Navigating Uncertainty: Young Workers and Precarity in Berlin and Abidjan
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Abstract: *»Unsicherheit navigieren: Arbeit und Prekarität unter jungen Erwachsenen in Berlin und Abidjan«.* These days, many young urban dwellers work in precarious jobs to make a living, such as gig workers for digital platforms or informal traders for mobile communication companies. Their working conditions are characterized by temporary contracts, low salaries, and fiddly tasks. In what ways does gig work shape and enable transitions into adulthood? To answer this question, this article uses two unusual case studies – the making-do of young adults working respectively in the digital economy in Berlin and Abidjan. Instead of tracing individual trajectories against an ideal of stable employment as a marker for transitions into adulthood, we practice a Global Sociology through comparative analysis. We start from the context of Abidjan to focus on young dwellers' practices of kinship. Based on in-depth interviews with young residents of Berlin and Abidjan, we reveal differences in the ways independence as an individual is expected in interpersonal relations and institutionalized redistributive practices. At the same time, we carve out similar mechanisms and, as such, overcome a Eurocentric analytical framework in which the majority world is described as "lacking in" or "a variation of" modern expectations about the role of paid work for life-course and youth transitions. Instead, the analysis shows the relevance of studying the realm of paid work as closely entangled with care relations.

Keywords: Precarity, livelihood, urban youth, care, kinship.

1.   Young Lives and Precarity

Temporary opportunities to earn money and small profits here and there are part of urban life, and urban theory has conceptually integrated these practices under the term "informality," as opposed to a so-called standard of formal, long-term employment recognized by state laws and regulations (Sassen 2001; Al Sayyad and Roy 2003; Viti 2013; Burchardt, Peters, and Weinmann 2013). Digital technologies and the business models by which they are spread in cities and used to reorganize urban logistics and consumption have driven

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the presence of temporary, low-paid and flexible jobs, normalizing them as part of mainstream urban development (see Thieme 2018; Rossi and Wang 2020). Young people are particularly attracted by the new work environments that the digital economy has produced, but they are also confronted with the precariousness of these temporary, highly flexible job opportunities. How do they organize their social coming of age, having to deal with the uncertainties that arise from unstable work?

To answer this question, and to understand how precarious work – that is, work that is low paid, legally poorly protected (if at all), and temporary – shapes transitions into adulthood, this article looks at the multiple figurations in which people make ends meet. This means overcoming analytical dichotomies that foreclose everything outside of formal labour as informal. Instead, practices of sharing and reciprocating become important aspects of the organization of livelihoods. We use care as a conceptual lens through which to capture these economic practices, and with this, to study how the deserving-ness of support is negotiated. Moreover, we focus on reciprocities, as kin matter for accessing resources.

Practicing kinship is particularly relevant in the context of transitions into adulthood, when actors renegotiate their webs of interdependencies, their networks of mutual dependencies with others. Besides others, youth refers to a transitory status between school and work, and is used to describe actors who are "yet to become" (Simone 2004b). Developed in the historical off-spring of modernity, the status is part of a model of human development that casts "youth" as both the essential precondition and the indefinite postpone-ment of maturity (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, 91). Recent terms such as "emerging adulthood" or "young adults" show that transitions from adoles-cence to adulthood are fuzzy, and by no means linear (cf. Furlong 2009; Heinz 2009).

To confront this limited view of life courses, we focus on youth practices of making do and of becoming, and understand their position as relational and situational: when are they perceived as young, when as old, and why? Refer-ring here to Rosenthal and Bogner, we situate the biographical experiences and attitudes of an individual in relation to wider laws of social becoming (2017, 16f). Hence, young persons are "social navigators of the present and social generators of individual and collective futures" (Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006, 21). They navigate the uncertainties that result from the changing parameters that enable their social recognition as adults, or that come up, as laws of social becoming do not work anymore in changing eco-nomic or institutional settings. These uncertainties challenge sociological un-derstandings of social mobility that looks "synchronically at the way in which agents move within solid social coordinates or structures" (Vigh 2010, para-graph 47). Against these shortcomings, the work of Africanists like Honwana (2014) or Vigh (2010), as well as Jeffrey (2010) and Thieme (2018), are useful

entry points into the study of precarious economic lives in youth transitions. They focus on young dwellers' improvisation and re-composition of practices of making do against the horizon of "eroding maps of life" and a situation of "waithood" (see also Schilling, Blokland, and Simone 2019).

This article uses comparisons to carve out ways in which young precarious workers negotiate individuality and personhood in their webs of interdependence. By starting with the economic practices of young precarious workers in Abidjan, we render visible aspects of urban life that remain easily under the radar in Berlin but are also important here to understand the reproduction of inequalities in precarious work. This way of crafting connections foregrounds the notion that relational work is crucial to the making of livelihood, and that comparing the formal labour positions and qualifications of young residents is not enough to explain the reproduction of inequalities. We see that individuality is a product of institutions and that, despite their self-proclaimed autonomy, young workers negotiate their belonging in their social relations.

In the following, we show how precarity is shaped by accessing resources through kinship practices. We will first describe how, in both contexts, the activities of airtime selling and delivery complement or "bridge" shrinking possibilities to access public support and the support of household members. In a second step, we carve out differences in the way practices of kinship become relevant. In Abidjan, the performance of kinship organizes hierarchical relationships in the household, at work and in communal spaces, and the young precarious workers reinforce their position as "youth" through these practices of kinship. In Berlin, kinship provides resources but is rendered invisible and restricted to the sacred space of the nuclear family, reproducing advantages for those young workers who can rely on family assets. Before exploring these dynamics in greater depth, we will discuss the comparative methodology in more detail.

2. Global Sociology and the Approach of Urban Comparison

The comparative analysis of young airtime sellers and food-delivery riders serves to explore new connections and ways of linking urban contexts such as Abidjan and Berlin, situating this research in the comparative urbanism debate with voices of Jennifer Robinson and others. In integrating cities "off the map" (Robinson 2002), this comparative project probes the possibilities for a new way of relating urban places to each other and embedding them in an analytical project for a more global urban theory (Robinson 2015, 2016;

McFarlane 2011; Simone and Pieterse 2017). In the general research project,[1] we do not compare these two cities as such, nor do we compare young urbanites' positions on the basis of measures of livelihoods, such as poverty rates or the labour-market statistics of GDPs – measures which easily sustain categorizations of Berlin as developed and Abidjan as underdeveloped. Instead, this research takes the two urban settings as a starting point for developing a more "cosmopolitan [type of] urban studies that situates its analysis in a greater diversity of experiences, including the experience of those places formerly off the map (of theory)" (Hentschel 2015, 79). Here, we situate our work in the debate on new forms of comparisons in urban studies (i.e., Peck 2015; Hentschel 2015; McFarlane 2010; Robinson 2011; Ward 2008; Nijman 2007). We expand on interventions for a more global urban theory that stress the relevance of actors' capacity to improvise and the connections with other urbanites in the organization of livelihood beyond stable employment (Simone 2004a, 2004b; Simone and Pieterse 2017; Simone 2018). We began conceptualizing economic practice from the study of the everyday of Abidjan's urban residents, and from there developed analytical lenses to study the reproduction of inequalities in precarious work settings in Berlin and Abidjan.

Instead of comparing youth practices alongside pre-defined dimensions of precarity, we use the comparative method as a means to find mechanisms that can explain *how* work matters for reproducing inequalities and experiences of precarity for some of the young residents. Here we draw on Chris Pickvance's plural causation model as a comparative research design (2001), which grounds our project in the epistemology of critical realism.

The core material consists of 48 in-depth interviews in total with mainly male residents aged between 18 and 35, who earned money in the two economies respectively as airtime sellers and food-delivery riders. Airtime sellers are street workers who top up customers' mobile phones. Delivery riders in Berlin are also street workers who deliver meals to customers who order online via an app. Even though all of them earned money within the digital economies of their cities, we explicitly also studied how these practices were connected to other domains, such as the household, the neighbourhood, or the street/public space.

The interviews were conducted as semi-directed interviews, oriented according to the problem-centred interview (Witzel 2000; Misoch 2019) using an interview guide[2] that focused on the interviewees' everyday activities and the

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[1] This paper builds on doctoral research that uses a comparative methodology to develop new analytical entry points into the study of urban precarity (Schilling 2023). It was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in the context of a fellowship in the International Graduate Program Berlin-New York-Toronto (IGK) at the Center for Metropolitan Studies at Technical University Berlin (2015–2018).

[2] We expanded on the interview guide developed by Blokland with project members in the project "Urbanizing Faith," which was centred around "narratives of how youngsters created

ways they made ends meet. Each interview brought up similar topics with open questions that enabled narrative answers and incited stories about ordinary practices (cf. Hitchings 2012). The interview was accompanied by a standardized questionnaire about the interviewee's demographics. Exploring "practices of making do," in the interviews we asked about the organization of their livelihoods in the everyday (housing, mobility, food, leisure, emergency support, and practices of lending and borrowing) and elaborated from the interviewees' stories the relevant social relations (cf. Schilling 2023, 23). Our questions aimed at assessing the "role repertoires and the meanings the interviewees attributed to this social tie that they evoked during the interview, and which mattered to the organization of their livelihoods (i.e., as an open question: How would you describe your relationship with person XY, what do you contribute to the relationship, and what does the relationship enable you to do?)" (ibid.).

We wanted to gain an in-depth view about the interviewee's understanding of the transaction, i.e., did they exchange resources as gifts or payable goods; did they consider the transaction as an act of sharing as kin or as market exchange between colleagues or clients. This way, we wanted to assess the "mixture of idioms that is available to be drawn upon by given groups" (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1999, 1439f), or their "relational work" (cf. Zelizer 2012). In the analysis, we used these idioms to study "what governs the conduct of this relationship" (Hannerz 1980, 321). Ulf Hannerz brings in a focus on the role constellations in which people act in concrete situations, which also depend on "where they have been before, and where they may be at some later time, because they are people with memories and plans" (ibid., 273). This way, we can connect relations to (meaning) structure.

We centred on transactions, a dynamic, unfolding process in which the "very terms or units involved in a transaction derivse their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction" (Emirbayer 1997, 286). This method follows the plea for different analytical tools other than name generators (i.e., Burt 1984; Fischer 1982) used in social network analysis (cf. Jansen 2003, 81-7). The latter method fails to explain how networks produce social capital (Blokland and Savage 2008, 5) and how inequalities are reproduced relationally, in practice (Blokland et al. 2016; Tilly 2001). They also risk abstracting networks from their location, rather than integrating the ways in which networks operate as contextualized practices (Blokland and Savage 2008, 6). Along the lines of analytical ethnography (see Lofland 1995), we aimed to "produce systematic and generic propositions about social processes and organizations," while understanding

ethnography and theory as "mutually informative." While "theory focuses and sharpens ethnography [...] ethnography grounds theory in the richness of social life" (Snow, Morrill, and Anderson 2003, 182).

We started with interviews and participant observation with young residents in Abidjan more generally and focused then on young men working as airtime sellers. The structure of the interview guide was slightly modified and specified after a first analysis of the interview material of Abidjan: We chose the platform delivery work as case study for the Berlin context and adopted the interview questions to this setting – for example, we asked about their relations to welfare bureaucracies and their social insurance arrangements. We re-specified certain challenges concerning the organization of livelihood as airtime sellers too, such as the relation to the dispatchers, and the organization of a place to sell. We explored them in more depth in follow-up interviews with actors of the field in Abidjan.

Hence, the collection of empirical material and the conceptualization of the empirical realities in the field constituted an iterative process, where we travelled between Abidjan and Berlin, with readings and conversations in the street. Interviews were combined with field observations in the riders' office and at formal and informal meetings of riders. The observations were used to identify practices of organizing work and interactions amongst workers, especially in the riders' offices, to see what topics are discussed, and exchanges of information and support. The field notes were not coded in their entirety, but served to reflect impressions from the work environment, and to help decipher the organizational culture.

All interviews were transcribed and coded using MaxQDa, following the methodology of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The code structure used to analyse the data was derived from a phase of open coding of the Abidjan case study, as the aim of the project was to start with digital work contexts in Abidjan and then develop our own analytical framework to study inequalities in precariousness. Here, notions such as friendship, respect, reciprocity, norms of deservingness, and kin (to name just a few) had emerged as relevant concepts to develop further. They all seemed important for understanding the social economy of getting by. In a second step, the material was coded axially (cf. Corbin and Strauss 2008) to develop three categories: "Doing kinship," "doing markets," and "doing friendships," which all designated particular economic practices, with roles, norms, and forms of exchange associated with them. In a comparative and circular process of coding, we carved out the specific ways in which practices of friendships, kinning, and market transactions were relevant in different domains.

Then we began to look for ways in which practices of friendship, kinning, and market transactions were relevant in other domains. We analysed which specific types of role-relations were predominantly mentioned by the interviewees, under what conditions, and with what consequences. Doing

friendship was central in Abidjan, as well as for the interviewees in Berlin. However, they practiced friendship differently when organizing their livelihoods, as the fields of market, state, and family were entangled differently. This closer attention to the way "the set of relations" in which we detected the categories of practices were organized was revealing (Becker 1998, 138). We could find causal connections through the juxtaposition of the two settings in which we studied economic practices. The categories of practices, "doing friendships, kinship and markets," showed variation in the properties, conditions, and consequences, and varied in the ways in which they were embedded in the system of relations and combined to organize their livelihoods.

This detailed discussion of the methodology helps explain how the conceptual lens, the focus on doing kinship, which will be at the heart of our analysis in the following sections, is already a result of the coding and analysis of the empirical material.

3. Navigating Uncertainty between Work and Care

Yopougon was one of Abidjan's largest districts and had the reputation of being an area where nightlife was most prominent and partying was at its best. As an urban extension built in the 1980s, it represented an urban imaginary of the "modern city" and was the home of an urban middle class that benefited from the huge public investment in housing when Yopougon was built (Steck 2008; Manou-Savina et al. 1985). For the children of these families, who lived in residential neighbourhoods there, the transition to adulthood passed inevitably through school attendance and even higher education (Proteau 2002). These urban milieus sought transition to adulthood through public-sector employment, which was increasingly inaccessible, with rising official and unofficial fees for entrance exams. Wage labour had long been and continued to be a model of social success, especially for urban men, as their role as "provider" was defined by paid employment, and work was fundamental to structuring overall household organization and social reproduction (Matlon 2016; Le Pape 1997). Airtime selling was hence a way for urban middle-class youth to distinguish themselves from the "street work" associated with less educated urban residents, and to bridge the waiting time until their aspirations for civil service entry were achieved (Schilling and Dembelé 2019; Le Pape and Vidal 1987).

François, 28, lived in just such an urban middle-class household with his parents and other kin in a privately owned house in Yopougon-Siporex. His father was an English teacher and his mother a saleswoman. He had obtained A-levels and was now pursuing his studies, hoping to become an employee in the public administration. However, when I met François, he was sitting at a crossroads under a sun umbrella topping up the prepaid cards of passers-by.

What had happened? When we discussed his situation in an interview later, François explained to me that he had begun selling airtime, as it had become difficult to finance school. Instead of "always holding the hand out," he had asked his mother to give him the financial credit to start a call box. He felt ashamed asking for money all the time, especially now that he was growing older (see Interview François, Yopougon, 19.02.2016).

François was not the only airtime seller I met for whom the activity was a way to gain some extra money while pursuing other professional goals. Luc, 25, lived with his older brother and the latter's wife and their three children. He had started to sell airtime to avoid them seeing him as lazy. He wanted to be able to "do the small gestures at home," as he feared being rejected by his brother when he was doing "nothing else but sitting around." His goal was to become a footballer. While he had begun playing football in his childhood, after leaving school it became his "project," and he started to play in competitions. He had left secondary school at the level of the lower secondary school leaving certificate (*troisième*), before graduating. His father had passed away at that time, which was why he left school. However, in 2010, he developed health problems, having been injured in football training. Selling airtime was one way of remaining active, even if injured. Along with three other young men, he worked for a woman who had invested capital in the phone box, and who paid Luc and his co-workers at the end of the month on the basis of the sales they had made that month. As an average, Luc mentioned 25,000 FCFA (or 60 Euros) as a monthly share. Most of my interlocutors earned around 30,000 FCFA through the sale of airtime, with some exceptions in which a young man's earnings could reach 100,000 FCFA a month. For every sale of 10,000 FCFA in airtime credit, airtime sellers' received a sale percentage of 4-6%, assuming they were not working for someone else, like Luc. All of them considered their earnings insufficient to make a living. Luc put it this way:

> Here [gesturing to the call box] we come to find support here. To be able to restart. Here we say: to be able to jump better, you need momentum, you can't stop like that, and then in front of a big hole you'll jump. So here we find support to be able to restart. I know that if I don't come here I can't have the money for the job I want to do. [...] [With] the money they will give me [at the call box], I start in the profession I want to do. It's like that. (Interview with Luc, Yopougon, 23.02.16)

Framing the activity as an airtime seller as a way to "find support" is telling. Airtime selling generates an income, but it is not considered to be work people identify with as their profession.

This resonates with the stories of Berlin's delivery riders I met. Delivering food by bike is a side job, and it compensates or fills in voids created when support arrangements cease to function. Morice, 23, had grown up in the former East Germany, his parents both being employees with middle-school

qualification. He had moved to Berlin after finishing middle school to study renewable energies at a university of applied sciences in Schöneweide in Berlin, a district in the former East. He had moved to this district recently too and had moved in with his girlfriend. In the first semesters he had received *BAFÖG*, a public funding scheme for his studies, but the funding body stopped the stipend when Morice failed to obtain the required credit points in time. Needing money to pay for his daily needs and apartment, he started to deliver food. He registered on an online platform, filled in his contact details, organized a bike, and just started delivering. As a mini-jobber, he earned up to 450 Euros a month and got paid the minimum hourly wage at that time of about 9 Euros.

In Victor's case too, his trajectory shows how much the delivery was a way of bridging a time when he was waiting and of making some money while pursuing other plans. He was 24 years old when we met and had come to Berlin two years earlier through the *Mobipro* mobility program, a program financed by the German state for young residents in European countries to come to Germany to take up in-house vocational training. His parents had been born in Romania but moved to Spain, where Victor grew up. As the professional training he was given stipulated somewhere in rural Germany, it did not quite suit his aspirations, and as he preferred to live in Berlin, to continue studies, he quit the training and tried to make a living in Berlin. Berlin, to him and to others, was a city where "everything was possible." Finally, he ended up delivering food as a full-time job, as he didn't want to depend on anyone else, and he needed to earn money first. He went to the employment agency, but he had difficulties understanding them, and the bureaucratic procedures at the agency put him off:

> [...] at the beginning I was searching for [further qualifications], but then after a while and thinking, I just decided it is better to work [...] [I]t's, this is really funny, because it is about my, me myself, being proud, and – I don't want to ask for a job from the Jobcenter. The help. [...] I want to do it for myself. Because I was having help from some people before, and I don't want to have it anymore. I want to do it for myself. It doesn't matter how hard it is. (Interview with Victor, Friedrichshain 03.04.2017, my emphasis)

Victor's story shows how the gig work helped him navigate the uncertainty produced by a labour market and welfare bureaucracy in which people who had no formal qualifications and who didn't speak German were easily excluded. The politics of deservingness, in which quantifiable, competitive rules about access to support gained in importance, as for example linking public stipends for students to their achievements in obtaining credit points, intensified the barriers to accessing public support structures.

The young men, both in Berlin and in Abidjan, used the opportunity to earn money by selling airtime or delivering food in order to deal with their shrinking ability to access support through institutional or personal arrangements.

The young men negotiated honour (proud) and deservingness of support, as well as being cared for by others. Care is defined here as an "open-ended process which [...] connects a giving and receiving side in practices aimed to satisfy socially recognized needs" (Thelen 2015, 508). Care practices can involve a broad range of relationships, i.e., friendship, patron-client relations, and professional care relationships. In the stories of Victor, Morice, Luc, and François, we see these different relational arrangements of support. While Victor and Morice face barriers to public support (stipend and welfare benefits), Luc and François deal with the limits of the deservingness of support with their kin. In these contexts, jobs selling airtime and delivering food helped the young men to bridge financial insecurities and provided them with a temporary income, rather than offering them career prospects or allowing them to nurture a professional identity.

This first section has shown that it is fruitful to locate young men's income-generating activity at the intersection of care and work when examining livelihood practices in precarity. Indeed, precariousness is more than precarity in labour relations. It encompasses situations that touch on the human condition of existence as such: "We are social beings from the start, dependent on what is outside ourselves, on others, on institutions, and on sustained and sustainable environments, and so are, in this sense, precarious" (Butler 2009, 8, quoted in Lorey 2017, 7). Selling airtime and delivering food can become a form of support for the young men I met, enabling them to make a living through uncertain routes. Both activities offer highly formalized payment systems and immediate income, as well as low barriers to entry. For most, however, the gigs are not enough to make ends meet in the long run and to make the transition into adulthood. The young men use other ties and are involved in additional care practices that mobilize kinship as an important resource. In the following, we will discuss their access to resources through practices of kinship in both Abidjan and Berlin.

4.   Practices of Kinning in Making (Unequal) Livelihoods

We have seen that in both contexts the young men negotiated whether they deserved support and used their activities to create margins for the transition to adulthood. In this section, we look in more detail at how they mobilize resources in the practice of kinning. In other words, we look at the "doing of kinship" in care relationships, which does not start from an ideal of form and unity, but from the practices that create relationships. Kinning involves reciprocity of resources (giving, sharing or redistributing according to the principle of reciprocity), caring and receiving care, and can imply that categories of kinship are used in relational work. We will note differences between the two contexts. The use of kinship as a relational category extends across social

domains in different ways in Abidjan and in Berlin. While in the Berlin context young men perform kinship in the form of the nuclear family and sacred space, the case in Abidjan shows how doing kinship provides access to resources not only in the household, but also in the neighbourhood and the workplace. In both contexts, inequalities are reproduced as access to resources as kinship reinforces hierarchies and involves processes of social closure.

4.1   Practices of Kinship across Social Realms

In the airtime distribution economy, the transactions between customers and airtime sellers were documented and tracked digitally via a platform. The director of the firm responsible for the distribution of one of the telecommunication company's airtime products in the area of Yopougon described the airtime sellers as a workforce that was disciplined via rankings and other measures: he rewarded those with the highest sales with gadgets, sun umbrellas, etc. (Interview with franchise's director of distribution, Yopougon, 11.10.2017).

On the ground, in the everyday practices of airtime sellers, however, another logic prevailed. Even if the airtime sellers were not directly employed by the subcontracting firms that organized the distribution of airtime in a particular area, they were supplied with airtime credit by these firms through dispatchers. Daniel, in his mid-thirties and the father of a young son, was one of the dispatchers I met and accompanied in his daily trips through Yopougon's neighbourhoods to dispatch credit to the airtime sellers on the street. He later became the supervisor of other dispatchers, too. In our conversations, he shared his view of how he perceived his role as dispatcher and supervisor.

> [...] [W]e are helping each other where we can [*un peu un peu*]. This means that we are getting familiar with each other [*on se familiarise*] – we call this "the family." Because it's even not friendship anymore, in the end we call each other brothers. We are sympathizing. [...] So the difference from being an acquaintance and then becoming like a brother, it's that, if you have a problem, the other one will not let you down. They will help you, they will support you. This is how it is. And if they have a bit, and they see that you are in need, they can also share it together with you. Easy! If they want something, you as well, they can ask you. (Interview with Daniel, Yopougon, 13.10.2017)

Daniel connected with others so as to create familiarity and turn his work relationships into kin relations. This comprised for Daniel caring for each other – "not let[ting] each other down" in a situation of need, and "support[ing]" each other. Between dispatcher Daniel and airtime sellers, such mutuality consisted of transferring airtime in emergencies. Daniel helped out when airtime sellers had a customer who needed to top up their phone but ran out of

airtime unit stock during the day or late at night, outside of his regular working hours as a dispatcher. He also supported some of the call-box workers with whom he became friends by investing in their business, whom he often referred to as brothers in our conversations. As a brother, he would give them capital to buy more airtime units, but still as a loan, which they would have to repay after making enough money. The transaction of resources hence was based on "[practices of] kinning, although in a way which was less fixed on the idea of 'unconditional solidarity'" (Schilling 2023, 126).

Performing relations as kin was not only an organizational logic of the work process itself, it also enabled access to resources to start the activity. Séverin, 25 years old, lived in Koumassi, Abidjan, along with his father, who had stopped supporting him, as he was getting "old." They also had different expectations about Séverin's future career. While his father saw him becoming a policeman, Séverin wanted to quit school and to become a professional footballer. In this situation, Séverin established a trusting relationship with a neighbour, a 33-year-old lady, who helped him financially with the entrance fee for the public administration exam and gave him the starting capital of 60,000 FCFA to start selling airtime as a gift. Séverin explained to me that the neighbour had become like a mother to him, as she provided him with resources whenever he needed them. An alliance based on ethnic categories existed between Séverin and the lady: they were both Baoulé (name of an ethnic group), as Séverin explained, but Séverin also stressed that his relational work, "his character," mattered in creating a relationship of care with her as junior to senior. He never showed a lack of respect for her and gave proof of his reliability. The neighbour had given him an envelope with money and asked him to take care of it for a while. As he was able to give the envelope back to her, and all the money was still there, the neighbour developed a trust in him. In establishing trust, she had considered Séverin as her junior (pétit frère), and to Séverin she became like a mother. As co-residents, Séverin and the lady emulated categories of kinship to establish care relations. Still, it was a hierarchical relationship, one of mutual respect, but not as equals. The idiom of kinship here expresses relations of domination by reformulating them as personalized relations of dependence:

> Material circulation (money, goods) mediates emotional investments: assistance considered satisfactory will be translated into terms of consideration and love [...] Power and authority are essentially based on an ability to provide assistance. (Bazin 1999, 3)

Care practices bring about asymmetrical interdependencies, which shape and set limits to the rightful shares that the interviewees could receive in their position as young people.

The trustworthiness of someone in urban communal spaces was also informed by institutionalized categories, such as status as a student, and the willingness to contribute and invest in relationality. Séverin was not the only

young man for whom airtime selling was part of negotiating his near relations, while looking for possibilities to become more independent from the support of parents or other household members. Maintaining a good reputation was key. David, another airtime seller I met, explained to me what made people decide to trust someone to manage a call box or other business: "Well, you need to know what the person is like, whether the person is not a villain [*bandit*], as you cannot entrust your meat to a dog, because he would eat it [laughs]." He continued:

> You are in the neighbourhood, you are young, you are a student, you are a bit at school, and you are doing [this] just as a means to get a bit of cash for your own pockets [...]. But if you are doing nothing, you are in the neighbourhood, you don't do anything – [someone] cannot give you a call box to manage [...] (Interview with David, Koumassi, 13.10. 2017)

He mentioned that the status of student boosted one's reputation for trustworthiness and thus facilitated access to livelihood opportunities. In this valorisation of academic education and university degrees as indicator of person value, we can see the persistence of classification schemes established in Ivoirian society since the French rule (Proteau 2002).

Maintaining an educational status legitimized social support in neighbourhoods where the majority of residents belonged to the lower middle class, which, at least in earlier generations, maintained close relations with the state as an employer (cf. Manou-Savina et al. 1985). Small favours, such as keeping the neighbours' keys or keeping money for someone, were practices the airtime sellers engaged in which were useful to build a positive image, a good reputation. Consequently, the young men were considered when neighbours had job opportunities to offer. At the same time, many of the young men I met always tried to maintain an impression of being in need. David too had to remain "junior," meaning that he was looking for work but without a steady job. Otherwise, his status in care relations would change, and he would be approached as someone others looked to for support. His position legitimized access to a share; hence, managing the call box was also distributive labour, in which the call box activity was less about earning money than about "securing distributive outcomes" (Ferguson 2015, 93).

4.2 Practicing Kinship as Nuclear Sacred Space

For many of the riders I encountered in Berlin, the delivery job was a means to make money easily and temporarily. It was street work, too: the riders waited for the app to assign them a new delivery gig, and then they had to drive as fast as possible to the restaurant to pick up the meal to deliver it to the customer, who had ordered the menu online via the platform. The contractual arrangements made it easy to step in and to step out of the job. The riders I met were mostly mini-or midi-jobbers who were paid by the hour and

were earning the minimum wage. The mini-job's maximal threshold was 450 Euro per month and the midi-job's was 850 Euro. Only midi-jobber were entitled to statutory welfare contributions (see *Arbeitsvertrag* 2023). As a freelancer, you were paid per gig (delivery). The platform did not provide work tools except for the delivery bag. The riders had to use their own mobile phones and bicycles, without being entitled to their repair and maintenance. The job as a delivery rider promised freedom and flexibility. Interestingly, the performance of autonomy and self-responsibility made invisible the importance of support relations. For some, support by one's parents was natural and invisible.

"I've never been in trouble. I have never asked for any help from anybody. I am able to sort things out on my own," Torben explained to me in our interview. Torben was 20 years old and had grown up in London with his parents and brother. After finishing his A-levels, he came to Berlin for a gap year before deciding what to study. Delivering food in the meantime was a way to get a status that entitled him to statutory health insurance, instead of paying for private insurance with high fees: he used the job to get entitlements to a share, institutionalized in the health-care system.[3] As such, for Torben his activity was distributive labour; it was "in fact less about producing goods and services [...] than it [was] about securing distributive outcomes. [It enabled him to access or make] claims on the resources of others" (Ferguson 2015, 93). In any case, he did not see in this job a long-term activity but considered it a "student job." And he liked it: "You have no boss. No one who tells you, go faster, or something like that. [...] You don't depend on anybody. Because your work is to deliver food" (Interview with Torben, Prenzlauer Berg, 16.05.2017).

Later, he wanted to become an osteopath (ibid.). Delivering food was a way to earn his own money, be able to do more things on his own independently of his parents, paying for his own his travel, etc. (ibid.). When we discussed his everyday experiences in Berlin, how he found an apartment, and what he liked about being in Berlin, it became clear that the possibility of "not depending on anyone's help" rested upon the security of Torben's father sending him money quite regularly, though not predictably. His father was French and his mother Portuguese. Both had attended university; his father was employed as a salesman, and his mother worked on the medical staff of a hospital. From time to time, without being asked, Torben's father transferred 300 to 1,000 Euros to Torben's bank account and gave him cash when Torben's bank account was blocked once. Torben did not feel any obligation to justify his father's support for a German language class: "for educational issues, parents are always ready to pay, right?" he asked rhetorically (Interview with Torben,

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3   Health care in Germany is based on the principle of solidarity and organized through statutory health insurance. According to one's employment status, residents become entitled to health care, whose costs are shared between employee and employer.

Prenzlauer Berg, 15.06.2017). In our conversation, he did not mention once the ability to pay. Relying on care relations in a family in which material support works "without question" enabled the interviewees to maintain a self-presentation as self-sufficient.

Other riders I met in Berlin avoided being supported by their kin, as they were aware of the latter's material shortages. Joseph was a young man in his late twenties who had moved to Berlin a couple of years ago. He began delivering meals to residences in the Berlin neighbourhoods of Neukölln and Friedrichshain at a time when he urgently needed to earn money to pay his rent. He was studying computer science, but had quit, and was getting by with temporary gigs that did not provide him with reliable income. The delivery job was a way to earn money quickly and quite reliably. Joseph could choose his working times, as he had a contract as a freelancer with the company. He got 5 Euros as basic pay per delivery (see Interview with Joseph, Neukölln, 25.05.2017). Knowing his mother was in financial difficulties, Joseph preferred not to ask her, even though he knew she would help him and give without expecting repayment, "as she knows him." She was an employee at a department store who had commenced law studies at university but did not graduate, as she was working full-time as the only carer for three children. Joseph felt that he constantly lacked money to get by, and he tried to avoid borrowing money from others. Over the course of his life, he had accumulated debts: official ones recorded by the SCHUFA,[4] a public-private organization, and private debts, with his girlfriend. Hence, he tried not to ask others for money. In his webs of relationship in Berlin, establishing a need for material support was not "commonplace" as it was a shared condition for "most of the people." This was unlike his hometown, which he describes as an environment with "no money, no academic people and such things," but more "worker's children" (Interview with Joseph, Neukölln, 25.05.2017). This made it difficult for him to speak about financial insecurities and needing the help of others.

In our conversations, both young men, Torben and Joseph, stressed their wish to be able to provide for themselves without the help of others and to be financially independent. That this required resources was not openly discussed by all, as need was provided for through interdependencies with others, but was "naturalized" as given in the dominant *perspective* of those who could rely on assets, e.g., through family bonds. This illustrates what Beverly Skeggs points out as the "bourgeois model" of personhood: The imaginary of

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4   SCHUFA stands for Schutzgemeinschaft für allgemeine Kreditsicherung (General Credit Protection Agency). It is a credit bureau which provides, for example, proof of the creditworthiness of consumers who want to rent a flat. The agency holds credit-rating information, which it issues via reports to private and corporate customers "to creat[e] trust between two business partners [and to] support safe, fast and efficient business transactions" (https://www.schufa.de/en/about-us/company/schufa/schufa.jsp, last accessed 08.08.2019).

personhood as singular self and possessive individual, in which actors extend their opportunities "by loading themselves with value that is convertible into capitals for themselves and Capital more generally" (Skeggs 2011, 508). Material conditions of living different relations to capital produce different orientations to others (cf. Skeggs 2011, 507):

> Different circuits and exchange mechanisms exist, some enable capital/s accumulation; others exist alongside and others are autonomist, based on reciprocity, care, shared understandings of injustice, insecurity, precarity. All these values circulate through the person as they face capitalism in very different directions. (Skeggs 2011, 509)

White male and middle-class youth could realize themselves as singular selves, while at the same time relying on invisible airbags, that is, kin as resources. They reproduced the idea of the family as a "separate social universe" by boundary work that idealized the interior of the family almost as "sacred space," "[as a] universe where the ordinary laws of the economic world are suspended" (Bourdieu 1993, 33).

Other riders, even when positioned differently, had to confront this dominant *perspective*, the norm of being able to go it alone, and maintaining the family as a separate universe. Dennis, for example, a full-time delivery rider who grew up in Spain, spoke of himself as someone able to "control his money." He was 30 years old and had come to Berlin to obtain alternative professional training, having already worked in elderly care in Spain and now wanting to specialize in computer programming. Until now, he was getting by with low-paid jobs in delivery or as a security man – making ends meet was not easy for him. Still, borrowing or lending money to others was something he avoided, as he expected not to be repaid. In addition, he did not want to introduce monetary transactions into his friendships, as to him money did not belong there. He would borrow money from his father, "as he belongs to his family." "But from friends and stuff? With the money, I think you don't have any real friends," he stated (Interview with Dennis, Mitte, 24.02.2017). For him, care practices of sharing and reciprocating belonged to bonds in the private realm (cf. Blokland and Noordhoff 2008; on bonds: Blokland 2003) – in contrast to friendships, which in his view should remain free from monetary exchange, as unpaid debts could risk these relationships.

Dennis (and other interviewees) stressed the importance of self-sufficiency and tried to maintain control and self-discipline. Asking for support was legitimate within the confines of a private realm, limited by the sense of disposing of enough resources available for sharing within the family. Moreover, time was a structuring factor and shaped intergenerational interdependencies. Most of the interviewees stressed the importance of being self-sufficient and independent from others – but only some were able to uphold this image. They could organize themselves seemingly "independently from others," because material support through kinning was made invisible as a naturalized

entitlement to draw on intergenerational bonds. Those who limited the use of support from bonds to emergencies, as they either felt too old to ask for help or were sensible to the scarce resources of their parents, had difficulties resorting to other social ties for support, such as friends or partners. Joseph and Dennis avoided relying on others to maintain honour and a feeling of control (cf. Blokland and Noordhoff 2008).

5.   Conclusion: Decentring the Self-Accruing Individual

The relatively recent and fast-growing digital economies in cities like Abidjan and Berlin bring about new opportunities to earn money for young urban dwellers. The delivery job and the airtime selling are both economic activities that attract young residents for their easy access to income and the promise of being your own boss. In this sense, we brought into perspective similar contexts of precarious work emerging in the digital urban economy, jobs that do not provide a sustainable income and only minimal legal protection to the workers, if at all. The juxtaposition of accounts of delivery workers and of airtime sellers aimed to trace the wider social configurations in which dwellers organized their livelihood in contemporary Abidjan and Berlin. We can understand the attractiveness of this gig work in young men's struggles to transition into adulthood when we look at the particular institutional histories of the organization of care and work that shape the organization of livelihoods. In both contexts, the gig work serves as a bridge to maintain a status of transitioning, of becoming. Integrating platform work or micro-entrepreneurship into the digital economy provides temporary financial security in a situation of uncertainty, given the shrinking opportunities to be taken care of by the state, e.g., as employer, as a public fund for studies, or as a welfare provider, in Côte d'Ivoire as well as in Germany. While being a source for financial security, the jobs do not enable sustainable livelihoods. This is also, but not only, because the young residents of Abidjan and Berlin use them as additional temporary sources of income while pursuing other plans, and most of the time they do not invest in the work as their professional career.

This embeddedness of the activity came to the fore when we paid attention to the economic practices beyond the actual work of delivery and sale. Given the realities of residents of Abidjan, outside the North America-European sphere, new questions regarding the young men's situation become urgent. They stress their relations as kin, their responsibilities and reciprocities as members of households and neighbourhoods. As a consequence, their accounts incite urban scholars to ask: Who can be taken into account as a source of support, where do we see practices of kinship, and what radius of responsibility do people experience as legitimate and why? These questions also decentre work from its function as means to accrue value as single individuals.

Instead, it problematizes and situates the economic activity as "distributive labour," that is, as the "securing of distributive outcomes" outside their labour relations (Ferguson 2015, 93).

The comparative gesture shows the different ways in which practices of kinship play a role in organizing livelihood as a precarious (gig) worker. For the airtime sellers in Abidjan, practicing kinship stretches across social realms, providing resources in work relations as well as in the communal spaces of the neighbourhood. Kinning reproduces hierarchical relationships as junior and senior, for example, and turns into a source through which authority can be established. In their navigation of uncertainty, airtime sellers make use of and seek out interdependencies as kin, and in doing so maintain a status as "*bon pétit*" or as young people in need of support. In that respect, they also tend to reproduce symbolic hierarchies established through the postcolonial state, namely the value of formal education (being a student). In Berlin, practices of kinship reproduced the idea of the sacred space of the nuclear family. The resources provided in kinship relations were often rendered invisible, and the performance and valorization of the self-reliant individual was dominant in the conversations. Practices of sharing, borrowing, and lending money outside the nuclear family was for many interviewees unthinkable, as friendships were thought to be "money-free" relationships (Dennis), an example of the demarcation of the differentiated fields of market, family, and state. Maintaining margins for manoeuvre was particularly difficult for interviewees who were or feared again to be in a situation of "structural dependency" (Blokland and Noordhoff 2008, 112), that is, in need of support through public institutions. The centrality of kinning through family bonds reproduced inequalities. Those who had assets accessible through these bonds could use the delivery job to further consolidate their advantages, whereas those who could not use or had less of them used the delivery job to earn a minimum to secure their existence. The norm of maintaining self-sustainability as an individual pushed actors to secure their livelihoods through market work (see Joseph, Victor), and they began delivery work as a means of securing their existence.

Extending the scope of this paper, it is important to contextualize the different figurations of support relations in greater depth, including historically. That said, it was not possible here to relate the individual accounts to the institutional settings – a first step in further contextualization. For example, we can see a distinct history to the welfare arrangements in both national contexts, which is an explanatory factor for the different ways in which kinship is used as a logic for organizing redistribution. For the interviewees in Berlin, their relations with welfare state bureaucracies were crucial in their organization of support and fostered imaginaries of personhood as self-accruing individuals (see ibid.). In Côte d'Ivoire, postcolonial statehood first relegates

support to the realm of the community, and then maintains kinship as a legitimate structuring principle in work and politics.

The comparison in the article has unravelled the fixed separation of economy and society or of market and community, in contrast making this separation itself a focus of analysis. Especially for the study of precarious work and new forms of economic activity in the digital economy, the boundary of work and non-work and the framing of activities and relationships is a crucial site to study. Furthermore, the comparative perspective helps to decentre the bourgeois model of the self-accruing individual. In this way, we can see how this dominant perspective reproduces contexts of constraints for those who are differently positioned.

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