a shared focus on what is worth taking risks for, at both the individual and collective levels. In this way, mechanical solidarity may be seen as persisting despite current social dislocation. It is called into question by the presence of autonomous actors and individual personalities, even as these personalities are subsumed under and swept along by the collective journey. In other words, the new conditions of work in contemporary neoliberal organizations seem to have changed the ‘workings of effervescence’ (Schiermer, 2014, p. 82) and generated new modalities for the unexpected production of solid social links, thereby attenuating the paradox highlighted in the introduction of this paper. The dynamics of solidarity have surely become more varied and more decentralized; now, they are mainly restricted to smaller groups and dissident enclaves held together by symbolically and practically powerful objects and projects, thereby shaping situated and often much smaller *political* communities. This means that mechanical solidarity remains firmly rooted in shared feelings and the shared awareness of threats, while also permitting individuals to express and assert themselves creatively in episodes of dissidence – an emergent combination of individualized and collectively generated and supported solidarity.

Combining Durkheim’s analyses of solidarity and anomie encourages us to look beyond the cult of ‘the little community’ (Redfield, 1989), which has affected sociological thinking so

strongly that we are ‘unable to conceive of any form of social solidarity that does not rest on shared values and spontaneous cooperation (. . .) or on engineered consent, manipulation or outright coercion’ (Lash, 1986, p. 65). Durkheim’s analysis offers a better way to theorize the problem of solidarity without sinking into nostalgia over the good old days of spatial cohesion in small, local communities (Balzell, 1968). It makes it possible to identify the revival of the culture of small communities in a new form and to give an account of the moral texture of encounters that understands them as part of meaningful collective endeavours with their own form of politics.

The challenge for scholars is to concretely identify these communities at work. We have shown that they are usually hidden, and operate in an infra-political manner, meaning that it is only possible to find them, and to recognize their particular form of the political, by investigating familiar places, talk to people who are closely related to us, and immersing ourselves in workplaces. It is only by exploring these spaces that we can begin to understand whether and to what extent neoliberal measures can infiltrate society, how this infiltration may reconfigure solidarities, and whether resistance still has a meaning in organizations today.

Solidarity and its infrastructure(s): towards studies of friendship in the workplace?

Durkheim was the thinker of togetherness. He believed that solidary collectives arose from emotional currents, waves of ‘electricity’ produced during intense interpersonal encounters (Barnwell, 2018; Shilling, 2005) – exactly what neoliberal societies and organizations are avoiding in the era of Covid-19. His view of social relationships as founded on collective representations as well as strictly personal and intimate bonds allows us to see that when people decide to initiate collective forms of dissidence, they are able to establish bonds of solidarity built from solid intersubjective encounters that go beyond *interpersonal* affinities. These may

even (re)produce friendship relations, despite contexts of distancing and fragmentation. We have shown that divergence over the meaning of a job well done can push people together, as they seek out others who share their morals and values. Beyond that, we argue that work may also provide a social infrastructure for communities, built and sustained through friendship relations developed in the workplace.

As Janis observed more than half a century ago, the existence of a substratum of mechanical solidarity in uncertain or menacing times is nothing new (1963, p. 227):

It has long been known that when people are exposed to external danger they show a remarkable increase in group solidarity. That is, they manifest increased motivation to retain affiliation with a face-to-face group and to avoid actions that deviate from its norm.

Durkheim himself asserted in the wake of exceptional events, such as a natural disaster, a public health crisis, or, in the case of our study, profound disruption of social relationships at work, manifestations of the need for solidarity are similar to those that arise when people experience an attack on shared basic feelings:

Never do we feel the need of the company of our compatriots so greatly as when we are in a strange country; never does the believer feel so strongly attracted to his co-religionists as during periods of persecution. Of course, we always love the company of those who feel and think as we do, but it is with passion, and no longer solely with pleasure, that we seek it immediately after discussions where our common beliefs have been greatly combated. (Durkheim, 1947, p. 102)

Neoliberal organizations are a ‘strange country’ for many workers today, because of the profoundly disruptive effect of these organizations on their lives. Sojourning in this strange country can be an impetus to seek shared experiences instead of isolating themselves further. In this way, ‘common conscience’ replaces ‘division of labour’, becoming the ‘principal kind of social aggregation’ (Durkheim, 1947, p. 173). If

preexisting community ties can serve as starting points for potentially novel forms of solidarity, it may be inferred that mechanical solidarity based on common conscience and beliefs is a *continuous* condition for the development and maintenance of harmonious intersubjective relationships within existing collectives or inside newly formed groupings. Mechanical solidarity would appear constant, lying dormant for a time, rekindled by exceptionally disruptive events, and subsiding again once a new organizational culture has been successfully engineered. Solidarity, in other words, may be seen as an *ongoing* phenomenon or process, a touchstone to which people return when they live through certain experiences or feel certain emotions. Dissidence, which is always a specific and situated phenomenon, is one such experience: specific and situated forms of solidarity emerge as interactions among people resisting shared circumstances intensify. We believe that these moments of resistance also nurture friendship as Durkheim defines it, as strong, durable bonds of solidarity, which in turn provide solid *infrastructure* for further dissidence.

Solidarity and friendship are often defined as contrasting with each other: solidarity is defined in terms of communities or associations, while friendship is seen as a bond based on individual preference. Durkheim’s concept of solidarity, however, is a way of asking how the best qualities of friendship are possible on increasingly wider scales of human interaction (Mallory & Carlson, 2014: 335) – in other words, it is possible to think of the two terms as complementary, even interrelated. This conceptualization connects the symbolic and political nature of solidarity (O’Hearn, 2009) to the private nature of friendship. If we follow Durkheim, the rising anomie in organizations signals “the weakening of traditionally powerful collective representations” (Mallory & Carlson 2014: 336) which subsequently weakens interpersonal relationships. Modern understandings of friendship reflect this, in fleeting connections built from within a narcissistic and individualistic retreat into private life. The result is the generalized

collapse of an enduring vision of collective life, and a renouncement of any commitment to strive for political impact on the quality of our social relationships. Mallory and Carlson mention the connection drawn by Tocqueville “between the depoliticizing potential of private friendships and despotic, tyrannical forms of democracy” (Mallory & Carlson 2014: 340), who saw it as potentially fostering tendencies toward despotism, in that it encouraged a certain renunciation and submission to seemingly soft forms of authority (de Tocqueville, 2003; see Singer, 2013). From the perspective of this article, the forging of friendship as a resource for collective effort can help us to perceive the political nature of mechanical forms of solidarity, as it is expressed and intensified during episodes of resistance. It is therefore of great importance that studies of organizational politics engage in analysis of the “social bonds that underpin the political”, and explore “how the sacred qualities of friendship” (Mallory & Carlson 2014: 338) can be nourished to produce and sustain the force of collective life. Rather than leading to more defeatist pronouncements about the loss of politically driven commitment and the breakdown of communities, research on organizational resistance can help to rekindle interest in examining how robust communal links attached to a specific work ethos can provide support to people in the workplace, and how these links take on life and energy when workers engage in resistance.

Working from this definition of solidarity as an ongoing dialectical motion between the sacred elements of friendship and its mundane everyday accomplishments through concrete and situated intersubjective relations (Pahl, 2000; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004), we propose that bonds of friendship form a symbolic and concrete *infrastructure* for engaging in dissidence in moments of social decline.

The mutual care and human intimacy that emerges through shared activities of resistance draws people together in a communal project. Because projects of resistance tend to drain competition from human interaction, mechanisms of friendship and a sense of security are able to flourish. Extreme mutual support and

denser interpersonal interactions, shared vocabularies, and cooperation on common projects are all contributing factors, and indeed we suggest that through these intimate experiences of solidarity, the neoliberal agenda is, at the very least, moderated. Inside the safe social spaces they create, which are built on mutuality and intimacy, workers become more able and willing to construct and sustain such spaces for others (Webster & Boyd, 2019, p. 51). *Resistance is work*: it entails labour-intensive activities that drive energies and provide impetus in moments of discouragement or fatigue. Friendship among resisters can become, over time and place, a process ingrained into how people perform their work, so that it becomes genuinely tied to a practice of care, reducing individual vulnerabilities. It may, in this way, be a pathway to working differently together. Friendship in these instances of resistance is not just a side product of an exceptional moment of engagement and extra effort (Courpasson & Younes, 2018); it can, and does, become part of a *sub-culture of trusting collegiality*. Acts of friendship are acts of resistance per se. Shared intimacy, the creation of safe spaces, and intensive work together, all anchored in common values, can challenge the political dominance and organizational resilience of the neoliberal project, which is driven by the ideological imperative to dismantle any and all collective identities, structures and destinies that stand in the way of unrestricted market forces. Recent research highlights how friendship and ties of solidarity can be generated across socio-spatial borders (Daskalaki & Kokkinidis, 2017), because they are both temporal and spatial in their reach and significance – meaning that lived environments and life stages play a crucial role in the practice of friendship (van der Horst & Coffé, 2012). This offers hope for rekindling solidary links that bear some resemblance to those of ‘the less extended societies of former days’ (Durkheim, 1972, p. 1198).

As Mallory and Carlson (2014: 333) remind us, for Durkheim, “the beliefs and practices of friendship are inextricably linked”. Workplace resistance, generating a whole “intersubjective

realm of relationships, permeated by symbols and the sacred” (Mallory & Carlson 2014: 333), is therefore fully related to an ideal of what intersubjective relations at work ought to be. Experiences of resistance in neoliberal settings, such as those we have described in this paper, are moments where intersubjective encounters, because they are entangled with intense emotions, produce “collective ideals of friendship (. . .) ritually renewed” (Mallory & Carlson 2014: 333). Regardless of their content, ‘the rituals and ideals of friendship re-enact its supra individual nature’ (Mallory & Carlson, 2014: 333). Friendship and ties of solidarity are themselves a form of pushback against neoliberal forces, in other words. Seen from this perspective, friendship is necessarily ‘political’ in that it bounds the sacredness of the person (Mauss, 1955), linking them to the ‘personality of the collective’ (Durkheim, 1961, p. 67).

Conclusion

This paper has used a Durkheimian reading of solitary forms of relationships at work to suggest that enclaves of dissidence are significant empirical phenomena in contemporary organizations. This is true because these relationships unfold in groups, places and moments where workers are emboldened as individuals in their moral engagement with their work, while feeling a powerful sense of belonging to a collective of equals. We understand these enclaves, among others things, to be social configurations that allow people to overcome certain worrying trends toward anomie, helping to reconnect individuals to one another as they commit together to creative, rather than purely oppositional, activities. It is worth noting that these groupings actually map nicely onto contemporary understandings of worthy individual behaviour, such as demonstrating energetic and productive engagement in a project, entrepreneurial spirit, and willingness to take risk, while at the same time remaining deeply attached and loyal to a collective entity. That seems an excellent way to describe an ideal form of productive community.

We have argued that a renewed focus on communal ties within the anomic company is crucial in organization studies if we wish to undertake any meaningful and engaged investigation of ways to counter the ‘new individualism’ emerging from the various forms of corporate culture engineered over the last four decades, which have created a false communal relationship within the company in service of maximizing productivity (Casey, 1995; Ezzy, 2002). The individualism this fosters is inimical to mechanical solidarity in that it is a ‘cognitive and affective make-up’ (Kunda, 1992, p. 10) which drains away the spontaneity of non-reflective reactions, and of social relationships which are, presumably, based upon sentiment and emotion. According to Downey, ‘the mechanical model is best understood in terms of spontaneous, non-reflective sentiments and habits which bind men together’ (Downey, 1969, p. 440). It therefore seems clear that solidarity should not, as is too often the case, be seen in organization studies as an exogenous analytical concept, but instead as a practice that provides concrete inspiration to people when everyday life is in crisis.

Following Rakopoulos (2016: 143), organizational politics should therefore analyse solidarity as a bridge, “which situates people in relation and inter-dependence, and ties the contingencies of the political present to existing (even ‘deep’) practices of survival and sociality”. As a bridge, solidarity connects practical agency – and its innate capacity to generate and sustain productive social relationships – to organizational localities and occupational enclaves. Infrastructures of solidarity embody trust-building values and dispositions through which isolated, insecure and anxious employees within anomic companies can begin to imagine and enact alternative ‘communal realities’, rejecting the ideology of extreme individualism through which anomic companies are legitimated. In this way, the social solidarities that emerge out of the practical agency routinely expressed by dissenting communities within neoliberal organizations reveal the inherently ‘pro-social’ nature of humanity as a species, and celebrates the human potential to ‘act together’

in pursuit of shared values and objectives. This, we argue, is a unique opportunity for organizational scholarship to engage with some of the most pressing issues of our times, particularly in a moment when calls for solidarity sometimes come across as magical incantations called out by helpless governments, enchanted prayers for fake unity.

Neoliberalization may have severely weakened the mechanical solidarity that is the social and moral foundation for the collective agency needed to transform the conditions under which we live and labour. However, it has not succeeded in eradicating it, nor has it been stripped of its underlying potential to change the material conditions and social context within which that life and labour take place. Organization studies should redouble its efforts to uncover the submerged, but far from exhausted, social solidarities that continue to inform collective life within neoliberal organizations despite their having done their utmost to destroy the conditions and contexts which made the latter possible. We hope, in this paper, that we have traced out the beginnings of a path in this direction by highlighting the complex processes through which neoliberalization has generated the very opposite of what it has so assiduously attempted to achieve. Instead of irreparably damaging, if not obliterating, all sources of social solidarity within socio-organizational life, we have argued that neoliberalization has actually created the necessary conditions to revive the very forms of collective agency it abhors. It is indeed an historical and sociological irony that these forms of collective agency have emerged from within the ranks of those who are most expected to advance and protect the ‘neo-liberalization project’ – middle managers and professionals, who are expected to help build, and then to administer and sustain, anomic organizations. Our analysis very strongly suggests that the study of these middle managers and professionals as politically engaged agents is a matter of sociological urgency: they are finding it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to keep up their end of the ‘Faustian bargain’ that neoliberal capitalism has driven with them. Moreover, our research

suggests that they are beginning to question, and even challenge and actively resist, the terms on which that bargain has been struck, and to seek out alternative modes of practical agency. It is beyond the scope of this paper to suggest that elements of ‘political intoxication’ might exist in neoliberal organizations, where most elements of collective vitality seem to have been ‘forced underground’ by dominant organizing principles of disaggregation and separation. However, instances of intra-organizational dissidence suggest that it would be worth studying further the possible contagious effects of these moments of resistance on collective life at work, because they remain necessary for individuals to ‘reach beyond’ their own selves in order to become connected energetically to group efforts and life (Durkheim, 1952, p. 287; Shilling & Mellor, 2011). Such studies may help us to draw valuable lessons from recent and ongoing popular movements such as the Yellow Vests in France. They also signal the emergence of a rich and challenging research agenda, one that encourages organization theorists to push forward their explorations of the potential of ‘effervescent political intoxication’ to generate new forms of social solidarity in twenty-first-century organizations and societies. Examining new forms of solidarity and connection becomes more relevant by the day, at a time when social distancing might become the ‘new normal’, and as global crises effect deep structural transformations in our lives.

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Note

1. Durkheim, in his review of the work of Ferdinand Tönnies, described the transformation of community into society as ‘the *rupturing*

of social bonds and the decomposition of the social organism' (1972, p. 1197). This he saw as a consequence of *internal war*, in that such situations place people in a state of opposition, and even hostility to one another. Following his lead, we consider struggles against anomie to be based largely in conflicts among opposing moralities of work.

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