

The Relational and Redistributive Dynamics of Mutual Aid: Implications of Afro-Communitarian Ethics for the Study of Creative Work

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Studies of non-standard, project-based forms of work prevalent in the creative industries have typically theorized the relational dynamics of work as a competitive process of social capital accumulation involving an individualistic, self-enterprising, zero-sum, and winner-takes-all struggle for favourable social network-positioning. Problematizing this prevailing conceptualization, our empirical case study draws on fifty in-depth interviews and two focus groups with creative workers in Ghana to show how relations of mutual aid, including elaborate efforts to live harmoniously with others, are intricately intertwined with economic practices of getting by and getting ahead. Our analysis abductively mobilizes insights from Afro-communitarian ethics to theorize the mutual aid we observed as a complex socio-economic practice of relational resource redistribution contingent on degrees of social proximity. In applying “a theory from the South” to foreground the role of moral obligations, social harmony, and hands-on practices of mutual aid in non-standard forms of work, we contribute a “decolonial critique” of relationality of relevance to scholars of creative work and business ethicists.

Key Words: creative work, creative industries, social capital, mutual aid, Afro-communitarian ethics, relational resource redistribution

This article re-examines the dominant conceptualizations of relationality in studies of creative work that have typically mobilized concepts such as social network and social capital to define and explain the relational dynamics of work in the creative industries. Creative work has long been regarded as a paradigmatic example of non-standard forms of labour unfolding in precarious and fiercely competitive labour markets external to well-delineated and stable organizations (Haunschild 2003; Menger 2014). In line with this prevailing view, creative workers have predominantly been typified as self-employed workers, “own-account businesses,” or independent freelance contractors pursuing insecure and discontinuous “boundaryless careers” on a short-term, project-by-project, on-demand basis (Mathieu 2011; Morris, McKinlay, and Farrell 2021). In seeking to account for how creative workers navigate the contingency and volatility of external labour markets, scholars have often mobilized the concept of “networks” and “social capital” (Blair 2001; Lee 2011; Townley, Beech, and McKinlay 2009). However, the dominant modes of conceptualizing social networks in external labour markets tend to relapse into an organizational, internal labour market model, of social interaction. Consistent with this model, it has become commonplace to argue that social networks significantly attenuate the adverse impacts of highly insecure freelance labour markets by functioning as “latent organisations” (Morris, McKinlay, and Farrell 2021; Starkey, Barnatt, and Tempest 2000). By this account, the intrinsic transience and precarity of freelance work is offset by informal and reputation-driven webs of professional connections that gradually congeal into semi-permanent and closed collaborative professional networks, thereby offering creative workers much-needed stability and predictability of employment (Antcliff, Saundry, and Stuart 2007; Daskalaki 2010). In accordance with such tenets, social capital has consistently been identified as indispensable to the pursuit of freelance creative work (Dowd and Pinheiro 2013; Lee 2011; Townley, Beech, and McKinlay 2009). This is because social capital, that is, the connections one possesses and the specific position one occupies in a social network (Bourdieu, 1996), are widely agreed to be essential for securing job entry and maintaining employability in industries characterized by on-demand work, an oversupply of workers, and a lack of formal entry requirements (Blair 2001; Haunschild 2003; Lee and Gargiulo 2022).

This almost unanimous scholarly consensus as to the primacy of social networks for managing creative work is largely due to an overwhelming emphasis on “bridging” rather than “bonding” forms of social capital (Putnam 2001). Bridging social capital refers to the strategic efforts of creative workers to construct relational linkages across the “structural holes” that separate those who are not directly connected within a network. Forging such connections typically entails efforts to develop “linking ties” with actors occupying higher power positions. In this instrumentalist conceptualization, actors proceed upwardly along a vertical and linear vector of connections to powerful actors towards the accomplishment of their goals of career advancement and professional mobility. Studies aimed at schematically ascertaining the effects of social networks on individual career success have applied statistical analyses of the frequency, volume, and positioning of purely professional contacts (Dowd and Pinheiro 2013; Pinheiro and Dowd 2009). In assuming the

centrality of bridging capital, such studies treat creative workers as individualistic, self-interested, and strategic network-maximizers whose primary aim is to amplify the sum of their “weak,” “fleeting,” and “thin” professional contacts in the hope that these will eventually bolster their reputational status and lead to semi-permanent work arrangements.

Analyses of bonding social capital, by contrast, have long been conspicuous by their absence in studies of work in the creative industries. Only recently have scholars begun to recognize and explore the salience of bonding social capital in upholding the livelihoods of creative workers, that is, the role of strong, thick, and circular ties within kinship, neighbourhoods, and local communities (Alacovska 2020; Alacovska and Bissonnette 2021; Belfiore 2021; Campbell 2022). Such scholarship has mostly applied a feminist ethics-of-care approach to theorize creative work as “a labour of care” deeply enmeshed in the relational realities of everyday life (Alacovska 2020), closely entwined with community-building efforts, and squarely predicated on provisioning care for others rather than the pursuit of individualistic self-enterprise or strategic network positioning. In adopting an ethics-of-care approach to creative work, these scholars have shed important light on the extent to which such labour is infused with non-instrumental and communitarian ethical-affective values of solidarity, community reproduction, and moral injunctions of social and political progress (Banks 2006). In their dedication to addressing the long-neglected dynamics of bonding as opposed to bridging forms of social capital, however, such studies have sometimes veered too far to the other extreme, tending to overestimate the communitarian ethos of work and to underestimate the role of instrumental, economic, and individualistic motivations.

In this article, we aim to elucidate the complex and ambiguous interrelationship between bonding and bridging capital. The focus of our examination is thus on the coexistence and intricate entanglement of non-instrumental, communitarian, and care values with individualistic, economic, and business considerations in the labours of creative workers. Specifically, we draw on fifty in-depth interviews and two focus groups with workers in the theatre and film industries in Ghana to investigate the relational dynamics of mutual aid as a vital element of doing creative business and securing economic sustainability in this sector. Rather than treating mutual aid as simply an altruistic, reciprocal, and non-commodified practice that takes place within self-organized voluntaristic or care communities outside the bounds of the market (Maitland 1998), such as “cultural co-ops” (e.g. Sandoval, 2018) or grassroots artistic collectives (e.g. Campbell 2022), we emphasize the everyday, often ambivalent and contested, circularity between help-giving (and the adjacent communitarian and care motives of selflessness and dis-interestedness), and help-receiving (and the related instrumental values of self-centredness and self-interestedness) within family, kinship, friendship, business, and local communities.

To conceptualize mutual aid as both a communitarian and self-interested practice, we apply insights from Afro-communitarian ethics—also known as Communalism or Ubuntu ethics (Metz 2007). We especially build on the “moderate communitarianism” approach advocated by Gyekye (1996; 1997), which principally acknowledges the “complex and dynamic balance between the individual and

the community” in the pursuit of relational harmony and the common good (Molefe 2017b, 186). Applying the tenets of moderate communitarianism to the study of creative work, we theorize mutual aid as a practice in which the practical accomplishment of communitarian relations and communal realizations of the common good are intimately coupled with individual economic practices and financial activities. For while these latter activities may “belong” to professional and business spheres and are undertaken in the pursuit of self-interest, in practice our study shows they are intricately interwoven with the everyday, intimate, and familial activities of establishing and maintaining harmony in relational ties. As such, we approach mutual aid as a constantly negotiated and contested process of relational resource redistribution whereby creative workers strive to accomplish harmonious relations with specific relational others positioned at varying degrees of social proximity, while at the same time maintaining economically viable creative businesses. Aligning with the moderate communitarianism of Gyekye (1996, 1997), Wiredu (2008), and Molefe (2017a, 2017b), we argue that failing to accomplish economic sustainability is tantamount to a failure to relate harmoniously within specific circles of mutual aid and that—vice versa—the achievement of successful creative business reflects success in averting discord. Our study thus reveals how economic and work lives in the creative industries in Ghana are upheld by practices of relational resource redistribution, further showing how the dynamics, content, and intensity of these practices are contingent on the particular relational— affective and ethical—principles of interaction specific to each relational tie in which mutual aid occurs.

In contrast to the ethics of care approach typically deployed by scholars to study the relationality of creative work, Afro-communitarian ethics offers a much longer and richer tradition of conceptualizing the relational ontology of the self, that is, the caring and communitarian underpinnings of human action and being. In its more expansive and caring grounding of the self, the Afro-communitarian thought system upends the centrality, assumed in Western libertarian intellectual traditions, including in studies of social capital in the creative industries (Banks 2006), of individualistic, rational, crudely calculative, social-capital-maximizing, and profit-seeking social actors (Lutz 2009; Pérezts, Russon, and Painter 2020; Woermann and Engelbrecht 2019). In foregrounding the value of Afro-communitarian thought for the study of relationality in creative work, we follow in the footsteps of business ethicists engaged in mobilizing Afro-communitarian ethics to broaden Western libertarian conceptualizations of leadership (Ike 2011; Pérezts, Russon, and Painter 2020), global management (Lutz, 2009), and stakeholder theory (Woermann and Engelbrecht 2019).

Our study makes two principal contributions. Firstly, in emphasizing and demonstrating the importance of mutual aid, resource redistribution, and the accomplishment of harmonious relations in commercial, labour, and economic contexts, we challenge the either-or approach to relationality prevalent in much organization, management, and sociological scholarship. This binary approach, we argue, oversimplifies the relational dynamics of creative work by treating them either as an individualistic zero-sum struggle for the accumulation of social capital or as an

altruistic, caring, and cooperative alternative to commercial and capitalist creative economies.

Secondly, by mobilizing insights from an Afro-communitarian ethics, we bring “Southern voices” (Alcadipani et al. 2012) to bear on the (Western) conceptualization of relationality in creative work. In this we join recent efforts by scholars of organization and management studies to highlight and act on the need for a “decolonial critique” of entrenched theories (Banerjee 2021; Mignolo and Walsh 2018). In particular, we stride with, and contribute to, scholarly efforts at “epistemic decolonialization” (Mitova 2020) and “conceptual decolonialization” (Wiredu 1997; 2002). Consistent with Wiredu’s “negative” and “positive” programme (1997) of conceptual decolonialization, we not only aim to negate and critically “de-centre” the mainstream sociological concept of social capital. Rather, we aim to affirmatively “re-centre” the discussion of such concepts by restoring the “epistemic authority to marginalized knowers and their knowledge systems” (Mitova 2020, 194) and their “indigenous conceptual schemes” (Wiredu 1997, 11). By de-centring and re-centring conceptual frameworks, we thus contribute to the re-imagination of the “pluriverse” (Mignolo 2018), that is, the possibility of the co-existence of diverse and alternate “paths and praxis toward an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing and doing” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 4). In doing so, we further respond to recent calls in business ethics for studies “looking outside the mainstream in the field” and engaging with “overlooked thinkers” and “thought systems” in order to revitalize, enrich, and broaden entrenched theoretical and analytical modes of understanding work and organizations (Wicks et al. 2021, 491).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Relationality of Creative Work: Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

Adopting the extraordinarily influential conceptualization of social capital first developed by Bourdieu (1996), scholars of creative work have typically approached social capital as a scarce and unequally distributed resource circulating within specific fields of cultural production (DiMaggio 2011). In accordance with the principles of rational utility maximization, social capital theory essentially contends that the greater the number of connections and ties we develop with acquaintances, colleagues, professionals, and so on, the greater will be the beneficial economic and social outcomes. Since any field is held to have a limited amount of resources, the accumulation of sought-after social capital is conceptualized in this perspective as a competitive endeavour tantamount to a zero-sum struggle or winner-takes-all game (Menger, 2014). In this view, creative workers regard social capital as worth struggling for in the present because in the future they hope to convert accumulated social capital into symbolic capital such as prestige and reputation, which in turn can be converted into economic capital, pecuniary benefits, and lucrative careers (Mears 2011). On the basis that informal recommendations can make or break a creative worker’s reputation and career, scholars have long concurred with the seeming truisms that “you’re only as good as your last job” (Blair 2001) and that “it’s not what you know but who you know” (Haunschild 2003). These truisms have been

supported by an ever-increasing number of studies seeking to demonstrate that the greater the amount of social capital a creative worker accrues the greater their income will be (Lee and Gargiulo 2022; Pinheiro and Dowd 2009). Such research proceeds from the premise that the more central a network position a worker occupies—that is, the closer they are to influential nodes in the network—the greater will be their reputation and visibility and hence their chances of being recurrently hired in consecutive projects (Antcliff, Saundry, and Stuart 2007; Cattani, Ferriani, and Allison 2014).

In most of these accounts, economic success in creative work is accordingly theorized as the outcome of “network effects” (Menger 2014) and the function of accrued “bridging capital” widely assumed to be essential for “getting ahead” (Putnam 2001). As *instrumental* connections forged to serve as *a bridge* towards a future job, forthcoming gig, or impending economic success, bridging ties often involve only thin, weak, fleeting, and surface-level interactions (Granovetter 1973) with professional or occupational acquaintances, associates, or colleagues. Therefore, studies have argued the salience of self-enterprising socialization (Lee 2011) and social capital-hunting practices in “network socialities” (Wittel 2001), including “schmoozing after-work parties” (Neff 2012), for the accumulation of bridging capital.

The centrality of bridging capital for creative workers has nonetheless begun to be questioned in recent scholarship, however, with studies foregrounding the role of bonding social capital in the management and organization of creative work (Campbell 2022; Reedy, King and Coupland 2016). These studies have emphasized the importance of strong, long-term, “thick” and “dense” ties (Granovetter 1973) forged within close-knit communities based on kinship or neighbourhoods (Putnam 2001). Premised on the notion that cooperation rather than competition is what is most requisite for “the maintenance of life” (Kropotkin [1902] 2010, xiii), such scholarship has shown that establishing, maintaining, and cherishing intimate, friendly, and mutualistic interpersonal ties with a range of others is undertaken by creative workers not primarily for the purpose of “getting ahead,” as in the case of bridging social capital, but rather of “getting by” in the precarious conditions so widespread in contemporary creative industries. Drawing on the feminist ethics of care approach, scholars advocating the importance of bonding ties have redefined creative work as “care labour” and extolled its selfless, disinterested, and compassionate orientation towards others (Alacovska 2020; Alacovska and Bissonnette 2021). Notwithstanding the valuable insights offered by these studies, however, they fall short of thematizing the everyday, mundane yet complex enmeshment of care, solidarity, and compassion with considerations of self-interest, economic, and business success. Instead, the majority of such studies relegate the caring, bonding, and other-centred dynamics of creative work to a separate non-capitalist sphere of alternative organizing and prefigurative politics, focusing for example on “commoning,” gifting, mutual support, and favour-swapping within artistic cooperatives and collectives (Campbell 2022; Reedy, King and Coupland 2016; Vail and Hollands 2012).

Bringing insights from Afro-communitarian ethics to bear on our understanding of the complex relational dynamics of non-standard forms of work, in this article we argue that bridging and bonding capital are not mutually exclusive but convergent in practices of *mutual aid* conceptualized as a process of relational resource redistribution geared towards both the maintenance of harmonious relations within kinship, friendship, and local communities *as well as* the advancement of economic success and competitive business advantage.

Relations of Mutual Aid: An Afro-Communitarian Ethics

In engaging with an Afro-communitarian ethics to study relationality in a business and economic context, we are inspired by scholars who made a convincing case for applying such ethics to revisit the fundamental contradiction between profit and society at the heart of business ethics (Lutz 2009; Pérezts, Russon, and Painter 2020; Woermann and Engelbrecht 2019). What these scholars identified as particularly propitious for this task is the Afro-communitarian conceptualization of a meaningful life as necessarily entailing the creation, maintenance, and expansion of harmonious relationships between individuals, society, and the cosmos (Metz 2012; 2013). Through an Afro-communitarian lens, a person is understood to achieve a sense of self by “entering into *community* with others and seeking to live *harmoniously* with them” (Metz 2015, 76; original emphasis). By recognizing the essentially relational and interdependent character of the individual, it is argued, Afro-communitarian ethics redresses the primacy in Western (libertarian) philosophical thought of self-reliance, self-interest, and independence over common interest and interdependence (Pérezts, Russon, and Painter 2020; Woermann and Engelbrecht 2019). Business ethicists taking this approach contend that the interests of individuals such as profit, promotion, and competitive advantage, far from being inherently antithetical to the interests of the community, can be understood as compatible with the common good and solidarity if individuals pursuing their self-identity comprehend and experience life as being inexorably bound up with the lives of others. For example, some business ethicists have put forth an Ubuntu-based proposal for recognizing the firm as a community (Lutz 2009), while others have endorsed an Ubuntu-led relational redefinition of leadership as a values-driven pursuit of “cooperative creation and distribution of wealth” (Pérezts, Russon, and Painter 2020, 743) and urged corporations to recast their stakeholders as “relationholders” (Woermann and Engelbrecht 2019). The underlying aim is to frame the social responsibilities of firms more expansively as extending beyond individual stakeholders’ profit towards the promotion of the common good.

While such studies have offered important discussions of Ubuntu in business contexts, and usefully translated its relational principles into general guidelines for business practice in and around organizations, they stopped short of operationalizing such philosophical tenets for the empirical study of the practical enmeshment of relationality with commodity exchange and economic practices as taking place outside formal organizations and within labour markets for non-standard work. We seek to address this shortcoming by operationalizing an Afro-communitarian rendition of mutual aid for the empirical study of the relationality of creative work,

aiming thereby to shed light on the enmeshment of market and non-market considerations in everyday, informal, and non-standard forms of work.

The majority of studies in this stream of business ethics have drawn heavily on the prolific work of Thaddeus Metz (2007; 2015), who popularized the oral tradition of Afro-communitarianism, and especially the South African variant of Ubuntu (Lutz 2009) among Western audiences. In this study, however, we revert to a version of Afro-communitarian ethics elaborated by the less-studied Ghanaian philosophers, Kwame Gyekye (1995; 1996; 1997; 2011) and Kwasi Wiredu (2008; 2009; 2018). Inspired by Akan philosophy, these ethicists framed mutual aid as an *everyday practice* in which relational duties to maintain interpersonal harmony and communitarian considerations *coexist* with the pursuit of self-interest and self-realization. In particular, Gyekye (1996) advocated a “restricted” or “moderate” version of communitarianism able to accommodate “a dualistic conception” of the self as communal and selfless and yet also autonomous and self-interested (Molefe 2017b, 187). Unlike versions of Afro-communitarianism that insist on the primacy of community and harmonious relations over the self in the definition of the common good (e.g., Metz 2007), there is neither tension nor contradiction between the common good and the good of individuals as conceptualized from this moderate Afro-communitarian perspective. In Gyekye’s (1996, 32) words: “communality does not obliterate or squeeze out individuality.” According to Gyekye (2011), such a reconciliation between self-realization and the maintenance of interpersonal harmony is possible because the common good should be understood as comprising all the goods that “are *basic* to the enjoyment and fulfilment of the life of each individual” and thus as encompassing the “basic good” of each individual community member. Consistent with this premise, Gyekye (1995, 156) argued that “the individual should work for the good of all, which of course includes her good.”

In this view, mutual concern for and responsiveness to the needs of others, including compassionate regard for the other, intense caring for communality, and social harmony, are all considered fundamentally constitutive of and integral to individual well-being and self-realization (Gyekye 1996; 1997). Maintaining a balance between the common and the individual good involves continually calibrating *other-regarding duties* and *the right to be other-regarded* (Gyekye 1996; Wiredu 2008). According to Molefe (2017a, 473), for example, the “moral identity of being a person” is developed by discharging “other-regarding obligations to promote the welfare of others in the society.” This is because individuals contribute to the formation and maintenance of the “common good” (Gyekye 1996) by fulfilling their other-regarding obligations, which involves constantly harmonizing their relations with others and conceiving of the common good as a matter of symbiosis, that is, as a matter not only of the selfless redistribution of their resources for the welfare of the community but also of the selfish fulfilment of their basic needs—a fulfilment enabled precisely by the possibility of tapping into resources shared by others (Molefe 2017a; 2017b). In this symbiotic conceptualization of self and community, besides being duty-bound to be other-regarding, each individual also has the right to be other-regarded and to benefit from a redistribution of resources for their self-interest and individual well-being

(Molefe 2017a). To Wiredu (2018, 222) all human beings “at all times, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, need the help of their kind.” Similarly, Gyekye (1996, 37) contended “the individual inevitably requires the relationships of others and the cooperation of others for most of his or her pursuits.” To illustrate this entanglement of self and community, Gyekye (2011) and Wiredu (2018, 220) both drew on the symbolism of an Akan art motif in which a crocodile is depicted with two heads fighting over food but a single stomach, with the shared stomach symbolizing “the commonality of basic interests” and the two heads locked in combat symbolizing “enlightened self-interest.”

Together, the right to be other-regarded and the duty to be other-regarding, lock individuals in circles of mutual aid that are upheld and lubricated by practices of help-giving and help-receiving (Wiredu 2018). Each circle of mutual aid necessitates the practical harmonization of relational resource redistribution, including the balance between selflessness and other-centredness with self-interestedness and self-centredness (Gyekye 1997; Wiredu 2009). Achieving this balance is inherently complex, for while the well-being of all people is deemed important, in practice the intensity and type of resource redistribution—including care, financial support, labour, and favours—is contingent on the type of each relationship. In this view, the duties and rights of mutual aid are neither equally nor equitably distributed among members of a community. Instead, a varying relational “sense of responsibility to household, lineage and society at large” (Wiredu 2009, 16) determines the practical reconfiguration of resource redistribution, with circles of mutual aid radiating outwards in declining order of proximity, intimacy, and intensity from families and households to friends, collaborators, and local communities. The closer and more intimate the relational tie within each cycle of mutual aid, the more intense will be the other-regarding duties entailed, and hence the greater the expectations will be of receiving help or being other-regarded. Moreover, it is the personal characteristics and concrete life circumstances of the individuals participating in these circles of mutual aid rather than abstract norms that ultimately arbitrate the amount, nature, and frequency of resource redistribution. Those who have already secured comfortable livelihoods for themselves, their family, and their kin are expected to make a commensurately greater contribution to the well-being of society at large and to attend to the needs of more distant and unknown others (Wiredu 2018). Similarly, those who are experiencing economic hardship or health adversity command partiality of care and demand the urgency to be other-regarded.

Our contention is that an Afro-communitarian lens as outlined above can capture the salience of mutual aid as a complex, ambivalent, and constantly negotiated practice of balancing resource redistribution between help-giving (selflessness) and help-receiving (self-interestedness) in creative work. This is because, in contrast with feminist care ethics, Afro-communitarianism acknowledges that the human resources of compassion, care, and generosity are *finite* and hence require careful and discriminating redistribution rather than a proportional return of gifts (Gyekye 1996; Metz 2013). Engaging in mutual aid should not be mistaken for a calculative act of deferred gift-giving in the sense of performing a favour to be reciprocated (equalized) at a later stage, therefore, nor as an exclusively solidaristic goodwill

response to the immediate troubles and sufferings of fellow members of one's community (Metz 2015); rather, mutual aid so conceived entails the relational efforts to *dutifully* reshuffle resources from those who currently have more to those who have less, while at the same time *rightfully* securing the certainty of receiving help when in hardship.

Afro-communitarianism is not an abstract moral code with corresponding categorical imperatives but “an operative ethic” guiding everyday behaviour and relational comportment (Wiredu 2009, 15). In this ethic, customary and cultural norms require that individuals contribute to the common good in a constant hands-on effort of establishing, maintaining, and perpetuating relational harmony in circles of mutual aid. Upholding circles of mutual aid is thus directly related to one's moral standing (Molefe 2017a). According to Wiredu (2018, 221–22), for example, “an individual's image will depend rather crucially upon the extent to which his or her actions benefit others than himself, not of course, by accident or coincidence but by design.” Consequently, those who have benefited from being other-regarded but failed to discharge their own other-regarding duties are “liable to be convicted, at the bar of public opinion, of such fathomless degeneracy as to be branded a social outcast” (Wiredu 2018, 223). This means that any action which fails to perpetuate the loop between help-giving and help-receiving not only distorts harmony and fuels discord but also undermines the robustness of one's self and the sustainability of one's livelihood. Mutual aid is thus simultaneously both liberating yet strenuous, life-affirming yet life-constraining, since giving help to others and receiving help from others alike impose a heavy burden of living up to one's rights and duties.

In what follows, we elucidate how creative workers navigate such contradictory and ambivalent tensions arising from the need to balance instrumental and self-interested motivations with communitarian and caring orientations and harmonize help-giving and help-receiving within specific circles of mutual aid. We show how maintaining relational harmony via *relational redistribution of resources* is inextricably linked to securing one's economic and business viability, especially in conditions of precarity and lack of industrial infrastructure.

METHODOLOGY

Our study draws on field research conducted with film and theatre producers in Ghana between January and March 2020. The precarious, informal, and insecure nature of work in Ghana's creative industries affords a useful case for exploring the role of relational ties in work practices. For while Ghana is home to a wealth of creative production, including a long history of theatre-making and film production, these industries lack established institutions, structures, and standardized processes.¹ Despite recent policy efforts to formalize the industry and improve

¹The film industry in Ghana includes many filmmaking traditions. It includes filmmakers working on high-budget, high-production value English-language films that screen on global platforms. *The Perfect Picture: 10 Years Later* (dir. Shirley Frimpong-Manso) is emblematic of this tradition. Yet it also includes a low-budget video-film industry producing movies in local languages, sometimes called “Kumawood” after

conditions for creative workers, the arts sector in Ghana is still characterized by a very high degree of informal self-employment and precarious work conditions (Alacovska, Langevang, and Steedman 2021; Garritano 2013). This lack of developed industrial and labour systems renders the relational infrastructures of mutual aid highly visible as producers rely on relationships to fulfil their business objectives and to carve out respectable livelihoods.

The contemporary Ghanaian cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are built on a foundation of postcolonial efforts to decolonize Ghana through arts and culture. Kwame Nkrumah's anti-colonial and postcolonial policies called upon artists to take an active part in the nationalizing and decolonizing agenda by drawing on indigenous knowledge systems and local forms of expression (Botwe-Asamoah 2005). Relational ethics, as the most prominent indigenous thought system, were the bedrock of the Ghanaian political decolonialization project in the years leading up to political independence in 1957 and immediately after. Given the strong association of arts and culture with decolonialization, the CCIs also exhibit a strong sense of reciprocity and relationality and hence represent a highly relevant case for the study of mutual aid through the prism of Afro-communitarianism.

The data collection for this study was conducted under the auspices of a large collaborative research project between universities in Ghana and Denmark aimed at investigating experiences of work in the creative industries in Africa. We collected qualitative data through in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted in four regions of Ghana: the Greater Accra Region, Ashanti Region, the Northern Region, and the Upper East Region. The creative economies of these locations differ significantly, with stronger commercial economies in southern Ghana but only emerging economies in the northern regions.

We interviewed a total of fifty individuals from the film ($n = 34$) and theatre industries ($n = 16$). To recruit the initial study participants, one of the authors leveraged the network they had built up through their involvement in the film and theatre scene in Ghana. Subsequent participants were identified through snowball sampling. To secure validity, the data-gathering was carried out by an author who is external to the Ghanaian film and theatre scene.

The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and three hours and were conducted in English, with most ($n = 48$) interviews recorded before being transcribed verbatim. Where possible, interviews were held in the offices of the film and theatre-makers. The first of the two focus groups we conducted for this study consisted of seventeen workers in the film industry from a town in the Upper East Region, including producers, directors, and actors. This focus group was held in a mixture of English and a local language, with participants free to choose their language of response and with all responses being simultaneously translated. The second focus

the city of Kumasi, that has been a leader in developing new forms of filmic expression, but which is currently in a period of crisis as it struggles to find a profitable distribution model after the collapse of the DVD market. Theatre in Ghana comes in many forms, including the popular musical theatre of the "Concert Party" as well as stage dramas. Theatre can be a big-budget spectacle, as with Roverman Productions, but tends to be smaller scale and run by small production companies, particularly outside Accra.

group was comprised of five performance poets and was held in Tamale in the Northern Region, in this case with English as the sole language. The use of focus groups was well suited to our purpose of scoping out an under-researched industry (Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook 2007). Local assistants embedded in the creative community were used to arrange the two focus groups and select the participants. Both focus groups were recorded, and the English-language responses were transcribed verbatim. Ethical clearance from the University of Ghana was obtained for this study and the names of all study participants have been pseudonymized to protect their identity.

The interviews and focus groups alike focused on the following aspects of creative work in Ghana: 1) the challenges and opportunities of working in film and theatre; 2) the influence of place; 3) practices of navigating between creative work and other responsibilities such as family duties; 4) the connections and support networks that creative workers draw upon; 5) the relationship between creative work and other businesses; 6) the policy and infrastructural context; 7) the participants' hopes for the future; and 8) their business models.

Our approach to data analysis followed the principles of abduction, that is, of "going back and forth between frameworks, data sources and analysis" (Dubois and Gadde 2002). We first analyzed the data thematically by searching "*across* a data set ... to find repeated patterns of meaning" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 86). In our first step we applied open exploratory coding using NVivo 12 software, with the dominant codes revolving around entrepreneurial strategies, the challenges and opportunities of working in the creative industry in Ghana, and of coping with precarity. This initial exploration brought to the fore the importance of everyday, intimate, and communal relationships in creative work in Ghana. However, these relationships defied any explanation consistent with the theoretical approaches typically applied in studies of social capital in creative work. As such, our initial coding identified an anomaly, that is, "a novel or unexpected phenomenon that cannot be explained or is poorly understood using existing knowledge" (Sætre and Van de Ven 2021, 684). In line with the procedures of abductive analysis, therefore, we then read our data through "multiple vectors of meaning-making from various perspectives while checking them against the resistance of observations in the field" until the "anomalous" elements of our data could be explained (Tavory and Timmermans 2014, 30).

At this stage we concluded that prevailing theories of bridging social capital in the creative industries (our first meaning-making vector), lacked explanatory power to account for the repeated instances we found in our data of forms of relationality that were not "weak" or "fleeting," individualistic or focused on profit maximization, but other-oriented and reflective of a strong value placed on establishing and maintaining close, long-term, friendly, communal, and caring relations. On this basis we then tested "a theoretical hunch" (Tavory and Timmermans 2014) that our data might be explicable through theories based on a feminist ethics of care (our second meaning-making vector). Accordingly, we re-read our data in the light of ethics-of-care questions such as "Who cares for whom?," "Why do they care?," and "How does caring unfold?" However, the care literature failed to capture the *mutuality* of

relationships we observed in our data, including the *interdependence* between the participants' economic practices and their efforts to cultivate social relations via practices of resource redistribution. We therefore began probing the possibilities of "alternative explanations" to provide us with "analytic openings to extend our explanation" beyond our initial theoretical frameworks (Tavory and Timmermans 2014, 124). To do so, we turned to Afro-communitarian ethics (our third meaning-making vector) and operationalized the concept of mutual aid for the analysis of the relational dynamics evident in our case. By way of functioning as an alternative explanatory framework, the concept of mutual aid helped us make sense of multiple on-the-ground observations, including the following three phenomena: 1) that help-giving and help-receiving is enacted in proportion to the degree of relational proximity between actors; 2) that the dynamics and flow of resource redistribution are dependent both on the specificity of relational ties and the personal characteristics of the actors; and 3) that a person's ability to make a living from creative work is contingent on the cultivation of harmonious relations (see Table 1).

MUTUAL AID: STRIVING FOR THE PRACTICAL ACCOMPLISHMENT OF RELATIONAL HARMONY

Sustaining a living or growing a business in the creative industries in Ghana entails maintaining harmonious relations with a range of situated others through practices of mutual aid. Put simply, both "getting by" and "getting ahead" require "getting along" with others. Each practice of mutual aid can be understood as a circle of help-giving and help-receiving between individual creative workers and others situated in varying degrees of proximity from family and friends to colleagues and fellow members of a wider community. The proximity of the relationships involved in these exchanges dictates the extent of the redistributive claims that creative workers can assert and the redistributive claims they are expected to honour, with closer relationships bringing more demanding duties. At the same time, the personal circumstances and characteristics of the actors shape the dynamics of mutual aid, with those enjoying business success facing greater redistributive claims. Each circle of mutual aid is thus constantly in motion, fluctuating in accordance with the personal circumstances of the actors and the specificity of the relational ties. Meanwhile, the rights and duties imposed by a relationship persist for as long as the relationship itself exists. (See Figure 1 for a diagram of this process.) This is evident in the acknowledgement by the overwhelming majority of our respondents that their livelihoods in a precarious industry would not only have been infeasible without the aid given to them by others but also if they had not given aid to others. In this context, maintaining harmonious relations was the crucial factor that made business success and the accumulation of economic capital even *possible*.

Relations of Family

Practising mutual aid with close and extended family members was recognized by our study participants as the most vital aspect of pursuing creative work and sustaining a business. It was not only common but customary to rely on more

Table 1: Coding Structure and Illustrative Data: The Relational Dynamics of Resource Redistribution in Mutual Aid

Relational ties	Modes of redistribution		The flow of resources	
	Honouring redistributive claims HELP-GIVING	Asserting redistributive claims HELP-RECEIVING	Resources given	Resources received
Family	Alberta: gives her labour to her parents' enterprise <i>"my parents too are having a school so I also work there too, I manage that place."</i>	Alberta: <i>"my husband is so helpful. ... but mostly, if I'm going to school or I'm going somewhere, I leave the kids with my mum."</i>	Alberta gives free labour	Alberta gets free childcare
	Rami financially supports his family: I <i>"have a single mother to take care of with two kid sisters who are in high school."</i>	Rami relied on extended family to attend film school in Accra. They <i>"found a way"</i> to get money and he <i>"took it and went to Accra and it could only pay for one semester that was it."</i>	Rami gives his earnings	Rami got money to attend film school
Friends	Philemon gives friends a platform to advertise their small businesses in his theatre productions: <i>"some friends with these businesses who will need platform to advertise, yes, those are our sponsors. So those are the people we bring on board."</i>	Philemon: When needing help Philemon seeks free labour from his friends: <i>"I've had to fund most of my productions myself. Sometimes I have to call on some friends, we collaborate and get it done."</i>	Philemon gives an advertising platform	Philemon gets free or reduced cost labour for theatre productions
	Christopher: <i>"Personally, if I do a show for somebody who I have no relationship ... I can charge like Ghc1500 for a single show and charge 2000 [a reasonable market price for theatrical shows in Accra] depending on how epic the show is. But then, when it comes to my friend ... we don't even discuss amount that [I] should be paid. We wait at the end of the show: if the show is successful or it wasn't that will show the amount."</i>	Christopher: <i>"sometimes we do the traditional media too [for promotion], the newspaper and the radio and TV. But then, they come at a very huge cost so not all the time. Sometimes we get friends who link you up, who connect you to people who work there and also you get to go for interviews and other stuffs and you don't pay for them."</i>	Christopher gives discounted skilled labour	Christopher gets access to otherwise prohibitively expensive advertising

Table 1: continued

Relational ties	Modes of redistribution		The flow of resources	
	Honouring redistributive claims HELP-GIVING	Asserting redistributive claims HELP-RECEIVING	Resources given	Resources received
Collaborators	Paul gives help to collaborators by offering training often free of charge so that others can flourish: <i>“The people that trained under me as well are doing well in music video industry and the film industry as well.”</i>	Paul: <i>“I have quite a bit of former interns, former trainees that are all over the place [freelancing] and when it is time they are needed, I call them and they come.”</i>	Paul gives training to others	Paul gets preferential access to skilled labour
	Adwoa runs an activist non-profit theatre company that centres women’s stories and queer stories. She keeps her collective of creatives going by “gifting” her personal finances to the collective.	Adwoa’s key business support is the advice of elder theatre colleagues at the university: <i>“These are women in theatre, older women, who are more established. Who have the history, who have the wisdom. So, we go to them to consult, basically.”</i>	Adwoa gives her money to the collective	Adwoa gets mentorship to develop as an artistic business
Professional community	Eben: <i>“people who come with a training from any of our universities in the dramatic arts and performing arts, sciences get preferential treatment from me. [...] I believe I am the biggest private theatre producer in Ghana and so, I must be the one who provides the platform for them so they can make the fullest use of their training.”</i>	Eben presents on a major radio station and in turn gets <i>“a certain discount for the adverts that we play with them”</i> and can thus reach a large audience for his theatre productions.	Eben gives trained theatre practitioners a stage on which to perform	Eben gets reduced cost advertising and thus his marketing efforts are bolstered
	Janet: <i>“quite a number of my mates all through school ... have a lot of zeros behind their earning. I can’t dream of those zeros, let me put it that way. I could go after those zeros if I was in</i>	Janet was introduced to vital gatekeepers in the international film business through the film festival, such as cinema chains, sales agents, and major international distributors that	Janet gives her money, time, and skills to developing industry infrastructure	Janet gets new business opportunities and access to new markets for her own business

Table 1: continued

Relational ties	Modes of redistribution		The flow of resources	
	Honouring redistributive claims HELP-GIVING	Asserting redistributive claims HELP-RECEIVING	Resources given	Resources received
	<i>any other thing but film. However, I'm determined to make sure that my contribution to the sector in Ghana ensures that Ghanaian filmmakers can add zeros to their names. That's my goal, to change that terrain."</i>	could later become partners in her business.		
Local community	Antonia: in theatre, " <i>our success is measured on the impact we have on the society. you make [theatre] in a way that [spectators] ... are ready to change and then at the end they realize that if they change in way that is positive they are going to benefit from it as a community, as a family or as individuals."</i>	Antonia: " <i>a few [local] companies believe in us so provide us services yes the services we would have still spent money on ... somebody can give you lunch for a number of period for rehearsals so at least the rehearsal is taken care of you are able to give something of food to your actors during rehearsals."</i>	Antonia gives educational plays free of charge to the community	Antonia gets a price-cut on operative costs and thus increases her competitiveness
	Philip makes films to safeguard and promote his culture: I " <i>make films not to lose valuable culture and traditions."</i>	Philip relies on the donations made by local community members at local film launch parties to finance his films.	Philip gives films in his local language	Philip gets voluntary donations needed to run his business

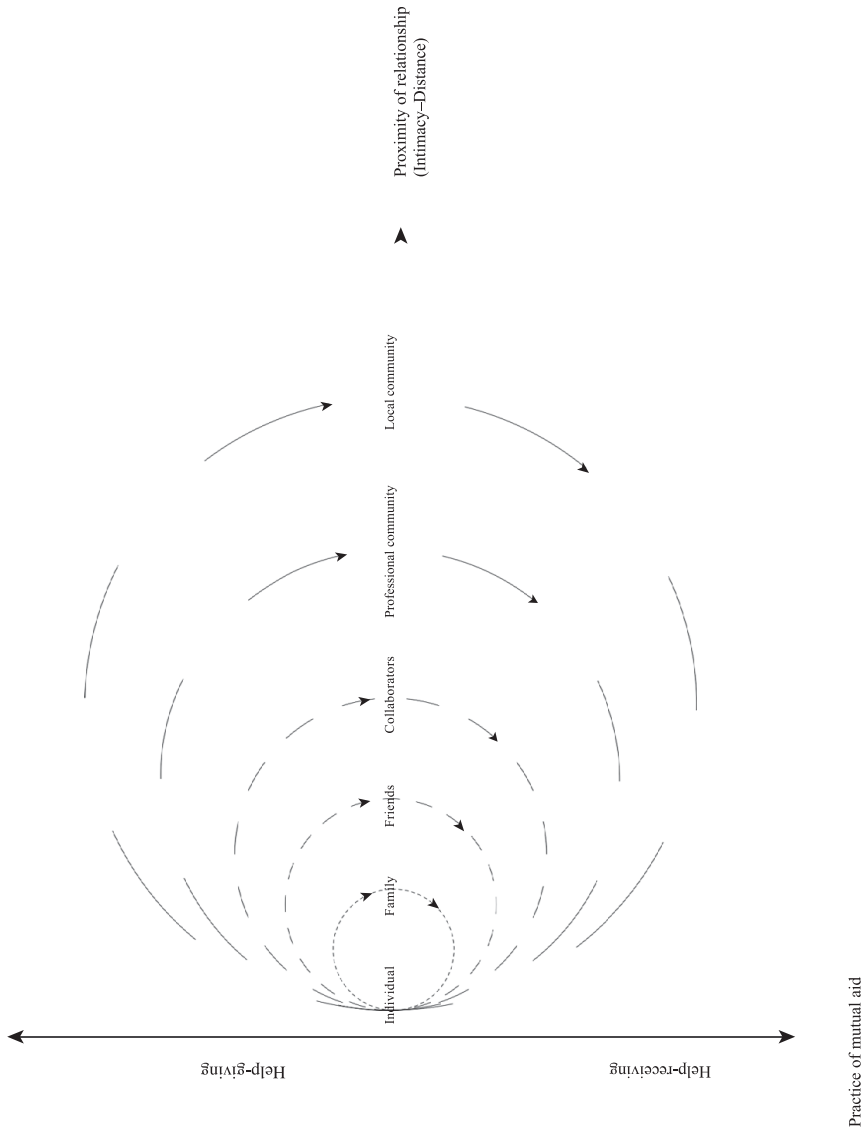


Figure 1. The Circle of Mutual Aid

affluent relatives for financial support in acquiring formal education and skills or securing seed capital to start up a small business. Those creative workers who lacked appropriate fiscal resources or faced economic hardship, asserted the right to resource redistribution on better-off relatives. As a typical example, the actor Pearl relied on her auntie for school fees and daily upkeep while attending acting school. In addition, when Pearl had difficulties paying for her own accommodation because of irregular and poorly paid acting jobs, she stayed at her auntie's house with "*no questions asked*." Likewise, when theatre-owner and producer Elisa undertook the highly ambitious project of constructing a purpose-built theatre in Accra, she was able to do so chiefly because she had access to family-owned land, which she had inherited from her grandmother. She explained to us when we visited her at the theatre: "*this is ancestral land; it binds me to generations before me*." Besides access to land, Elisa had also access to shipping containers gifted to her by an uncle. Elisa repurposed the containers into a ready-made rehearsal and exhibition space. Our data show that the right to seek help from, and be other-regarded by, relatives vitally upholds creative workers' ability to navigate economic challenges, especially in the early stages of their careers. However, asserting redistributive claims does not only help creative workers *get started* or *get by* but also *get ahead*, as exemplified by Elisa whose ownership of a theatre reduced her production costs and increased her profit margins.

Redistributive flows from relatively more resourceful relatives also take the form of daily enactments of mutual aid such as childcare or homecare, crucially enabling creative workers to cope with onerous work demands. For example, Akosua (filmmaker and actress, Accra) explained that she had been able to grow her film career after marriage and children "*because in Ghana we have family structures and extended families [are] pretty much part of most of our lives. So, you know, those people who are parents have extended family helping ... There are so many hands around to help and juggle*." Redistributive claims were also made for other kinds of help in the form of labour. Kwame (filmmaker, Kumasi) not only relied on his son's creative skills as a university-trained filmmaker to help him write his screenplays but also on his daughter's business skills to help him make his films: "*I even don't know how to negotiate well because I'm not a business-minded person ... Now it's my daughter who's doing that business ... She's very good at doing that*."

As a necessary and natural concomitant of asserting such redistributive claims from proximate others, the creative workers we interviewed were duty-bound in turn to honour redistributive claims themselves. For example, Pearl, who had initially been heavily supported by her auntie, had over time increasingly started to support her ageing auntie by covering hospital bills and providing daily care. As Pearl's career took off and her income from acting became more regular and even steadily rising, she was able to assume also the financial responsibility for a younger "*niece*" ("*a distant relative in a dire need of help*"), who, at the time of the interview, was staying with her full time. Pearl's duties to relational others in her extended family intensified in tandem with her growing professional standing. Gradually such duties became ever more onerous for Pearl who started fearing she would not be able to take

care of more relatives on her rising but still meagre pay. In contrast to Pearl, Elisa expressed a more abstract sense of redistributive duty to her family that supported her with setting up her theatre business. For Elisa, running a successful theatre enterprise in itself implied living up to the duty of giving back to her ancestors by expanding her “*family heritage*” and “*paying homage*” to the history of her “*family name*.”

Relations of sharing within extended families also lubricate business relations. Emmerson, a filmmaker from Kumasi, explained “*here in our society, we live in an extended family*” (with aunts, uncles, and grandparents) and as such he *dutifully* gave his relatives employment in his portfolio of small businesses (e.g., trade, taxi). Emmerson’s relatives relied on his redistributive flows for their livelihoods. In turn, Emmerson was *rightfully* receiving vital resources of “*trusted labour*” from his relatives (e.g., received help with equipment maintenance, logistics or admin), all of which made his labour-intensive but cash-strapped filmmaking business not only sustainable but also steadily expanding.

While our participants recognized that such reciprocation was imperative to maintain harmonious relations and keep the circle of mutual aid spinning, they also acknowledged, as Pearl did, that fulfilling these duties was not a smooth undertaking, straightforwardly compatible with pursuing a creative career. For example, Janet (filmmaker, Accra) attributed the breakdown of her marriage directly to the demands of her creative work, explaining that this had meant she was unable to live up to the relational expectations of her family:

Then I was producing, editing long hours, going on sets for long hours and my ex-husband then just couldn't accept that I'd be working at 2 a.m. or longer into the night, or that I'd be on a set made up of sixty or seventy percent guys. He just couldn't. ... That experience led directly to the breakdown of my marriage at the time.

Janet’s attribution of the breakdown of her marriage to her inability to live up to relational expectations, points to her nagging sense of failure to honour relational duties. However, it also shows a lack of reciprocity in the relationship, as her hard work and career choice did not receive the needed or even rightful support from her partner. Similarly, Adwoa (theatre, Accra) described a sense of conflicting demands. Deeply committed to her time-intensive work in socially engaged theatre and art, which she supplemented with a second job in radio and television, Adwoa said she felt unable to balance her creative work with family responsibilities according to her own and others’ expectations: “*My family will tell you I'm not a good family person. I don't think I do family well. So, I've failed miserably on that part of my social duty.*” Both Adwoa and Janet experienced severe personal and emotional consequences because of the discord resulting from their perceived inability to honour the redistributive claims of their families for time and attention. While women and mothers are expected to work in Ghanaian society—indeed it would be seen as morally wrong if they did not engage in work that generated an income (Darkwah 2007)—there are gendered expectations for care and attention to family that fall unequally between men and women.

While our informants commonly alluded to the strains of continuously navigating the demands of business and family, often openly acknowledging that such navigation was necessary because their creative work could only flourish due to their access to the redistributive flow of money, labour, time, emotional support, and other resources from their families, the tensions involved in such redistribution were severe, especially for those who had experienced economic success—even when such success was relatively mild.

Relations of Friendship

In Ghana, cultivating harmony in friendships and running or developing an economically viable creative business are not separable but intricately interwoven endeavours. For Lucas (theatre, Kumasi), friendship relations had been both the impetus for and the outcome of his successful business. In making this point, Lucas paradigmatically captured the intertwinement of being a successful creative entrepreneur and being a good friend:

I didn't originally want to be an entrepreneur. But I felt the need to be. I saw a lot of talented people when I finished school. My friends were way more talented than I was in school. They finished school and then the jobs they took up cut them away from the creative arts. I talked to them and [they] said, "Chale, we need to make ends meet. We need to create a source of livelihood." So, I decided to create a haven ... After bringing them together, I realized that I needed to feed them. So, I needed to learn how to turn this [theatre] into a business.

Maintaining harmonious friendship relations, as a vital requirement for doing creative work and running a business in Ghana, entails strong and tangible commitments of mutual aid. For example, Rami (film and media, Tamale) felt a keen sense of ethical obligation to leverage his business to help his friends, even when this aid increased his labour costs and led to longer production schedules. He fulfilled his relational duties by hiring fellow film school graduates from Accra to help him out with production work. Bussing in these college friends to do the filming, Rami was able to support them by paying out their wages:

The guys come from Accra for one week to do the shooting. Because if I start doing the shooting that means they will have no job. ... And their creativity in filming will go down. I do broadcasting, so I don't have to take their jobs.

Although Rami has the skills to shoot these videos independently and thus could save on labour costs if he hired local crews, he chooses not to do so on the grounds that straying from his main area of broadcasting into filmmaking would be taking a job that should *rightfully* go to a friend struggling to eke out a liveable wage. Maintaining harmonious bonds of friendship is not just an ethical axiom for Rami but a concrete act of taking care of his friends. At the same time, however, Rami readily acknowledged that helping friends was also a necessary means of ensuring the seamless functioning of his business, since in creating this web of mutual dependencies Rami had secured a dependable workforce willing to provide free labour when business was sluggish.

Similarly, Christopher also relies heavily on the skilled labour of his theatre practitioner friends to help him run his theatre company in Accra. Although he would prefer to produce experimental theatre, Christopher prioritizes crowd-pleasing genres “*to fill the auditorium*” so that his plays will be more profitable and keep himself and his friends in work. Acknowledging his reliance on these relationships, Christopher also said he was troubled by the possibility of souring these relationships:

Our team is based on friendship ... most of them aren't doing it because they want money from it, but ... because they love to do it ... At the end of the day, even though they're all doing it for the love of it, at a certain point, one needs to gain something.

As this statement implies, Christopher was concerned that if he one-sidedly asserted redistributive claims for help-receiving on his friends without honouring their claims, then these relationships could collapse into discord, compromising his possibility of making future claims. In his view he redistributed his resources to his friends in two key ways: by producing revenue-generating content from which he could share the profits with his friends, and by freely giving his own labour to friends for their plays. For Christopher, maintaining harmony was thus both ethically right and essential for keeping his business afloat.

Given that relationships come with a redistributive requirement for *mutual* aid they are often as burdensome as they are beneficial, meaning that people also sometimes avoid relationships or shun further intimacy (Amankwaa, Esson, and Gough 2020). We can see this process in the case of Commander, who was one of the few of our informants to have a robustly profitable theatre business and on that account was more often the subject of redistributive claims than the one asserting claims. Commander emphasized the delicate balance and difficulties involved in upholding harmonious relationships with friends while striving to grow his theatre business:

One of the things I've learnt over the years is that business ... must be separated from friends and family. So for now, I think I'm going to be a bit harder. This year, that's one of the goals. I told myself that I'm too flexible. That's how I see myself. And I'm too considerate. ... I believe that if you are a businessperson and you really want to go far and you always do friends and family, and do not know how to dissociate the business part from the friends, it becomes difficult.

Commander had recently decided to accept acting jobs only on condition that the clients agreed to pay him a fee beforehand. However, this decision was causing discord:

Now there is a huge cut down in the number of plays. They [producers who want me to act] say “The Commander really has changed. Now he is charging everybody so.” But this is a reasonable charge. I am not overcharging.

For Commander, maintaining his business success necessitated resisting intimacy with others. As others tried to pull him closer to them, he strove to push them further away, implicitly demoting friends to the status of collaborators on the axes of intimacy by *not charging his friends less for his labour*. While Commander insisted

he had no choice but to be less flexible about the price of his labour in order to meet his business goals, this change was perceived as a withdrawal of help and thus generated discord, leading to a downturn in his business (e.g., dearth of jobs and commissions). This case illustrates the relational tension that can arise from a misalignment of intimacies, for while Commander preferred to honour the claims of others at the level of a collaborator by working on a play but charging for his labour, others around him sought to assert claims at the level of friendship and thus demanded he work for free.

Relations of Collaboration

Relationships with colleagues were carefully cultivated by our respondents in the form of close-knit webs of friends-cum-collaborators through continuous practical enactments of mutuality. Many deemed it essential to draw others into intimacy through help-giving in order to initiate new circles of mutual aid. For example, Kofi (filmmaker, Kumasi) provides on-the-job training for industry newcomers with a view to employing them for a reduced wage at a later date: “*When I have a job, I call them. Then we negotiate how much they are going to take. The only thing is, they won’t charge me like they charge outsiders.*” Being “inside” the circle of a harmonious relationship has the distinct economic advantage of reducing labour costs and thus of enabling cash-poor creative workers like Kofi to make films. Drawing people into more intimate relations through help-giving is thus one way of stimulating help-receiving in the form of free or discounted labour. This focus on help-giving in order to induce redistributive flows through the deliberate cultivation of closer kinds of relationships, that is, of relationships that impose a duty on those involved to respond with aid-giving themselves in order to fulfil their own obligations to maintain harmonious relations, was openly acknowledged by Dogbe, an actor who had recently completed a degree in theatre in Accra. For Dogbe, pulling others into intimacy through help-giving was a matter of “*working smart*” to get ahead. When Dogbe wanted to grow his business by selling his poetry recitals on digital-streaming platforms, he realized he first needed a recorded album but lacked the money to pay for such a recording. However, he was able to *rightfully* press help-receiving claims. While in school, Dogbe had *dutifully* given aid to a fellow student by providing his voice-acting services free-of-charge, thereby drawing them into an intimate relational circle of friendship with concomitant strong demands for mutual aid. On account of this friendship, Dogbe now had the *right* to assert his claim for help-receiving by asking his friend to record the album for free, who did so in recognition of a *duty* to fulfil the incurred obligation. Sustaining such a flow of mutual aid thus proved foundational for Dogbe’s entry into a creative business.

As all these examples show, giving aid to colleagues in the creative industries in Ghana comes with the expectation of subsequently being able to assert redistributive claims. As Abdullah (filmmaker, Tamale) explained: “*In Tamale here we help each other—we don’t pay the actors and actresses. So when you helped me in my movie, if you also have [a movie] I will come and help you, so we don’t spend a lot of money.*” As a corollary of this expectation, any failure to honour

redistributive claims is likely to create discord and ultimately risks undermining one's moral and business reputation. Such discord was evident, for example, in the account given by Anwar (Tamale, theatre actor). Anwar regards not paying actors as exploitative, since *“people take advantage of other people, especially when they feel like those people lack some ideas they should've known.”* For this reason, Anwar was now adamant that he would no longer work with production houses that were not willing to pay him for his acting. In his view, these production houses were behaving immorally by asking for free labour without reciprocating, that is, by asserting redistributive claims but not honouring claims for resource distribution. This had led Anwar to sever his relationships with these producers. Anwar's case serves as an important reminder that vulnerable people are at risk of exploitation if more powerful people ask them to provide free labour as help.

Although the issue of payment for work emerged as a powerful source of potential discord throughout our interviews, it was also clear that harmonious relations could nonetheless be maintained even without payment as long as other compassionate steps were taken. In the Ghanaian context, producers and directors feel obliged to provide actors with transport money and refreshments. As Philip (theatre producer, Accra) explained: *“If I'm not able to give you any money I should at least be able to give you your transport—because you are spending money to come for rehearsal and I need to be able to make it up to you.”* Without such enactment of mutuality on the part of directors and producers, the relationship could never be harmonious. Such disharmony could jeopardize Philip's business, he acknowledged, since actors might no longer accept the jobs he offered them and needed them to do. Practising mutual aid was also key to the business success of Rabiū, a veteran film producer in Tamale. When asked if it was difficult to find actors for his films when they knew they would not be paid, Rabiū emphasized the reciprocity of the arrangements that kept his business afloat: *“No, I think it's not difficult because we are one. We are together. So if I say ‘Come and help me shoot my movie!’ you will definitely come because tomorrow you may need my help.”* He further explained that he would often try to reallocate resources in other ways in return for the free labour he had received, including by shooting films in small bouts to enable actors to work on other jobs:

We make sure that when we go to a location, whether we are done or not, at least we should be back to allow the people to go and do their different jobs. Then we arrange another time for you to go back. Because we are not paying them and they are doing other jobs just to feed their families, so you cannot engage them for a week without paying them.

Arranging complex shooting schedules in this way constitutes an act of giving on Rabiū's part that serves to uphold the harmony of relations between different work teams in a context where actors' work is often not remunerated. His willingness to give help by revising production schedules was what enabled him to receive help in the form of free acting labour. In sum, Rabiū was successful in business precisely because he related harmoniously with his collaborators.

Relations with the Professional Community

While sustaining harmonious relations with family, friends, and colleagues requires strong and tangible forms of mutual aid, the sense of duty felt by our respondents towards their wider professional community was more abstract, requiring less concrete types of aid to sustain. Nevertheless, maintaining harmony at this relational level also proved extremely difficult for many of our respondents, with many characterizing their industries as being highly competitive, sometimes ruthlessly so. For example, Emmerson told us that “*in Kumasi here, it’s like the jungle—the fittest survives,*” while Ebenezer (film producer, Kumasi) said “*we always want to be like crabs in a bucket.*” Both these producers emphasized that you needed to “*look after your own*” in order to prosper in what they described as an unsupportive and competitive industry. Similarly, Mawutor (film producer and actor, Kumasi) felt that securing help from unknown professionals who did not belong to any previously established circles of mutual aid was extremely cumbersome because you could never know who to trust: “*Somebody may have a good face but may be a bad person. Somebody may have an ugly face but may be a good person.*” Therefore, Mawutor always avoided strangers and relied on individuals with whom he had forged strong intimate relationships, referring to these as his “senior brothers” from whom he took advice to inform his business decisions.

The attitudes of these three producers reveal a fundamental paradox in circles of mutual aid with more distant others, such as members of the wider creative industry community. As we have shown, film and theatre producers in Ghana are only able to sustain their businesses amidst chronic precarity because they rely on intimate and close relations. Given this reliance and the burdensome requirements for resource redistribution that these relations entail, however, there often develops a strong suspicion of people who are not part of existing intimate relationships. This explains the seemingly contradictory statements made by one filmmaker and actor who first told us that “*in Kumasi I will say that we are like family ... we are there for each other, we watch each other’s back*” but who later added that “*we have a lot of false people lying in the industry now [and] I don’t just work with anyone.*”

Some creative workers, and especially those running successful businesses, felt a moral duty as entrepreneurs to help out and intervene in the dysfunctional and infrastructurally deficient context of Ghana’s creative industries. The majority did so by reallocating resources from their own businesses towards the development of industrial infrastructure—something that was universally acknowledged to be missing in the creative industries in Ghana and which was widely perceived as an impediment to the sustenance and growth of individual businesses. Acts of infrastructure-building constituted an act of giving to the professional community, while at the same time being calculated actions undertaken to advance one’s own long-term growth prospects and accumulation of economic capital. This duality of motive was clear in the case of Janet, for example, an accomplished filmmaker from Accra who declared “*The biggest challenge I face as a filmmaker is the lack of structures, the lack of processes, the lack of funding, the lack of opportunities.*” Janet

argued that “*there isn’t enough co-production or collaboration*” in the film industry in Ghana and that “*issues of trust and all those things emanate from the lack of access to resources and opportunities or clarity in structures.*” In order “*for a new improvement to happen,*” she argued, “*the change has to be widespread enough*” in order to address the key question of “*How do we close these gaps so that all filmmakers can move forward?*” Although she had already built a successful career for herself, Janet felt that change needed to be systemic for the industry and thus for herself to move to the next level. This conviction finally led her to found a film festival that now “*facilitates the business of film*” by hosting a film market and enabling networks among filmmakers, distributors, and cinemas across the film value chain in Africa. Founding the festival was thus an exercise in help-giving to the professional community, though it was also in Janet’s own self-interest insofar as the infrastructure problem hampering the industry’s growth was also an impediment to her personal business growth.

As another example of aid given to the professional community, Commander’s production company has a partnership programme with the National Theatre of Ghana to develop and jointly stage plays with young production houses on weekdays. This programme not only provides the National Theatre with an opportunity to work with new talent, but it provides the young companies with mentorship and free access to space to help them develop their plays. Commander’s production company gives their share of the ticket sales to these young production companies, since he believes that taking away the limited revenue generated by their plays would be incompatible with his company’s mission of encouraging the development of these upcoming companies. Yet, Commander’s help-giving to the professional community was also aimed at ensuring economic benefits for himself:

The idea was to push weekday theatre because weekday theatre is not high in Ghana. People don’t really patronize weekday theatre so [his company] we were like “OK, how do we get people interested in weekday theatre?”

Through his aid, Commander was thus also building a new market for weekday theatre in the hope of profiting from this market should his own company ever start staging plays on weekdays. As the examples of Janet and Commander show, communitarian goals and self-interested economic motivations are not incompatible, since in both cases their acts of giving aid enabled both themselves and the industry to get ahead. By acting in a communitarian spirit, indeed, they accrued *more* personal benefits in the long term than if they had acted only according to their narrow self-interests of the moment.

Relations with the Local Community

Through an Afro-communitarian lens, people are *dutifully* bound to prize, but also *rightfully* allowed to tap into, communal relationships—relationships with the wider community of which a person is a part. Our data included many observable enactments of such mutual aid. For instance, Isaac (filmmaker, Accra) explained that as a man over fifty he felt obliged to contribute to his community:

I'm doing works with my village, my chiefs, all those people. So, there's always calls for me to attend this meeting and that meeting, and all those funerals and social gatherings and all those things to help is my way of contributing to the welfare of our community ... Beyond your family, you have to be a community person also.

Other creative workers gave care to their communities through promoting and protecting their ethnic cultures. For example, Mahama (filmmaker and actor, Tamale) had studied in Accra but came back to Tamale because he wanted to tell stories about the Dagomba culture to which he belongs, using his talents “*to exhibit the culture of my tribe and also to showcase what my tribe possessed.*” Similarly, Illarion (theatre producer, Tamale) was strongly motivated to make theatre to aid his community:

I believe that theatre is the best tool to educate society ... I believe you don't live for yourself. Nobody was ever created to be for yourself. Just like the trees, they bear fruits but they don't eat their fruits. They give it to us. So, it means that whatever you have in you as a talent, as a skill, you have it for the sake of others.

Accordingly, Illarion had only produced one “*pure commercial play*” but produced “*countless*” socially engaged plays for free, including a play to “*campaign for peace*” which he has produced in the last three elections. Moreover, he could give these plays to the community for free because he could mobilize resources from his community to cover the costs. For example, he could approach a school headmaster for the use of a bus to transport his team to and from performances.

In explaining their sense of obligation to give back to and maintain harmonious relations with their local communities, our respondents acknowledged the importance of what they *rightfully* gained from their communities. Some spoke about the recognition and standing they had achieved in their communities on account of being filmmakers and providing decades of entertainment in local languages. Such standing, respect, and even fame could often translate into material rewards. For example, Rabi (filmmaker, Tamale) told us that as an industry leader “*there is no politician or traditional leader that I cannot go closer to,*” while Sampson, as one of the pioneering film producers in Kumasi, said that “*when you are a producer, you have the opportunity in the society because anywhere you go, the door will be open to you.*” Taking care of their communities had thus generated powerful webs of local dependencies advantageous to their own businesses. This was possible because their standing enabled them to draw powerful people who control local resources such as politicians or chiefs into intimate relationships, thereby generating new lucrative loops of mutual aid, including the right to claim help.

Our respondents mostly spoke about local communities and their duties to these communities in terms of social development. For example, Jafaru (film and radio producer, Tamale) saw it as his “*social responsibility*” to be a “*partner in development,*” while for Antonia (theatre producer, Tamale) the theatre is “*an avenue for change*” and her priority is to create “*drama for development*” in which “*our success is measured on the impact we have on society.*”

Many of our respondents regarded social development as a worthwhile investment alongside their long-term goal of running successful and profitable businesses. Although Rami (film and media, Tamale) recounted several experiences of losing money by working on projects with major international NGOs, for example, he did not see this in a negative light but rather framed it as a deliberate exchange of his labour for the benefit of others:

[The NGO] didn't pay us for the training because we're always afraid that when we make a budget big, then we add payment for us the budget will be bloated. And when the budget is bloated that means that the possibility of them doing it will not happen again, and the dreams of the children get shattered. You look at your pay and the children's dream, which one's more important? So you just go with the children's dreams.

In Rami's view, adding to the project budget by asking payment for himself would have risked future projects being scrapped, with direct negative consequences for the children he wanted to help. Such other-centred actions were necessary, he felt, for maintaining harmony with his community. At the same time, by giving help to the community through NGO-funded media work, Rami's business also flourished. For example, Rami could procure broadcasting equipment through the NGO-funded projects, while the work enabled him and his collaborators to keep skills up to date, thereby preserving the competitiveness of his company in the long run.

The creative workers we spoke to felt that helping their local communities was their duty, which they fulfilled in various ways, including by contributing artistically to social development, instigating social change through theatre and film, and/or seeking to educate the public. Importantly, however, honouring such abstract duties to distant others, was not separate in their minds from accomplishing mutual aid in more intimate relationships. For example, their involvement in socially engaged arts not only enabled them to extend help to their wider communities but also afforded crucial opportunities to grow one's business, and hence also to meet redistributive claims, by providing work for friends and financially supporting their kin.

DISCUSSION

Our case study has evidenced how efforts aimed at the practical accomplishment of harmonious relationships of mutual aid, while often ambiguous and contradictory, are essential both for "getting by" and "getting ahead" in the creative industries in Ghana. We further hope to have highlighted how the complex ways in which bridging and bonding social capital interact in creative work can productively be studied by paying attention to the everyday relational dynamics of practices of mutual aid, most notably by following and tracing the contested circularity between help-giving and help-receiving within families, friendship, and professional and local communities. These complexities of mutual aid are best understood, we argue, by adopting a moderate Afro-communitarianism lens (Gyekye 1996). This is because a central tenet of such a perspective is that

everyone has both the moral *duty* to *dutifully* uphold relational harmony via relational resource redistribution for the purpose of promoting the well-being of others as well as the moral *right* to *rightfully* press redistributive claims on others for the purpose of self-interest. From this perspective, we argue the *non-instrumental* accomplishment of relational harmony is inextricably linked to and indistinguishable from *instrumental* efforts at attaining economic sustainability and business success.

Thus construed, mutual aid is structured in a pattern of nested concentric circles (Figure 1). The individual and their efforts at attaining self-realization are at the centre, while relational ties radiate outward from the individual in a declining order of intimacy and proximity. The relational ties intrinsic to each circle of mutual aid afford both duties to redistribute resources and corresponding rights. The degree of closeness determines the content, type, and relative strength of these rights and other-regarding duties. How people act or are expected to act is thus dependent on the specific relational tie immanent in each circle of mutual aid. In short, the closer the relationship, the greater the strength of other-regarding duties and the more intense the right to be other-regarded. The strength of redistributive claims thus decreases the further one moves from the family, and vice versa, the duties to redistribute resources such as money, time, financial assets, or land increase the closer one moves towards the family. The achievement of relational harmony as the basis of economic practice is, however, neither a seamless nor straightforward endeavour. It is, as our data analysis shows, a vexed process rife with discord, grievances, and resentment necessitating concerted efforts at repairing broken relationships and getting the circles between duties to help and rights to be helped to spin sustainably.

In foregrounding mutual aid and its relational redistribution of resources as inseparable from pursuing creative work, we make two interrelated contributions to scholarship. First, as elaborated below, we offer a decolonial critique of established concepts of relationality in the study of creative work. Second, we tease out the implications for business ethics of a relational understanding of non-standard forms of work, of which work in the creative industries is a paradigmatic example.

The Practice of Mutual Aid: A Decolonial Critique of Social Capital in the Study of Work in the Creative Industries

This article contributes to the theoretically diverse project of “epistemic decolonialization” (Mitova 2020). In particular, we enact both “the negative” and “the positive” program of conceptual decolonialization as outlined by Wiredu (1997; 2002). To Wiredu, the decolonial project not only avoids, reverses, or negates entrenched conceptual frames inherited from mainstream (Western) knowledge systems. It also affirms, mobilizes, and *thinks with* indigenous thought systems and categories (Wiredu 1997). This does not merely entail tokenistically embracing non-canonical and marginalized “Southern voices” (Alcadipani et al. 2012). Rather, what is required is both a *de-centring* of well-established Western theoretical concepts, and *re-centring* (Mitova 2020) through a sustained and non-reductivist

engagement with “the relational ontologies” of contextualized local systems even when they are “incommensurable with realist ontologies of Western science” (Banerjee 2021, 1084).

A decolonial critique, therefore, does not merely seek to multiply Southern voices nor test Western concepts on realities outside the West, but as Banerjee (2021, 1084) put it “asks us to imagine a ‘pluriverse.’” The “pluriverse” demands that we recognize the ontological possibility of coexistence of many worlds in *this* world in which other realities, concepts, theories, and truths are entangled with Western conceptual frames, rather than being supplanted by or aiming themselves to supplant “Western universalism” (Mignolo 2018, x). As Mignolo and Walsh (2018, 28) have cautioned, by emphasizing learning from Southern relational ontologies, a decolonial critique should not perpetuate the colonial wholesale elimination of existing concepts but rather insist on the pluriverse.

Making the pluriverse happen requires forging a “non-hierarchical dialogue between different epistemological traditions” (Banerjee 2021, 1084). Such a dialogue does not, however, imply the *integration* of indigenous knowledge into the mainstream. Rather, it aims to *change* the mainstream itself to reflect multiple and interconnected realities/ontologies. If the imagination of the pluriverse is what guides decolonial critique, then the decolonial critic must acknowledge that Western rationality is not the only interpretive, epistemological, or ontological perspective with which to frame or imagine the world. Instead, a decolonial critique involves “opening decolonial cracks, and fracturing and fissuring” entrenched Western concepts, requiring researchers “to think *with* (and not simply *about*) the peoples, subjects, struggles, knowledges and thoughts” of others (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 17). A decolonial perspective does not seek to *add* knowledge of other places to mainstream space, it seeks to *fundamentally transform those very spaces* through its challenge to the assumption that theory generated in the West is universally explanatory.

In constructing our decolonial critique of relationality in studies of creative work, therefore, we have striven to “think with” Afro-communitarian ethics about the relational infrastructures in which creative work and business is embedded in Ghana. We did not seek therefore to merely disclose the multiplicity and alterity of (African) modes of knowing *the reality* of creative work nor to apply established (Western) concepts on “indigenous” empirical data but attempted to *think with* the difference *the realities* of working in the South can make for conceptualizing relationality. For this purpose, we have operationalized a definition of mutual aid informed by Afro-communitarian ethics to explore and conceptualize instances of mutual aid as the practical redistribution of resources within specific relational ties. This is not to suggest that the concept or the practice of mutual aid should replace that of social network and social capital accumulation. This is but a step towards “fissuring” binary (bonding/bridging) concepts of social capital that prevail in studies of creative work, and in this way contribute to the reimagination of the “pluriverse” in which many worlds and knowledges are coextensive and “where everything is connected to everything else” (Banerjee 2021, 1084). We hope such thinking with difference that learning from the South makes possible

will inspire future studies to approach relationality in creative work pluriversally, that is to become attuned to its diverse, relational, redistributive, and heterodox dimension which exists in addition to, and not in lieu of, social network positioning and management. Key here is the wording “in addition to, and not in lieu of” since it makes clear we are not arguing for the elimination of existing concepts, but rather for their re-centring, that is, fissuring, expansion, and proliferation (as aligned with the basic tenets of a decolonial critique).

In challenging the assumption that winner-takes-all struggles for the accumulation of “bridging” social capital and network-positioning are the most prevalent constituents of work in the creative industries, we further align our efforts with scholars in the fields of sociology, management, and organization studies, including business ethics, who have attempted to tackle the “care deficit” in studies of creative work. We thus stride with scholars who have drawn on a feminist ethics-of-care perspective to highlight the long-overlooked role of *bonding* social capital in creative work (Alacovska and Bissonnette 2021; Belfiore 2021; Campbell 2022). By providing empirical evidence of how the economic existence of each individual creative worker in Ghana is bound up or *encircled* with others, ranging from immediate family and friends to co-workers and professional and local communities, our study further substantiates the arguments made by these scholars for seeing creative work as inherently interdependent and relational. While beyond the scope of this current study, a vital future direction for research is whether and how circles of mutual aid perpetuate or reinforce existing social inequalities. When relational, informal, and often cashless, redistributive modes of pursuing daily economies become central to the analysis it becomes imperative to untangle the range of exclusions and inequalities that may emerge along ethnic, religious and especially gendered lines as greater demands of help-giving are being placed upon women in accordance with an essentializing view of women as innate caregivers.

In contrast with previous studies based on a feminist ethics of care, that have tended to gloss over the complex negotiations of the limits of selfless and other-oriented care, however, we have emphasized how instrumental considerations, motivations, and calculations of self-care *coexist* with non-instrumental care-for-the-other in the daily management of relational ties within specific circles of mutual aid. We have contended that mutual aid is a practice that simultaneously involves the moral duty to uphold a life-enhancing web of relational connectedness and beneficence via relational resource redistribution as well as the moral right to benefit from relational resource redistribution for the sake of self-interest (Wiredu 2009; 2018). Inasmuch as an individual pursues their self-interest while also pursuing the common good (Gyekye 1996), therefore, mutual aid is a hybrid or dual practice, since it both promotes the common good and well-being of others while also furthering self-realization, self-interest, and care for the self. In this view, honouring ties of dependence and pursuing one’s economic interests are not antagonistic but entangled practices, since economic and business sustainability in creative work can neither be divested nor extricated from efforts at achieving harmonious relations in practice—efforts that necessitate the quotidian management of the relational redistribution of money, labour, psychological support, time, and other resources.

As we hope to have demonstrated in our analysis, it is precisely in its foregrounding of mutual aid as a quotidian and mundane *economic* practice enmeshed in *relational* considerations that an Afro-communitarianism-informed conceptualization proves more expansive than current views on care and mutuality in creative work. Much in line with sociological studies of local communities that thematize bonding capital as a coping strategy adopted in response to institutional fallout and political distrust in the Global North (see Leonard 2004; Williams and Williams, 2014), studies of creative work have treated care and mutual support as informal communitarian self-help unfolding independently of and/or in parallel with economic exchanges within formalized markets. Such studies frame self-help as being embedded in a non-commodified and non-market sphere that only exists as an alternative to established capitalist institutions (Banks 2006). Unsurprisingly, therefore, the focus of these studies is typically on mutual aid taking place within alternative forms of non-capitalist or prefigurative political organising such as local creative communities (Reedy, King, and Coupland 2016), artistic collectives (Vail and Hollands 2012), and socially engaged arts (Alacovska 2020; Campbell 2022). By contrast, we believe that adopting a conceptualization of relationality informed by Afro-communitarianism could serve to both de-centre and re-centre the concept of social capital. By thinking with indigenous thought systems such as Afro-communitarianism, we not only reverse the binary either-or, either bridging or bonding, logic underlying current approaches to social capital in creative work studies. We also, as Wiredu (2002, 24) advocated, “bring enlightening perspectives on some subtle problems” in the West. In our case, namely, we argue that Afro-communitarianism can help us re-centre analytical attention in creative work studies to the diverse array of “heterodox” relational-cum-economic practices, such as favour-swapping, self-provisioning, and commoning that seem to be as essential for the sustenance of creative careers in the Global North as they are in the Global South (Alacovska and Bille 2021; Banks 2006; Umney 2017).

Unlike approaches that conceptualize work and life as irreconcilable spheres of existence and thus focus on “work-life balance” and the trade-off between doing creative work and the responsibilities of family life (Dent 2020), an Afro-communitarian approach to relationality treats work and life as inextricably entwined. As such, the “dilemmas of care allocation” arising from a contested privileging of work over life or of life over work (Antoni, Reinecke, and Fotaki 2020) are framed very differently in the approach we propose. Thus, whereas existing approaches—typically drawing on an ethics of care perspective—proceed from the premise that the provision of care invariably demands creative workers make emotionally wrought, even stigmatizing, choices about the redistribution of scarce resources such as time and attention away from the intimate sphere of life towards the maintenance of collaborative ties and hence economic success (Alacovska and Bissonnette 2021; Campbell, 2022), an Afro-communitarian ethics offers a relational-normative basis for rethinking the partiality of care and other-centredness. This is not because Afro-communitarianism sees the resources of care as infinite but rather precisely because priorities of care allocation are commanded by specific interpersonal relations that themselves possess a basic yet differentiated

moral status (Metz 2007). In proceeding from this premise, our study has elucidated the main ways in which care is given and received through ongoing efforts to perpetuate circles of mutual aid and the creation of harmonious relations across work (business) and life (intimacy) divides. Moreover, we have shown how and when care and help is redistributed, that is differentiated, hierarchized, and prioritized, in accordance with the closeness of specific relational ties as well as concrete personal circumstances. Our findings confirm that a key ethical principle guiding practices of mutual aid is that nobody has the right to hoard resources but must redistribute them in the form of aid as a prerequisite not only for being regarded as an ethical person and a “good” member of the community but also for running a successful creative business. As a matter of principle, therefore, a person’s help-giving duties must be aligned with the degree of their personal flourishing, work success, or standing. This means that those who have already flourished have onerous obligations to reallocate resources to others in greater need than themselves, with those in greatest need having the strongest right to assert redistributive claims on others, both proximal and distant. Put simply, those who have more are obliged to give more.

A note of caution is in order, however. The epistemic and conceptual decolonialization we have advocated and practised is but one part of the wider project of decolonization. Many scholars are adamant that decolonization is more than just an epistemic project. It is also a political and material project necessitating economic reparations and the restitution of land to indigenous peoples (Tuck and Yang 2012). Future studies need to grapple with this aspect of decolonialization in the realm of the creative industries such as, for example, the repatriation of looted art and the reattribution of creative ownership to indigenous peoples.

Relational Resource Redistribution as Economic Practice: Contributions to Business Ethics

Previous studies by business ethicists have convincingly mobilized insights from African philosophies, most notably Ubuntu, to redress the epistemic hegemony of Western epistemologies, ontologies, and thought systems. We align with and contribute to such pluriversal efforts (Mignolo 2018) by demonstrating the empirical and theoretical usefulness of an Afro-communitarian ethics for de-centring mainstream approaches to the relationality of creative work. More specifically, our study complements the pioneering endeavours of business ethicists in organization and management studies to counter “epistemic coloniality” (Ibarra-Colado 2006) through the systematic incorporation of “Southern voices” (Alcadipani et al. 2012) to rethink key concepts in their disciplines, including ethical leadership (Ike 2011; Pérezts et al. 2020), stakeholder theory (Woermann and Engelbrecht 2019), global management (Lutz 2009), and CSR and social entrepreneurship (Adeleye et al. 2020). Taking their point of departure in Ubuntu, such studies have emphasized relational ontologies, communitarianism, and interpersonal interdependencies as the basis from which to challenge the often implicit assumptions diffused in mainstream organization and management studies of the existence of a rational, individualistic, profit-maximizing *homo economicus* at the centre of the firm or the

organization. In foregrounding the contradictory and ambivalent negotiation of relational resource redistribution in mutual aid as the basis of economic and business practice in the creative industries, our study thus supports ongoing analytical efforts to reconsider the profit-versus-society dilemma at the heart of business ethics from an Afro-communitarian perspective.

In elucidating the relationality underpinning the economic sustainability of non-standard forms of labour, our study reveals how economic and relational motivations not only coexist in the daily lives and business activities of creative workers but are mutually reinforcing. By redefining labour, business, and economic practices as compatible elements in the relational undertaking of mutual aid, the approach we advocate for studying non-standard forms of work treats labour, business, and economic practices as deeply enmeshed in the everyday relational infrastructures of family, friendship, and local communities rather than corporations and firms. With this approach we have been able to “reveal alternative modes of rationality” (Ibarra-Colado 2006, 474), including by recognizing relational logics as organizing principles of labour markets, especially in conditions of precarity and insecurity (Alcadipani et al. 2012, 134). By emphasizing the entwinement of logics and values often treated as antithetical in the everyday practices of creative workers, we hope to add a new slant to debates in business ethics that have long grappled with the assumed contradictions between the logic of the market (self-interest) and the logic of other-regarding sociality (care) (Long and Mathews 2011; Maitland 2002).

The assumption that markets and solidarity belong to mutually hostile worlds is so widespread as to be a truism; as is evident, for example, in the common notion that money considerations “sully” relationships of love (Maitland 2002). Our study problematizes this assumption, since the concept of mutual aid as a redistribution of resources within specific relational ties takes its starting point in an acknowledgement of the co-constitutive intertwinement of self-regarding “self-interest” and other-regarding “love for the other” in the flow of the daily economy (Lutz 2009). As such, the conceptualization of mutual aid we have advanced presents a fundamental challenge to the entrenched conviction that resources are solely acquired in a marketized, formal, corporate, or organizational sphere and only subsequently distributed in informal, interpersonal (moral, non-commodified) infrastructures of family, kin, and local communities. In this conceptualization, resources are not necessarily growing infinitely and unsustainably in amount or intensity according to the logic of (capitalist) markets, for example by accessing large loans or attracting capital investment. Instead, existing resources incessantly circulate within relational infrastructures according to a *degrowth* logic based on other-regarding duties and rights to be other-regarded, the fulfilment of which is indispensable for basic human flourishing. Our findings substantiate this conceptualization by showing how the creative workers in our case largely succeeded in reconciling seemingly antithetical logics, being at once highly communal and yet fiercely competitive, remarkably generous yet strategically advantage-seeking. Far from kinship and friendship being spheres hostile to money and economic self-interest, our data suggest not only that relational infrastructures *lubricate* the daily businesses of creative workers but also that the exchange of resources such as cash, favours, and free labour, *cements* the strength and significance of those intimate relationships.

By questioning the principle of competition as the primary mechanism for resource accumulation in labour markets associated with the creative industries, we contribute a theory from the South that recognizes *cooperation*, and especially the principles of relational resource redistribution, as a prerequisite for undertaking practices in this industry. Understood thus, practices of mutual aid are not contrary or inimical to the economic and market logic of exchange but intricately intertwined in everyday work and life.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have pursued a decolonial critique of the concept of social capital in studies of creative work by mobilizing an Afro-communitarian conceptualization of mutual aid as a relational and redistributive practice whereby economic and labour pursuits are intermingled with, and inseparable from, interpersonal duties and ethical obligations. The ethical import of relational practices of mutual aid within labour markets has only seldom been tackled by scholars. This is somewhat surprising given how the concept of “mutualism” developed by Kropotkin ([1902] 2010) at the beginning of the twentieth century was mobilized as a powerful counterpoint to entrenched ideas and vestiges of Social Darwinism. More recently, influential scholars such as Putnam (2001) in sociology and Maitland (1998) in business ethics have refused to accept that the “totalizing” expansion of the market has resulted in a complete “loss of community”—thereby inviting the question of how community is sustained in practice within market economies. We tackle this complex topic by operationalizing an Afro-communitarian conceptualization of mutual aid. In applying this ethical perspective to the analysis of the relational-cum-business dynamics of non-standard work, moreover, we heed Adeleye et al.’s (2020, 719) call to “go beyond aspirational rhetoric” surrounding the “normative” usefulness of Afro-communitarianism for business ethics and explore the “adoption and execution of Ubuntu in complex, modern organizations.”

As has long been the case in creative industries, “complex modern organizations” are increasingly comprised of non-standard forms of work and employment relations. Recent studies of the gig economy have found relational intimacies of various kinds to be paramount for staying afloat, for example, as gig workers face severe “social capital challenges” owing to their disconnection from any single organization, their geographical dispersion, and the accelerated transience of their work (Ashford, Caza, and Reid 2018; Petriglieri, Ashford, and Wrzesniewski 2019). Other studies have revealed the importance of “doing relational work” with clients, showing how efforts aimed at turning transactional business relations into friendship relations helps gig workers navigate fierce competition in the gig economy (Alacovska, Bucher, and Fieseler 2024). The extent to which work increasingly takes place within relational infrastructures rather than single and well-delineated organizations presents business ethicists with important new challenges, not least because business ethics has so long been preoccupied with firms and corporations and their stakeholders. In this context, we hope our case study of creative workers in Ghana from the perspective of Afro-communitarianism can inform future efforts to

tackle this aspect of business ethics and to enrich our understanding of relationality and ethical conduct within the rapidly changing organizational settings that make up the world of contemporary work.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Grant Number 18-05-CBS. The authors would like to extend their deepest gratitude to all the members of the Advancing Creative Industries for Development in Ghana (ACIG) team for their invaluable assistance in developing this article from an initial fuzzy idea to its final publication. We are particularly grateful to Professor Akosua Darkwah and Professor Kate Gough for their critical yet constructive and detailed readings of earlier drafts. Their insights significantly enhanced the quality of this work. The participants at the sub-theme “Organisational Research on and from the Global South” at the 38th European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) Colloquium in Vienna provided the much-needed inspiration to keep going with this paper, and we are very grateful for this. This paper could not have been written without the participation of the creative workers in Ghana, and we highly appreciate their sharing of experiences. Last but not least, we also wish to thank the generous and caring editor and reviewers at *BEQ*, whose steadfast support and guidance throughout the many revisions have been instrumental. Their dedication and collegial help have been a great source of inspiration and stamina for us. We are profoundly indebted to them for their unwavering commitment to this manuscript.

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