

# The Philosophy of Work of the Elderly in the Rural Areas of Negros Oriental

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## Rationale and Theoretical Perspectives

As is well-known, the notion of “work” plays a central role in human and social development. In fact, Karl Marx (1964) claims that work is the essence of humanity, that man ceases to be human the moment he ceases to work. According to Herbert Marcuse (2007), Marx views work as man’s affirmation of his being because through work, man can produce and reproduce an external, material objective world. Through work, man is able to transform and appropriate the material objects he encounters to satisfy his needs, a satisfaction necessary for the full realization of his potentialities and his becoming a truly free being. Put differently, work is man’s act of perfecting himself. In this sense, as already mentioned, work is man’s essence; it defines human being as conscious being distinct from the other animals, who, in producing and reproducing the objective world to his advantage, creates a world in his own image and expresses and perfects his own capacities. Work therefore cannot be conceived purely in terms of economics but as an “activity”, that is to say, an act of forming and shaping of human capacities. On the other hand, Sigmund Freud (1973) claims that work is the *élan vital* of civilization. For Freud, without work, society could not have attained the kind of unprecedented progress that we witnessed today. In fact, for Freud, work is one of the foundations (the other is Eros) of society. He says that men “come together”, that is, live in society, first because they are forced to do so by economic necessity and second that they want to do so to acquire their basic desires. Thus, for Freud, civilization is first of all progress in work—that is, work for the procurement and augmentation of the necessities of life.

In Marx, as in Freud, work therefore must be viewed as “cooperative” work. This means that people would somehow need to sacrifice individual interests for the common good. But with today’s economic globalization, driven by the neoliberal policies of the West, all aspects of the work process, for example, what is to be produced, how and how much, how prices and wages are to be determined, and the like, all of this solely determined by the neoliberals themselves. As a result, the realization of the goal of work is perverted in today’s highly globalized world. Thus, human and social development is greatly jeopardized as people will hardly find satisfaction in their work. In addition, the idea of social solidarity and progress in civilization which cooperative work harbors has also been greatly undermined.

Economic globalization indeed has produced numerous social problems across the world (Gray 1998), one of which is the perversion of the function of work resulting in what we can rightly call as the “structural transformation” of the communities in the periphery.

In the face of the tremendous power of modern industry, science and financial techniques, the appeal to indigenous work ethic might appear incredibly naïve. But this is only so if one forgets the immensely destructive nature of globalization. To speak very simply, and if one lets oneself be guided by the generally accepted notion that globalization has a destructive tendency: if the logic at work “at the center”, which has been imported to the new emerging powers, and which has subjugated territories “in the periphery” like the rural communities in Negros Oriental, Philippines, is left to rule unchecked, only a catastrophe can emerge from it, either social (new wars) or environmental (climate change), or a combination of the two. Against this catastrophic background, the alternative model of work ethic presented by the elderly people in the rural areas of Negros Oriental, and indeed the historical struggles that were waged in its name, suddenly appear anything but sentimental. Local work ethic therefore can be viewed as one of the rich sources of “social hope” in today’s globalized world.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This proposed research project aims to contribute in addressing social problems that globalization engenders through an engagement with the way in which elderly people in local communities view work as a means for human and social development. In particular, this proposed research project will examine the impact of globalization on the work attitude of the elderly people in Sitio Pinayun-an, a mountainous part of Barangay Bato, Mabinay, Negros Oriental and explore some of the ways in which they draw on their rich cultural heritage to confront and resist such global concerns facing them today. This is premised on the idea that the model of work presented by these local people can be an alternative to the destructive tendency of globalization as can be seen in the growing socio-economic inequalities in contemporary societies. I will argue that the local communities in the periphery continue to practice “cooperative work” and therefore the championing of this work ethic would contribute greatly to human and social development. In light of the above, this proposed research project will be guided by the following questions:

- 1) What is work? How does the notion of work contribute in human and social development?
- 2) What is globalization and how does it affect the role and function of work in contemporary societies?

- 3) How do the elderly people in the remote areas of Negros Oriental, Philippines view work?

### **Modes of Inquiry**

Throughout the project, I will employ textual analysis and ethnophilosophy as my research methodologies. To the first, I will rely mostly on a number of critical scholarships on globalization, the philosophy of work, and indigenous communities. These include the works of Anthony Giddens on the impact of globalization on local subsistence economy and culture; the SUNY Levin Institute's project on Globalization 101; Patricia D. McGuire-Kishebakabaykwe's important work on the resiliency of indigenous knowledge against globalization; Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*; and Karl Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. While I find these seminal works extremely important when considering my topic, I think they need to be developed further as they do not highlight the capacity of indigenous cultures in countervailing the destructive tendency of globalization.

To the second, I want to show how globalization has impacted on the work attitude of the elderly people in Sitio Pinayun-an, a mountainous part of Barangay Bato, Mabinay, Negros Oriental and explore some of the ways in which they draw on their rich cultural heritage to confront and resist such global concerns facing them today. To do this, I will conduct ethnophilosophy research on this community between March and November 2014. Ethnophilosophy as a method of research often involves a philosopher-anthropologist who studies indigenous philosophical systems. Although this is disputed by traditional philosophers, the idea is that a "specific culture can have a philosophy that is not applicable and accessible to all people and cultures in the world" (Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnophilosophy>).

The data of this study will be obtained through the following strategies: (participant) observation, focus group discussion, and interview with the respondents (ages 60 and above who are still working). I will also make use of the phenomenological approach in soliciting and understanding the experiences of my respondents. I will be using the Cebuano dialect during the focus group discussion and key informant interviews, but data will be transcribed in English. In these interviews, I will highlight the informants' view on work and the way in which it impacts on their lives and the community. The interview will be guided by the following major questions:<sup>1</sup>

- 1) Please talk briefly about your life and how do you earn a living?

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<sup>1</sup> These questions will be asked in Cebuano during the actual interview.

- 2) What do you think is the importance of work in your life? Do you think you find satisfaction in your present work?
- 3) How would you compare the nature of work before (say in the past 30 or 40 years) and now?
- 4) How do people in your community organize work? Can you say that people in your community work cooperatively for the common good?
- 5) Do you think that work has contributed significantly in the development of your community?

In the course of my fieldwork, I will spend ample time (2 weeks at least and spread between May and July 2014) living in this remote area so I may acquire firsthand knowledge of the practices relative to the notion work of the local folks. To do this, I will ask permission from the Barangay Captain of Bato as well as explain to her/him my research intention. I will also ask the help of the Barangay Captain in identifying prospective families that will host my stay in the community.

While in the community, I will try to do my share of the household chores and community works so I may become less of a stranger and researcher to the people in the community. As much as possible, I will roam around the community and talk to people even if they are not my direct informants. In other words, I will act as a resident during my field visits. In this way, I may establish rapport with them. This is very important for the informants to be more open and spontaneous during the interview and focus group discussion.

Field notes and recorded conversations will then be transcribed and analyzed according to my research themes and variables. I will employ text analysis and coding in this case, like highlighting or categorizing and listing “words” or “phrases” from the informants’ answers that have direct bearing on the themes and variables of my research.

### **Organization of the Study**

This proposed research project is divided into two parts. Part one will discuss the socio-economic and philosophical foundations of the notion of work. It will also include a discussion on the way in which globalization transforms the role and function of work in contemporary societies, with emphasis on those societies located in the periphery. Part two will be a detailed discussion on the philosophy of work of the elderly people in Sitio Pinayun-an, Barangay Bato, Negros Oriental. It is here where I will argue that “cooperative work” can be an alternative to globalization.

### **Expected Outcome and Significance of the Study**

The expected outcome of this proposed research project will be in the form of a conference paper and journal article. First, I will present the output of this project in anthropology or cultural studies conference and then publish it in *Silliman Journal* or other refereed journals. With this communication and outreach strategy, the effect of this proposed research project will be threefold, namely: first, a better, more nuanced, understanding of the notion of work and its impact on local cultures through the production of a critical assessment of the notion of work of the elderly people in Negros Oriental, Philippines; second, the enhancement and promotion of “local knowledge” and in responding to the issue of bridging the gap between theory and practice as well as the “problem of contextualization”; third, to contribute to the promotion of social justice and the articulation of social hope and emancipation in contemporary indigenous societies; and lastly, as a result of the third, the study will contribute in promoting and valuing faith inasmuch as the notions of social justice and social hope will make more sense if they are grounded on Christian faith.

## Research Budget

Item	Amount (PHP)
Honorarium for the Principal Investigator (PHP 2, 000 per month X 9 months)	18, 000.00
Honorarium for research assistant(s) (PHP 500 per month X 9 months)	4, 500.00
Travel expenses and per diem	14, 000.00
Supplies	8, 000.00
Miscellaneous	5, 500.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>50, 000.00</b>

## Timetable of the Study

Activities	Months									
	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	
Researcher conducts library and archival research and writes first part of the research project										
Researcher conducts field research and writes part two of the research project										
Researcher revises drafts										
Researcher presents research output in academic community										
Researcher prepares the final output for publication										

## References

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