

## The Pedicab Drivers' Daily Transgressions: Struggles for Provision and Care

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**Abstract:** Through a series of interviews and direct observation of behavioral patterns and geographical setting, this paper presents three selected pedicab drivers' personal struggles and other experiences in life. The gathered data/narratives are 1) examined using the sociological concepts of agency/motivation and structure and 2) further read in the light of *Gaudium et spes*' understanding of the double effect of human creations. Learning about the pedicab drivers' narratives gives a more informed view about human behavior in the face of structures that work more for some but less for others.

**Key Words:** motivation, struggle, agency, structure, *Gaudium et spes*

### Introduction

There are scores of drivers who steer their pedicabs along the Taft Avenue area, in front of the De La Salle University, Manila campus. At present, there is no

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updated number of pedicabs in Metro Manila roads and byways but in 1991, it was reported that a total number of 5,500 pedicabs are in operation.<sup>1</sup> This represents 5.2% of the total public transportation vehicles of that year. The figure must have increased to approximately 10,000 after almost 23 years. These pedicab drivers push their pedal-powered tricycles through Metro Manila roads and byways—serving thousands of commuters who have to hire them in the absence of jeepneys or the more expensive taxicabs or the Grab/Uber transport services.

The local government of the City of Manila has passed an ordinance declaring the pedicab transport as illegal. But, presumably, for lack of political will, police authorities have been inconsistent in enforcing this ordinance. The pedicab system and its drivers have persisted and are relatively unmolested by the police; apparently, their presence is tolerated for as long as they fulfill their “daily bribe” or when the police team is not pressured by supervisors to control them. Some members of the policing team wryly comment: “We just cannot totally remove them from the streets; they have no other source of income; they also have their families to feed.” The rule of law is thus somehow compromised by the rule of common sense or socio-cultural improvisations.

On June 9, 2014 the City of Manila has approved the City Ordinance No. 8291 or the Triwheel Code of 2013, that required tricycle and pedicab drivers to have their vehicles registered and to apply for a transport franchise to be allowed to operate. The ordinance also

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Gozun and Marie Danielle V. Guillen. “Towards a Sustainable Transportation Environment: The Case of ‘Pedicabs’ and Cycling in the Philippines,” p. 5, <http://www.codatu.org/wp-content/uploads/Towards-a-sustainable-transportation-environment.-The-case-of-Pedicabs-and-cycling-in-the-Philippines-Brian-GOZUN-Marie-Danielle-GUILLEN.pdf>, accessed 4 January 2018.

bans them on 46 of the city's major thoroughfares. Failure to comply means they are operating illegally. It has been reported that only 30% of the drivers/operators are able to comply with the ordinance.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to Ordinance No. 8291, the pedicab system and pedicab driving were illegal and unregulated on various counts: absence of official registration, driving without license, unregulated fares, absence of terminals, violation of traffic rules (counter-flowing, road-obstructing), some abusive treatment of passengers, etc. Hence, there are plenty of reasons to stop the pedicabs from continued operation; there are scores of reasons<sup>3</sup> for passengers to stop drivers from pestering them, and; there are compelling reasons why individuals should be discouraged from staying on as pedicab drivers.

This paper will try to discover some of the reasons why the pedicab drivers themselves insist on continuing their job even as they are considered as “illegal workers” or “scourge” of the streets.<sup>4</sup> We know that they are not

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<sup>2</sup> City Ordinance No. 8921 established the guidelines for the operation and registration of tricycles and pedicabs in Manila and included fees that drivers and operators must pay. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/613858/manila-trike-pedicab-drivers-protest-ordinance#ixzz53BhmuI3u>, accessed 4 January 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Based on the survey of feedbacks from the author's 208 students both in De La Salle University (DLSU) and De La Salle – College of St. Benilde (DLS-CSB) last July 2014, the following is the summary of their negative reactions: (1) they violate traffic rules since some of them used to counter-flow or beat the red light; (2) they add to the heavy traffic on the streets most especially when they are in groups and some of them are slow-moving; (3) some of them charge too much especially when one is not a regular passenger or unfamiliar with the fare rate; (4) some drivers are nasty and disrespectful most especially to female passengers; and (5) sometimes they are very annoying or irritating when they keep on asking and insisting the students to ride.

<sup>4</sup> See the featured comments (overwhelmingly negative) in <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/613858/manila-trike-pedicab-drivers-protest-ordinance>, accessed 4 January 2017

schooled and they lack the skills to land another job; business firms would immediately exclude them for want of qualifications; the general public looks at them as one among informal workers who must endure some sort of negative-but-tolerated reputation suffered by similar workers like “barkers”, *habal-habal* motorists, unregulated street vendors, and the like. Nevertheless, we lack the details about why they are still determined to “suffer” from their lowly status and from the hard but despised labor typically identified with pedicab driving.

What actually motivates them despite the bad press that they earn from the public? From where do they get their strength to continue working like rickshaw slaves? Why are they still in the streets?

This paper will look into some aspects in the lives of selected informants. The aim is to discover a less-known quality of pedicab drivers: their determination, specifically their motivation to work despite the vehicular traffic, the legal, social and cultural hazards involved. This knowledge about our society's representatives of the marginal and excluded groups may help us to (1) understand the “dangerous” Others—thus gaining a more-informed assessment about their excluded status; (2) bring into light the otherwise absent stories of marginal individuals; (3) communicate the nature of suffering and oppression in a society which is partial to skilled and educated individuals; and (4) relate this matter with *Gaudium et spes*' understanding of the double effect of human creations.

### **The Transgressors and their Struggles**

Our first informant is Mang Nonoy. The determined effort and the heavy push of Mang Nonoy's thin and seemingly weak legs on the pedicab's pedals translate into additional earnings to pay for the everyday expenses at home and provide for the schooling of his

only son. Next in the list is Mang Reynaldo. Every sweat flowing down his body would add to his capacity to buy a kilo of rice, instant noodles, and fish as well. That is enough food for a few days for his under-nourished four children. The third is the remarkable lady pedal-pusher, Ate Jo. Despite the pollutants that come out from the cars and trucks inhaled by the physically exhausted Ate Jo, she persists in the job in order to bring food to the table and earn smiles from the faces of her two children who know that their mother, who also takes the role of a father, has never failed to bring nourishment to their plates.



Fig. 1. Pedicab Driver, Mang Nonoy

*Hangga't may lakas pa ako para mamasada, igagapang kita para makapagtapos ka ng pag-aaral.* (Until my last ounce of strength, I will work hard for you to finish your studies.) This was the promise of the teary-eyed 59-year old Ricardo “Nonoy” Pilapil to his son whom he constantly reminds to be serious with his

schooling. Being a pedicab driver for almost six years, Mang Nonoy's only inspiration left is his 16-year old son who is in his 7<sup>th</sup> grade. He finds no luck in his marital relationships since he got separated twice. He had two children with his first wife but they left him; while his second wife, who became addicted to drugs, went on her own way. Thus, he decided to raise single-handedly their only child.

As early as 4 o'clock in the morning, Mang Nonoy gets up to start his day's work. He hopes no miracle of winning the lottery or finding a bag of dollar bills but simply to earn daily at least 300 pesos (6 US dollars) to shoulder the home budget and to meet his son's needs. At around 6 o'clock in the evening, he has to go home and find rest with his son, the one who motivates him to be courageous in life.



Fig. 2. Pedicab Driver, Mang Leon

At the age of 52, Leoncito Maylas, a pedicab driver

for almost 12 years and counting, also suffered Mang Nonoy's fate. His first wife left him and they had two children who were taken by their mother to the province of Negros Occidental. He got married to his second wife who now lives with him and their four children. With the higher cost of living, he had to exert greater effort to support the family since his wife does not have a stable job and had to take care of the children. During the interview, his eyes projected the sense of worry and pressure for being the sole breadwinner of the family. However, the same responsibility also brings smiles to Mang Reynaldo's face. *Mahirap talaga ang buhay, kailangan mo makipagsapalaran. Pero masaya pa rin dahil makita ko lang ang mga anak ko na naglalaro at nagtatawanan, nawawala lahat ng pagod ko.* (Life is really hard because you have to face many trials. But I'm still happy because just seeing my children laughing and playing with one another, my fatigue is gone.)



Fig. 3. Pedicab Driver, Ate Jo

Lastly, Jo Angeles, a lady pedicab driver. Walking along Leon Guinto Street, this dark-skinned jolly young lady caught my attention. It was quite daunting to talk to her since other pedicab drivers are also staring as one got closer to their muse. But nonetheless, the interview-plan was carried out and Ate Jo was generous with her time. In the course of the conversation, Ate Jo never hesitated to open up her private life. She is only 25 years old and with two kids, four and two years old. She volunteered about why she is the one driving the pedicab and not her husband. *Sanay na ako sa mahirap na buhay. Hindi ko na inaasahan ang asawa ko dahil pinakulong ko sya. Binubugbog nya kasi ako pag lasing sya, tapos adik pa. Kaya kahit babae ako, d na mahalaga yun, kaya ko ito para sa mga anak ko. Kailangan ko sila buhayin.* (I'm used to a hard life. I do not depend anymore on my husband for he is in jail. He repeatedly battered me when he's drunk and he's also a drug addict. Being a lady driver does not bother me, I have to do this for my children. I have to support and care for them.)

Mang Nonoy, Mang Reynaldo, and Ate Jo—these hardworking laborers have something in common. Aside from being in the same kind of work, these street characters fulfill their duties as responsible breadwinners and carers for their respective families. Their struggles and sentiments highlight these themes: motivation and commitment.

### **Motivation and Commitment**

Motivation is the reason for one's desire to do things, while commitment is the dedication to continue to pursue a cause or activity. Together these result into resoluteness, determination, and constancy in one's endeavor.



Motivation can produce commitment. It is the reason why a person commits into doing something. However, simply having the desire to accomplish something is not sufficient. In motivation, achieving one's goal requires the ability to persist through obstacles and endurance to continue despite difficulties. We may agree that "motives related to the need to express one's agency or competency are typically assumed to be common to all individuals".<sup>5</sup> This could also mean that we can express this agency through what we do for our loved ones, for their own benefit.

The children of our pedicab drivers have become our drivers' source of motivation. To bear difficult obligations everyday with the uncertainty of sufficient earning is never easy. The pedicab drivers have to endure the scorching heat of the sun and face downpours as they pedal along Taft Avenue and its side streets. Some students, who are their major clientele, see these pedicab drivers as truly hardworking breadwinners. They are amazed at the drivers' ability to penetrate through the flow of traffic and how they can find alternative ways to reach their destination. They are witnesses to the drivers' patience in waiting for passengers, even to stay and hold their queues for hours. They salute these drivers for appearing during heavy rains and not minding the cold or the possibility of getting sick.

There are other risks that the drivers constantly face. A risk is described as the presence of uncertainty about whether potentially significant and/or disappointing outcomes of decisions will be realized.<sup>6</sup> The situation

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<sup>5</sup> Hazel R. Markus and Shinobu Kitayama. "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation." *Psychological Review* 98/2 (1991): 240

<sup>6</sup> Todd Dewett, "Linking Intrinsic Motivation, Risk Taking, and Employee Creativity in an R&D Environment," *R&D Management*

of these drivers is in a way uncertain for there is the possibility of getting caught by the authorities; the risk of accidents since most pedicab drivers frequently violate traffic rules; the possibility of getting sick because of physical exhaustion and fatigue, most especially during heavy rains when it is considered to be an opportune time to earn a bit more; and lastly, the very risk of earning less than expected which involves belt-tightening for the whole family. Even with all these risks, these drivers are still deeply motivated. For them, what matters most is the good of their children. In fact, a few of the drivers get to the point of involving themselves in transactions related to prohibited drugs. This could be an easy source of money most especially when they are in urgent need for funds. Someone narrated about a driver who was once caught by a police agent for dealing drugs with a student. The student was able to bribe himself out. Both the student and the driver did not end up in prison.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, if we see them violating the law, there are also times that they can be as real heroes for others. Another incident narrated by Mang Nonoy was about a driver who was stabbed to death for helping a student who was victimized by snatchers/robbers.<sup>8</sup> Some people may have

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37/3 (2007): 199 [197-208]

<sup>7</sup> The driver who had given his feedback, as well as the driver who had made the drug transaction, did not want their names mentioned. According to the driver, the buy-bust operation happened because one of the barangay councilors carried out a clean-up drive against drugs.

<sup>8</sup> This incident was validated by the news report of Bernard Testa of *Interaksyon.com* dated June 29, 2013. Jonas Mateo is the name of the pedicab driver who died after he was stabbed chasing robbers at the De La Salle University. Aside from being a driver, he was also a member of the *barangay tanod* brigade—local watchmen who serve for crime prevention. According to the report of Testa, on a recent rainy evening, Mateo was waiting in queue to service DLSU passengers when he heard someone scream, "Snatcher! Snatcher!"

negatively-biased views about their presence; on the other hand, there are some who consider the drivers as contributors to the community.

The pedicab drivers may have been labeled as lawbreakers for violating some traffic rules and regulations, but they cannot be treated as criminals. Despite their lack of credentials, they are productive in their labor; and they respect the law *most of the time* (they *also* park on designated areas, follow the traffic signals, respect the rule of right of way, pay their bills, etc.). These are facts that cannot be ignored. True, pedicab drivers have, at times, compromised the law but, in many instances, their so-called transgressions are really avoidance of restrictive institutions (traffic ordinances). They proceed through restrictive spaces in pursuit of resources; and, in the process, they produce misdeeds. Their intention is to bring food to the table despite running through tight spaces. This is the character of their transgressions on the road: these are maneuvers through spaces that have not been built in their favor; to assure themselves of some limited resources, pedicab drivers produce unintended disruptions to a certain street flow that has not been established to include them.

In upholding their rational commitment to their families who, at the same time, are non-beneficiaries of social welfare, pedicab drivers are sometimes behaving against social and legal institutions or exposing other

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He swung into action and used his pedicab to block the motorbike of two men riding in tandem, fleeing the scene. The duo fell, and one quickly stood up and ran. Mateo caught up with the other, tackled and managed to subdue him, even as security officers from the school were racing toward them, to help apprehend the suspect. Then tragedy struck. The other suspect went behind Mateo, and stuck a knife into the pedicab driver and that caused his death. See, <http://www.interaksyon.com/article/65204/humble-hero--pedicab-driver-dies-chasing-robbers>.

vehicles to forms of recklessness that could produce bruises and dents—but they really do not promote robbery or corruption of morals. The kinds of transgressions committed by the pedicab drivers are guided by reasons to provide and care for families and, thus, non-malicious—it is not done to harm people.

Pedicab drivers are *sometimes* pushed to violate traffic rules and regulations (countering traffic flow, crossing through pedestrian lanes, passing through sidewalks) if they hope to earn for their daily keep. Our city roads were meant to be filled by the West's automobiles and regulated by Western type of laws. Since such roads were not built with the intention to include the West's "unthinkable others", we are condemned to live with the annoying behavior of pedicab drivers. On the other hand, one could also think the other way—why should pedicabs strictly follow rules if this would result into deprivation of food for the table? This does not mean that we support lawlessness; this is to offer a different way of viewing pedicabs that habitually violate traffic rules meant for roads *not intended* for pedicabs. This would mean that Western-type roads that were built without the pedicabs in mind are continuously functioning just as if the pedicabs do not belong. Individuals who try and insist that they also belong in restricted *pre-established* geographies are thus either driven away or resentfully tolerated. Pedicab drivers suffer but are still motivated to maneuver through the structures that are disabling for their intentions to earn money and survive. We may be able to further enrich our understanding about their motivation-against-all-odds if we view it through the sociological concepts of agency and structure.

### **Agency and Structure: Moving Through the Interstices of Space**

In sociology, the primacy of structure or agency in shaping the behavior of humans is one of the big debates. This issue is expressed by the question, “do social structures determine an individual's behavior or is it human agency?” A structure is said to be the “recurrent patterned arrangements that influence or limit the choices and opportunities available while an agency is the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices.”<sup>9</sup> This debate involves the contentions: 1) an individual person acts as a free agent, being independent from the social structures or 2) the social structures are the ones shaping human agency, thus, dependent on it. Agency as topping the social structures is explained below:

Agency approaches the individual as atomized, positing a voluntarist approach to human action. They argue that the context in which an individual lives is a pluralism; social power is spread between groups, and that no single group dominates. The way to analyze, therefore, is by looking at what the individual tells us - there is an onus on reflexivity; on the individual being able to account for and be aware of the reasons and implications of their actions. This approach also pays attention to time. History is taken to be the outcome of freely chosen choices and self-determined deeds: the “great man” view of history which sees Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Margaret Thatcher and Bush as figures that, through freewill and behavior, changed the course of history.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 448.

<sup>10</sup> Ben Aston, “What is structure and agency? How does this

On the other hand, Aston also points out that the primacy of structure over agency holds that “individuals are situated actors in place and embodiment. We are embodied physically, defining out health, opportunities, life possibilities, etc., and emplaced in terms of lifestyle, conditions, etc.”<sup>11</sup> Our actions therefore respond to the structures of one kind or another, in which we are situated. In short, social structures such as class, gender or race (or the geographies and the legal system operating in Taft Avenue) are seen as systems which are greatly spreading through time and space that individuals have no choice but to operate within or through or even against them.<sup>12</sup>

To reconcile the claim of both parties, British sociologist Anthony Giddens bridges the gap between agency and structures through his theory of *structuration*. He proposes that “structure and agency are a mutually constitutive duality. Thus social phenomena are not the product of either structure or agency, but of both.”<sup>13</sup> Giddens here gives emphasis on the proposition that social structure is dependent on agency and this agency is at the same time dependent on structure. Human agents draw on social structures in their actions, and at the same time these actions serve to produce and reproduce social structure. This implies that they are reciprocal and inseparable. Agents are placed in the realm of social relationships (whether positive or negative) that define them and in the same way define the opportunities they face in their everyday

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framework help us in political Analysis?,” *Academia.edu*. (n.d.): 3 [1-10], accessed 28 August 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977).

<sup>13</sup> Matthew R. Jones and Helena Karsten, “Giddens’s Structuration Theory and Information Systems Research,” *Mis Quarterly* 32/1 (2008): 129 [127-157].

life. The agents' repetition of thinking, acting, and interacting in various ways always constitute these social structures which are established. These can be traditions, institutions, moral codes, and other established ways of doing things. These can be changeable when agents begin to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them in a different manner. According to Blackledge, quoting the words of Karl Marx, "men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>14</sup> Putting it in a more vivid way, we are the creator of our own life and we write our personal story using the raw materials or resources available and, actually, within our reach. We make our own choices from the available resources. In this sense, freedom is always constrained. Absolute freedom is an invention of those who forget about the constraints of body, social body, language, clothes, food, tools, gravity, race, gender, geographies, etc.; the pedicab drivers, by the way, have a larger share of this limitation of freedom by virtue of lack or absence of availability and enjoyment of capital and other resources. Our decisions and choices are at the same time the products and influences of the structures which were present before we were born and which will persist after our death.

Putting it in the context of the pedicab drivers, one could consider them as the ones manifesting those efforts of agents going against structures. Drivers strive to emphasize their capacity to negotiate through the streets even as they violate traffic rules or the games of fairness. In fact, whatever they do, some people look at them as hindrance to a peaceful and orderly state of

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<sup>14</sup> Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 2.

affairs. What may be happening is that with their transgressive acts, they compensate for what social structures cannot give to them.

Through their sheer determination, despite being counted as illegal, pedicab drivers show why non-inclusive social structures could be outdone, to some extent, by motivated agency. In the situation of our pedicab drivers, they are motivated by their children who are on the brink of hunger, illiteracy, or homelessness, which are also conditions-products of a social system that fails to provide opportunities for the penniless and property-less. In other words, the drivers' motivation rises from their urge to deal with the pitiful and unfortunate condition of their loved ones. That is why they venture into the streets despite all the hazards of legal and social judgment. And after fulfilling this task, the pedicab drivers will now feel happy, fulfilled, and responsible because they are able to provide for their children's needs. Even for a short moment, they will savor these positive kinds of emotion. These will serve as fuel for greater motivation and commitment to labor and care within restrictions.

Thus, one may also consider that the counter-cultural behavior of these drivers is also a consequence of the imposition of structures that turn against their will to survive. They are restricted by what the structures dictate upon them. They become violators of the law because, first and foremost, society's regulations along Taft Avenue area are precisely those rules which do not allow them to realize and exploit the potential of earning income from pedicab driving; violating some rules is the opposite of their desire to become earners (thus, they continue to block lanes, counter the flow of traffic, and drive without legitimacy). Pedicab fares are only self-regulated (about PhP 40.00 per trip); however, they are tempted to abuse passengers by imposing



higher fares on rainy days because, as it often happens, this is one way of earning enough for their family's needs. In some exceptional cases, illegal activity like drug peddling has become an additional source of funds for a few drivers.

On the other hand, police authorities have their own version of countering or violating legal structures. Authorities who would catch a drug peddler may opt to settle the case for a demand of regular grease money. As a matter of fact, abusive police authorities collect PhP10.00 a day per pedicab driver as a sort of regular daily bribe (*lagay*; literally, something one puts in the pocket of the police).

Thus, one may look at the pedicab drivers not as simply the villains of the streets. They are both personally- and socially-driven and are pushed to a desperate corner where there are relatively few, if there are any, options for escape. In the same way, we may view them not as outcasts because they too are perceived to be helpful at times.<sup>15</sup> Meaning, there is that

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<sup>15</sup> Taken from the same survey of feedbacks from DLSU and DLS-CSB students, these are their positive reactions: (1) they are very hardworking and persevering breadwinners of their family for they will do everything just to earn and provide for their needs; (2) the virtue of patience is very evident also since they can wait up to 2 hours in their respective terminals; (3) they are people with great sacrifice and dedication because they can bring their passengers to their destinations even in the scorching heat of the sun or during heavy rains, even in deep floods; (4) they are indeed helpful to the commuters, most especially to those old passengers and those who are tired of walking; (5) they are very creative also in searching for and passing through short-cut roads in comparison to jeepneys which cannot do the same; (6) they do not contribute much to the traffic since they are only few and smaller in size; (7) they contribute to the rich culture and innovative quality of Filipinos; (8) the pedicabs are environment friendly vehicles since they do not produce dark smoke/harmful gases; (9) lastly, some of the drivers are friendly and approachable for they do not snob any passenger who wants to ride but always standing by to render service.

duality that we can recognize in the behavior of these pedicab drivers. They want to assert themselves and at the same time, they are being influenced by pre-established structures as well as the lack of structures that promote well-being. By asserting their counter-cultural ways, they may also be thinking of themselves as persons with determination, responsible breadwinners of the family, or simply as human beings who find the meaning of existence in work and providing care. Being pressured by disabling structures could explain their need for enabling structures that welcome their desire to belong. There is always that need for humans for social acceptance and integration. City Ordinance 8921 may be the powerful's move to force them toward integration, but this law proved to be a burden and considered as counter-productive. Creating a more benevolent law may require the drivers' input and not solely determined by supervisory power.

The fact of "belongingness...is that human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships."<sup>16</sup> The pedicab drivers may seem to be aggressive and reckless at times, but as one looks into their eyes as they air out their sentiments, they value their relationship so much; most especially with their families and the people around them. However, the roads and the laws—human creations—also restrict their desires and practices to bring support to their loved ones. To further develop this line of argument, let us now turn to *Gaudium et spes* and its teachings about human beings and their creations.

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<sup>16</sup> Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation," *Psychological Bulletin* 117/3 (1995): 497.

***Gaudium et spes* and Human Creations<sup>17</sup>**

In the section dealing with the “situation of human beings in the modern world,” *Gaudium et spes* presents a fundamental problem that has tormented humanity since time immemorial: the contradictions resulting from creative activities or production. Reading through this section, we get the impression that *Gaudium et spes* is whipping humanity with reminders about flaws that result from human creativity: “while man [sic] extends his power in every direction, he does not always succeed in subjecting it to his own welfare (GS 4).” *Gaudium et spes* methodically speaks about this human limitation: about every person’s ability to plumb into one’s depths as well as one’s inability to see the profundity of longings and afflictions; about humans who create things (like roads and laws) and produce either growth or decadence which, in turn, impact on everyone. Skimming through human history, we observe that modern or advance-modern time has no monopoly over this problem; premodern societies have had their share of contradictions. The overextraction of water (e.g., for aqueducts) in antiquity resulted in the desertification of vast lands; the cutting of trees for construction caused massive soil erosion; the financing of the construction of St. Peter’s Basilica triggered division in the Catholic Church—such creative projects were *intended* to benefit humans.

From *Gaudium et spes*, one could actually make this conclusion: that humans invent things but along the way or eventually they also produce contradictions—that while humans produce spaces like cities and roads,

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<sup>17</sup> Portions of this section appear in Ferdinand D. Dagmang, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) in Ten Parishes in the Philippines* (Manila: under the auspices of missio-Munich, 2016), pp. xvii ff.

aiming to take control of themselves and their surroundings, they are unable to predict and take hold of various resources/forces which eventually gain power independent from their intentions. When Monsanto promised progress and development through their GMOs and herbicides, it also unwittingly brought misery to Punjab farmers.<sup>18</sup> In creative achievements, various positive results and negative consequences come about—producing joys and hopes as well as griefs and anxieties.<sup>19</sup>

Our creations, like city roads, have intended functions with immediate and direct effects on us—effects which are usually visible and beneficial. Through time, some unintended (or initially invisible) effects become more visible. Both the immediate and more remote effects are then intertwined in the meaning and function of creations. Eventually, creations are not only viewed through their original intended function (intention as “spirit”), but also through their unintended effects (with its unintended “spirit”). Creativity and its double-edged spirit are thus implicated in the whole ambivalent stories of production and utilization.

TV sets, for example, bring about excitement and joy because of their entertainment value. Other creative outputs, like movies, variety shows, soap operas, and cartoons, also depend on the TV set. Because of these consummables, people find the TV as a source of relaxation and fun.

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<sup>18</sup> See G. Gruère and D. Sengupta, “Bt cotton and farmer suicides in India: An evidence-based assessment,” *The Journal of Development Studies*, 47/2 (2011): 316–337; see also the works of Ram Sarup Ankhi, a poet and novelist of Punjab who wrote about farmer suicide, indebtedness, and drug addiction.

<sup>19</sup> See Ferdinand D. Dagmang, “Structures and Structural Sin,” *Hapag* 2/1 (2005): 77–112.

Through time, some other signs appear and could show the more deep-seated power of the TV not evident at the outset, like the way it would regularly disrupt or interrupt or intrude into meals which used to be a family's get-together, a **key** life-scenario for shared conversation and enjoyment of food. Nowadays, family members are drawn to the TV set while unconsciously ingesting food and not minding meal fellowship. We could even observe families unable to start their meals without *Eat Bulaga* or *Showtime*.<sup>20</sup> For them, the TV has become a mealtime apparatus. Visual and auditory fun may have compensated for what is lacking in their meals or conversation. TV viewing, in this sense, is a sign of surrender to routine or commodified fun; it could also be a sign of re-definition of having meals. This means that the traditional script for meals becomes forgotten or subordinated in favor of a newer script that will inscribe itself in the minds and bodies of those sharing TV-meals.

It is only when after some more signs are felt by people that we realize the long-term effects of things-practices. We need the help of time to teach us about hidden power and its consequences, like the loss of many opportunities for fellowship and appreciation of meals prepared by Mom. (The saying, "*Nasa huli ang pagsisisi*," reminds us about how lessons are painfully learned through time.) The lack of appreciation for a meal prepared by love could actually earn accumulations of subconscious displeasure from Mom. We need experience, a longer experience, to be able to know about the danger of TV-meals to memory and behavior. The longer the experience may seem better for our memory and bodies to keep those lessons.

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<sup>20</sup> Popular TV shows: GMA Networks' *Eat Bulaga* and ABS-CBN's *Showtime*.

Some people, however, need reminders from others to learn and derive wisdom from experience. Other people's better insights about things are indispensable reminders about the hard lessons or facts of life. Some of these people have profound understanding of things, of reality, because of their long exposure and mindfulness to experience. Many of past religious and moral leaders, like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, showed courage, wisdom, and prophetic discernment necessary to bring their people to sustained moral struggle and liberation from things which ordinary people consider as necessary and indispensable. No less than Jesus' death by crucifixion has made his disciples realize the exceptionally powerful life-giving message of the Good News of the reign of God that goes beyond the ordinary human desire for and pursuits of money, prestige, exclusive solidarities, and power.

Producing TV sets, constructing buildings and building roads—these are considered necessary, but we do not normally acknowledge that these too are products of the human heart, something which *Gaudium et spes* belabors in its statement about humanity and the modern world being soaked in contradictions.

We are not saying that *Gaudium et spes* has emphasized the fact of concealment of the negative by what we see as positive—this is something which *Gaudium et spes* does not develop. In entering into the assumptions of *Gaudium et spes* about the human heart's contradictions, we are expanding here the analysis of what these contradictions could also do to the pedicab drivers' ways of pursuing their longings for bounty or survival within built spaces.

*Gaudium et spes* looks at modernity's situation in terms of imbalanced progress. The details that *Gaudium et spes* outlines are rather overwhelming: that in having produced economic abundance, moderns are

also experiencing the pain and cruelty of hunger and poverty; in having assumed autonomy and freedom, social and psychological slavery are freaking people out; in having achieved cooperation and solidarity, irreconcilable conflicts are dividing nations, leading them to violence or war; and in searching for a better world, humans are grappling with a life without spiritual advancement, dealing with a world produced by a heart that is not only creative but also restless and full of contradictions.

*Gaudium et spes* underscores humanity's achievements as reflections of the human heart—root of finitude and fallibility, the source of the lack of perfection and balance. It depicts a world where humanity is “at once the cause and the victim”—cause of creative productions, but victim of the negative outcomes and perverse consequences of the process, fruit, and enjoyment of fruit of production. For *Gaudium et spes*, it is through our creations, through work (not through coitus and reproduction), that the fruits of sin are multiplied. Pope Francis’ recent encyclical is also a lamentation over what the human heart could produce: “The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life” (*Laudato Si’* 2).

Nevertheless, *Gaudium et spes* is optimistic in view of humanity’s widespread longing: “persons and societies thirst for a full and free life worthy of man; one in which they can subject to their own welfare all that the modern world can offer them so abundantly. In addition, nations try harder every day to bring about a kind of universal community.” (GS 9) This optimism may have to rely on the positive direction of a heart cognizant of its limitations as well as its ability to rise above its downspiralling negative tendencies. In its

recognition of something higher than itself, the human heart also hopes to come up with achievements freed from its own imbalances and contradictions.

But, again this hope cannot be realized by the ordinary, all too human, heart alone. We need one which is no longer pulled down by contradictions. *Gaudium et spes* offers the way of Jesus and the Reign of God to transcend the ordinary human heart's ambivalence and captivity in the polarities and memory-depleting forces of the modern world.

Who would forget that scenario when Jesus broke the law as he healed people during the Sabbath? For Jesus it was a more appropriate time to bring his way of healing and message of hope to humanity than strict observance of the law, a human creation. On another occasion, the disciples walked through a field on the Sabbath day, picked handfuls of grain so they would have something to eat for they were very hungry. But the Pharisees insisted this was not lawful for they again broke the Sabbath. It was on this moment that Jesus gives the true purpose of the Sabbath: "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27 NIV). Jesus' point was that the Sabbath, the Law, was made to serve people. It serves, and not master, people. The Sabbath was a blessing, not a burden.

There are instances when one has to go against some created norms in favor of more noble reasons or high-level principles, like compassion. It is probably a more grievous sin for a father to let his children die of hunger than to cause a traffic disruption on the streets or sometimes overcharge passengers during heavy rains. Jesus calls the pedicab drivers to something more life-giving. The good news is that in the end, Jesus invites all to salvation, including those who would push pedicab drivers to desperately transgress the law.



### Conclusion

The pedicab drivers represent the flock of manual laborers who are trying to find their place in the society. We saw them not simply as law violators on the streets but also as responsible breadwinners who try to socially belong, through productive work. Their loved ones' well-being push and inspire them in order to surpass whatever difficulties they encounter in their everyday routines. The object of their sacrifice is also the source of their motivation. This motivation originates from what is considered as a natural drive which they must satisfy in order to avoid hunger and insecurity. At the same time, they are also motivated because of the incentive or reward not only from monetary gain but also from the recognition of their own loved ones. The force of this motivation is a continuous phenomenon that originates from their homes and proceeds to the streets. There may be deficiency in total social integration but their family approval serves to bring in an essential factor, one that creates a balance between the serious social-structural lack and drivers' transgression.

The pedicab drivers may have been treated unfairly because others see them as the "villains" of the roads. It is true that they transgress structures, but the larger society itself tolerates them for either humanitarian reasons or bystanders' inaction. Their motivations, driving their anti-structural ways, may be seen as "mitigating" element for what we see as "sin". In short, they may not be seen as simply lawbreakers but significant members of the society who strive for a meaningful existence. Aside from the help and service that they can offer to commuters, we should also look into their commitment to provide for the needs of their loved ones.

The drivers' situation can be likened to the exclusion suffered by some individuals during Jesus' time. Social

and religious standards were imposed by the rulers and as a consequence, oppressive restrictions were suffered by the many who “did not belong”: the illiterate, the lepers, the tax collectors, children and women, the sinners, herdsmen, and non-Jews (all covered by the clause: the Poor and the Oppressed).<sup>21</sup> They were negatively judged by those in power and presumably by the mainstream public, but Jesus announced to them the offer of greatest well-being. We are being reminded here about the liberating message and ministry of Jesus to those who are deemed excluded because of rules or prescriptions.

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<sup>21</sup> See Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992).