



Is Precariousness in the Eye of the Beholder?

Using self-perceived employability to understand the
perspectives of Filipino online freelancers

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Abstract

This thesis studies the labour market opportunities of online freelancers from the Philippines. Precisely, it explores the role of employability in defining the working conditions in process outsourcing from the perspective of independent contractors.

Local policy makers endorse freelancing as a job engine, especially for the poor rural areas. At the same time, a debate about work without labour securities spills over from OECD countries to the global South. Previous research has shown that such precarious working conditions are common among contract-workers. Additionally, this thesis found that career progress is fragile.

To understand freelancers' motivations for their job choice, perceived employability first was assessed by means of a survey for both the organizational and the freelance labour market. Educational status and distance from urban areas were used as independent

variables. The results highlighted that a remote location weakly predicts perceived freelance employability, while educational status was not significantly related to it. However, graduates from the city see themselves in the position to choose between organizational and freelance employment.

In subsequently conducted semi-structured interviews, individuals from this group explained their preference for independent contracting with a higher degree of autonomy and higher wages relative to available 'stable jobs'. This is an important finding since it urges caution when applying the Eurocentric notion of precariousness to the global South, even if individuals act on globalized labour markets.

It further suggests self-perceived employability as a tool to test subjective job security in environments with fluid class structures and thereby achieve a more differentiated view of the big group of independent contractors, freelancers or temporary workers.

Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	3
Chapter Two: Theoretical Underpinning	8
2.1 Conceptionalizing Employability.....	8
2.2 The New Spirit of Capitalism. Tracing Flexibility	13
2.3 The Precariat: Labour Market Security Diet	15
2.4 The Precariat and Why Perceived Employability is Important.....	18
Chapter Three: The Case – Work in the Philippines	19
3.1 Philippine Labour Market Trends	19
3.1.1 Where to Work?.....	21
3.1.2 Freelancing as an Industry and a Research Topic	23
3.2 Philippine Educational Policy: A short historical account.....	25
3.3 Work in the Provinces	27
Chapter Four: Research design	28
4.1 Quantitative methods.....	31
4.2 Qualitative Methods	35
4.2.1 Using Qualitative Data to Test Validity	36
4.3 Methodological Considerations.....	37
Chapter Five: Quantitative Analysis	38
5.1 Insights from the Quantitative Analysis.....	43
Chapter Six: Qualitative analysis.....	44
6.1 Validity Test.....	44
6.1.1 Freelance Versus Organizational Labour Market?	45
6.2 The Role of Education.....	51
6.3 The State and Online Freelancing: Ignorant or Ignored?	55
6.4 Graduates from the City: Young and Wild and Free	56
6.5 Opportunities for the Rural Population?	59
6.5 A Career in Freelancing: Experience and Reviews as Success Factors	61
Chapter Seven: Discussion	62
7.1 Evaluation of Methodological Choices	62

7.2 What Cushions Insecurity	63
7.3 Career Progress: Dependencies and Sustainability	65
7.3.1 Hyperspecialization and Career Perspectives	66
7.4 A New Form of Insecurity	68
Chapter Eight: Conclusion.....	70
Bibliography	75

Chapter One: Introduction

Is it morally right to outsource work to low-income countries? Does outsourcing equal exploitation? How does transaction processing differ from manual labour in this context? These issues continue to trouble the study of globalization. Even though final answers do not behove scholars to give, it is imperative for research to understand the working conditions in the outsourcing sector of emerging economies when debating globalizing labour markets. Lately, internet-facilitated processing work has received increased attention in connection with organizational and independent contract outsourcing (f. ex. Thite and Russell, 2011, Subbarayalu, 2013; Sudhashree et al, 2005; Hechanova et al, 2006). However, much of the literature insists on a narrow view that scrutinizes working conditions based on low income (compared to OECD countries), repetitive tasks and unfavourable hours, mirroring the critique on manufactural outsourcing (e.g. Scholz, 2013: ‘digital sweatshops’). Thereby, the risks, such as being underemployed with respect to one’s education (Dwivedi et al, 2007) or forced to ‘hyperspecialize’ – to perfect a very particular task and repeat it endlessly (Malone, 2013) –, have been framed as to highlight an ‘objective’ undesirability of these jobs.

Meanwhile, a discourse on *precarious work*, rooted in the fragmentation of class structures in OECD countries, foregrounds the notion of labour insecurity. Rather than limiting its view to working conditions at this very moment, it integrates the lack of alternatives and prospects, an implicit ‘short-termness’, and makes it a co-defining feature of precarious jobs. (Standing, 2012). While recent literature has begun to explore these dimensions for organizational work in business process outsourcing (BPO), most notably call centres (see Beerepot et al, 2013, D’Cruz and Noronha, 2006), the concept has not yet been applied to freelancers in outsourcing target countries. Naturally, the study of employment would consider this combination little worthy of attention, as it would regard the quasi-absence of bureaucratic employment as evidence enough of its precariousness. Thereagainst, managerial literature’s interest is dampened by the routine tasks that many online freelancers handle, discerning them from high-skilled contractors, ‘proficians’ or free agents, whose case research has taken before (see Kunda et al, 2002; Süß and Becker, 2013).

Both streams of literature have, however, made use the concept of *employability* as a way to determine individuals' opportunities on the labour market. It is, in the broadest sense, defined as the ability to maintain or get a satisfactory job (for the precise definition used in this thesis, see 2.1, p.11). To promote employability, national and international policy makers have in the past decades worked towards altering the Philippine educational system (e.g. IMF and World Bank), while also proclaiming freelancing as a way for people from rural areas to join the labour force (World Bank, 2016; DOST, 2015). However, little is known about the relationship between formal education and location to labour market success of freelancers in emerging economies. Adding to this, uncertainty persists as to freelancers' career ladder and ability to move to organizational jobs. This leaves a gap in research alongside the manifestation of the above outlined dimensions upon which Standing (2012) defines precariousness.

By addressing it, this thesis aims to enlarge upon literature on precarious work on globalizing labour markets, placing it in the new frame of freelancers in the Philippines. In doing so, it integrates the concepts roughed out afore, thus contributing to the understanding of working conditions in global outsourcing through extending it by career-oriented dimensions. It strives to uncover how education and location influence, restrict and capacitate freelancers in seizing opportunities, and how individual perceptions motivate career decisions.

The worldwide number of online freelancers who make a living as independent contractors doing short-term assignments, has increased exponentially with network coverage (World Bank, 2016). In the Philippines, the Department of Science and Technology estimates their figure to half a million workers in rural areas alone and portrays freelancing as a driving force for future job creation (DOST, 2015). Meanwhile, several failed legislative proposals (e.g. Bill 4444, cf. p.20) articulate the challenge: In the absence of regulation, the labour of the individual is subject to market forces at any point in time, and therewith completely commodified. Unlike in organizational employment, which grants security of tenure and access to social benefits, a freelancer's work relationships lack any form of labour security (Ulandssekretariatet, 2014).

In this thesis, an assessment of perceived employability will form the basis for determining who sees her- or himself in the position to choose between freelancing and organizational work. Standing's theory, by highlighting the undesirability of labour insecurity, implicitly suggests that freelancing is a stopgap for those who cannot find a job on the stable job market. The first step in

testing this is to understand who feels in the position to make a decision, that is, for whom does organizational employment present a realistic option. In developing countries with a strong business process outsourcing industry, such as the Philippines, India or Brazil, knowledge workers can be faced with a decision between the two, in case they are employable on both. A second step needs to investigate the motivations of these workers. If they chose freelancing over a non-precarious office job, their decision might be based upon previously unconsidered factors which would give occasion to question the notion of precariousness in the context of the case. This leads to the following research question:

What is the role of employability in understanding precariousness in the case of Filipino web-based freelance workers?

Mindful of the preceding assessment, this thesis sets out to accomplish a two-fold purpose: First, a practical element, predicting and testing employability in a setting unlike those previously researched. Second, an ideological element, understanding individuals' motivations for freelancing as well as its role in career plans, and thereby following up on recent investigations of individual prospects in the context of knowledge work outsourcing (see e.g. Beerepot, 2013).

This translates into the following sub-research questions:

- How does educational status affect the perceived ability of freelancers to find new, equal or better employment?
- How does distance to urban areas affect the perceived ability of freelancers to find new, equal or better employment?
- Why do freelancers freelance?

A mixed method approach is used to address these questions. This research design aims to combine a quantitative assessment of perceived employability with a qualitative interview analysis. Interviewees are chosen to represent groups that, through the quantitative analysis, can be identified as either particularly employable on both relevant labour markets and thus face the choice between organizational and freelance work, or whose employability perception noticeably diverges from what can be expected after the following reviews of general research and case-specific literature. The quantitative data consists of 173 survey responses. Their analysis prompted

the selection of six freelancers for semi-structured interviews, including university graduates and individuals from remote locations.

This paper contributes to research by combining fields. The study of employment – frequently connected to a social critique that from the 1990s onwards often took the shape of a social exclusion discourse (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2004) – only recently went back to emphasize class differences (e.g. Standing, 2012). It is inclined to see freelancers in low-wage countries as underprivileged individuals, stripped of labour securities by macro-trends towards flexibility. Contrariwise, the model of ‘free agents’ who enjoy their status, for whom freelancing is a choice rather than a necessity, is reserved for highly skilled individuals whose abilities make them outstandingly employable. Being in demand gives them the power to embrace flexibilization and re-interpret it as their own autonomy. It finds representation in the group of proficians in Standing’s classification. When Kunda et al (2002) ask ‘Why do contractors contract?’, they do so puzzled over of the wealth of organizational employment opportunities the free agents they interviewed chose to pass up. For low- and medium-skilled tasks – representing the bulk of assignment done by Filipino online freelancers –, the answer to the same question has been pre-empted by an alleged lack of alternatives. Put differently, low skilled workers are assumed to work as freelancers because it is seen as the only job they can get. However, as shall be examined in Chapter 3, the last decade has seen remarkable growth in the Philippines’ process outsourcing sector, which combines low- and medium-skilled office jobs with comparably high wages (Beerepot et al, 2013). Therefore, it is time to ask whether, in the case at hand, the free agent model is not restricted to high-skilled proficians. In turn, this thesis seeks to contribute to the social debate by questioning the implicit precariousness of low-value adding work in online global labour markets.

Seizing on Moore’s call for an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of work and employment within International Political Economy (IPE), I further examine “how governmental policy idealises a particular subjectivity wherein workers are not employed, but are *employable*” both in a critical review of the employability concept itself (Chapter 2.1) and in the context of educational policy in the Philippines (Chapter 3.2; Moore, 2012, p.215).

The thesis follows this structure: First, a dedicated section attends to a conceptualization of employability. It needs a stand-alone part to, for one, track the multifarious uses in the past, including their ideological and methodological implications, and for another, narrow down the

view to the recent research thread of perceived employability that underlies the quantitative analysis. Second, Boltanski and Chiapello's *New Spirit of Capitalism* is presented. Therein, it is argued that labour market flexibilization, while feeding social inequality, is a response to demands for autonomy. Two alternative narratives for the evaluation of working conditions are given in the forms of the artistic critique, which values freedom from hierarchies and strict regulations over the loss of security, and the social critique, which to an extent accepts unfavourable conditions regarding the work as such but expects compensation through fair pay and labour market securities. In a final subchapter, Standing's precariat is introduced as an effort to revive the social critique. By means of a systematic examination of insecurities in labour markets in OECD countries, he sketches out the notion of a precarious job that is neither especially bearable momentarily nor offers career perspectives. The third chapter offers a detailed review of labour market trends, educational policy and the freelance sector in the Philippines. Thereby, it links concepts carved out afore to characteristics of the case. Methodological implications are revisited in the subsequent chapter, and provide the basis for the research design. This section also allows for a brief discussion of the mixed method design in the way this thesis uses it, pointing out the benefits of follow-up interviews to reveal motivations and perceptions of previously identified relevant groups.

The fifth chapter displays the survey results. Variance analyses serve to test the influence of educational status and distance from urban areas on perceived employability. Thus, the quantitative analysis functions both as a test for assumptions that theory and policies suggest, and as a means to identify groups whose perceptions can give additional insights into the role of employability for precariousness among Filipino online freelancers. Sixth, the interview analysis seeks to achieve two things: Prove the validity of the survey results by testing its underlying assumptions, e.g. the distinctiveness of freelance and organizational labour market in the context of the case, and reveal narratives of the interviewees and the groups they have been assigned to. It leads to a discussion, which pairs quantitative and qualitative findings. Drawing on Boltanski and Chiapello's (2004) conceptualization of work in modern capitalism in connection with the results, the chapter critically discusses Standing's social classification around precariat and proficians in the context of the case, and makes this a basis for articulating broader concerns about the model. Lastly, a conclusion provides a summary and directs the view to future research.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Underpinning

This chapter will start with reviewing the manifold concepts of employability. What does it mean to be employable, how to measure it and, not least, why? Given both the abundance of answers the literature tenders regarding the two first questions and the limited scope of a thesis, this review will not be exhaustive or complete. Yet, an overview of the most prominent ideas is needed to give direction to this study. In research, employability has been used in a macro-economic and an individual-oriented perspective, with the latter dominating discourse over the two previous decades. It gained momentum by promising an answer to the question: Has this person what it takes to get a job? A bulk of literature has since then been concerned with detecting *what* indeed it takes.

By contrast, critical scholars lament a growing pressure on individuals to be employable. In their view, a continuous trend towards firm flexibility has robbed workers of security on the labour market, and forces many, particularly the least employable, into undesirable work relationships. This chapter will first follow Boltanski and Chiapello's (2004) argumentation as to how companies could successfully promote flexibilization without crucial resistance, and finally turn to Standing's effort to introduce a new social classification based on the degree of labour insecurity individuals have to put up with.

2.1 Conceptualizing Employability

The study of employability has long been indivisibly connected to the study of skills. Who is capable enough to get a job, and what are the attributes that count towards an individual's skillset? An ever more inclusive definition of skills has been at the core of efforts to highlight the concept of employability in managerial literature and political debate, concurring what Boltanski and Chiapello call the New Spirit of Capitalism (2004). It so has it that the ability to build and maintain a network and to appeal socially (*soft skills*) took on greater significance (Gazier, 2001; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Still, the concept of employability today is as fractured and vague as to prompt Rajan et al to comment:

“It is one of the few words that has gone from cliché to jargon without the intermediate stage of meaning” (2000, p.23).

With turf battles debating the difference between ‘sustainable’ and ‘satisfying’ jobs as the result of being employable – that is, respectively, jobs that can be maintained with reasonable effort and jobs that correspond to the skill level of the applicant – perhaps the only reason why the concept has not faded into thin air yet is its appeal to policy makers (Finn, 2000; Forrier & Sels, 2003). As will be argued shortly, it allows for a shift of responsibility to the individual actor on the job market. By understanding an individual’s ability to get a job to his or her educational standard (Dearing, 1997) as the result of the knowledge, skills and attitude he or she possesses (Hillage and Pollard, 1998) it also invites to define this responsibility through quantification of the very knowledge, skills and attitude necessary to enter employment. Hence, research has been trying to identify relevant skills and addressed the question of how individuals acquire these. McQuaid (2005) points out with regard to the former that skills enhancing an individual’s employability depend not only on the desired job but also on the particular labour market and time of the search. For that reason, it is not surprising that many studies explore it by using a qualitative framework. It shows, however, that translating employability into a pragmatic measure of job acquisition would belie expectations because “it’s applicability [would be] subverted by the ‘irrational’ activities of graduate recruiters, which render useless any employability indicator based on the proportion of graduates obtaining work” (Harvey, 2001, p.97) This should be true for any recruiting process irrespective of the applicants’ educational status because, as Harvey points out elsewhere, employability skills depend on the type of work and will vary widely across disciplines, sectors and companies. To circumvent the, in this logic, pointless cumulative listing of skills, he developed a working definition that describes employability as “preparedness for employment” and argues for a limited set of key skills.

A critique towards, for instance, Hillage and Pollard’s definition and framework that is not articulated but somewhat implicit in Harvey’s conceptualization is the lack of prospect (Harvey, 2008, p.100). Even though both definitions resemble each other, with the ability to get a satisfying respectively fulfilling job at their core, for Harvey job acquisition must not be an end in itself but enable further (workplace) learning and improve competitiveness, or else employability would be little more than job satisfaction (similar in: Forrier & Sels, 2003; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). Therein, a broader view is introduced that relates to the critique of the “inability to think long-term” Standing takes up (2012). In sum, however, despite efforts to bring forward a skills-based conceptualization that would allow for a consistent operationalization, employability

remains a latent concept that is not apparent in reality (Gerring, 2012, p.157). Measuring it objectively has been a rather fruitless endeavour.

The quest for a statistical tool is, arguably, rooted in what Gazier describes as the second era in which the notion of being employable attracted scholarly attention (2001). During the 1950s and 60s, the concept evolved from a nominal categorization differentiating between ‘suitable for work’ and ‘not suitable for work’ into a continuous scale (ibid.). The former stemmed from the early industrial era in Europe (Gazier, 1999) and to this day remains the basis of determining a country’s labour force. The second scale was developed in two different directions. In France, it was used to determine the probability of a particular group in society finding jobs (Lefresne, 1999). Hence, the approach was macro-economic, not individual-oriented. In the USA, the skills-based view outlined above first occurred. Being employable was defined as the result of an (unspecified) set of skills that was not attached to an occupational group but an individual, making it possible to be more or less employable in comparison to others due to personal characteristics (Berntsson, 2008).

The US-view has dominated research and attracted the attention of policy makers from the 1990s onwards. It, however, set out to incorporate labour market compatibility. Employability as it is used, for example, by the European Commission in its ‘New Employment Strategy’ (1997) is determined by how well individuals fit in the labour market based on whatever skills or attributes they have. That so many studies try to pair academic achievements (e.g. Harvey, 2001; Knight & Yorke, 2003; Mason, Williams, Cranmer & Guile, 2003; Bowers-Brown & Harvey, 2004), soft skills (Morrison, 2014; Nickson, Warhurst and Commander, 2011) or even obesity (Paraponaris, Saliba and Ventelou, 2005) to success on the job market is therefore not surprising.

At this point, I will pass on summarizing this side of the literature in greater detail and instead turn to more recent attempts to suggest a *subjective* employability concept. A review of the ‘objective’ skills-based view was necessary to explain the road this research is about to take. Agreement upon basic definitions has not brought along conceptual consensus, exemplifying a tendency within the social sciences towards unclear terminology and conceptualization (Gerring, 2012, p.113). By accounting briefly for the development of the research domain and contraposing an objective and subjective perspective, this thesis attempts to address this flaw. Such a dichotomy, though, is to an extent constructed as studies of objective or *actual* employability have often

themselves provided insights into its limitations (e.g. Harvey, 2001 and 2008). Hence, it should not be a springboard to categorize scholars but to demarcate attempts to quantify employability as a ‘skill-to-labour-market-success’ ratio from measurements based on individual perception. This thesis aligns itself with the latter idea that the mere perception of being employable presents a virtue in itself. As I will argue shortly, this is especially true in globalizing labour markets shaped by flexibility and individualization.

The individual assessment of one’s possibilities of getting new, equal or better employment is what in this thesis will be referred to as *perceived employability*. This definition builds on Rothwell & Arnold (2007) and Berntsson (2008) and seeks to incorporate three conceptual dimensions. First, it borrows from Berntsson the term *new, equal or better employment* which “suggests that it is not merely a matter of promotion, but rather about the security of finding similar employment” (p.15). Second, perceived employability is based on *one’s own assessment* and therefore reflects the individual rather than the macro level. And third, the very grounding in an individual’s *perception* implies that it is no objective phenomenon. Employability, consequently, is conceived as inherently subjective in this thesis.

The departure from objective concepts like the “ability to get a satisfying job” (Harvey, 2001, p.100) or “the chance of a job in the internal and/or external labour market” (Forrier & Sels, 2003, p.106) is motivated by the significance of perceptions in the context of the case. As Berntson argues on the shoulders of Katz & Kahn’s behavioural research (1978): “People who perceive themselves as employable, for example, are more likely to perceive flexibility as less threatening” (2008, p.7). In relation to the guiding question of this research, this accentuates the importance of investigating both organizational and freelance employability in order to get an idea of how immediate insecurity is experienced, and thereby indicate precariousness.

Freelance and organizational perceived employability

In the study of work, labour market dichotomies have mostly been grounded in dual labour market theory, first introduced in 1971 by Doeringer and Piore. They look upon the internal labour market as a self-contained entity, such as an organizational branch, that functions according to a predetermined set of principles or rules. It is, therein, distinguished from the external labour market that functions according to economic principles. That is, all workers are alike on the external

market, differing only based on their attributes, skills etc. The rules governing the internal labour markets give an advantage to the workers already employed in the branch or entity while not giving it to external workers.

The theory has a normative echo, namely the differentiation between a ‘primary segment’ with “high wages, good working conditions, employment stability, [and] chances of advancement” and a ‘secondary segment’ with “low job security, low wages and high demand for flexibility” which shows similarities to Standing’s labour market observations regarding the precariat (Doeringer and Piore, 1971, p.165; Berntsson et al, 2006, p.227; Standing, 2008). Yet, this thesis does not adopt the differentiation between internal and external, and neither its implications. Even though it may seem intuitive to liken attributes of the secondary segment to freelancing, this study seeks to critically examine these assumptions, similar to how Beerepoot et al (2013) questioned resembling ideas for the BPO sector.

Following dual labour market theory, employment form – for example, short-term vs. long-term – would be a likely predictor of perceived employability. The methodological implication would be a categorization into temporarily and permanently employed individuals (see Berntsson and Marklund, 2006, or Silla et al, 2009). Since, however, being temporarily employed is something all participants in this study have in common, this distinction is redundant. In addition, the assumption that temporary workers have lower education levels (Giesecke and Gross, 2003; Leontaridi, 2002) is ultimately put to test in the context of the case by investigating their alternatives on the organizational labour market. Hence dual labour market theory is not applicable to this study, and the categories of the quantitative operationalization should not be interpreted as reflections of either the internal vs. external dichotomy or the primary vs. secondary segmentation. At this stage, I will abstain from explaining the bases for later methodological decisions in further detail and refer to the third chapter which will characterize freelance and organizational work in the context of the Philippines and include previous findings on employment stability and income levels as well as labour market policies.

2.2 The New Spirit of Capitalism. Tracing Flexibility

Studies on employability like to introduce by underlining the importance of their subject in an era of flexibilization. This thesis is no exception. Dwindling labour market security earned employability the reputation of being the modern version of job security. In times, where few people can rely on life-long employment in one company, security can be gained through being or feeling employable (Oss, 2001). But what derailed the old job security? How can changes on the labour market be explained? To understand flexibilization and individualization, it is helpful to explore the evolution of capitalism over the recent decades. Boltanski and Chiapello (2004) argue that the transformation of capitalism towards greater flexibility and ‘leanness’, which brought about the phenomena of subcontractors, short-term employees and freelancers, was preceded by ideological changes. Further, they suggest that this development is part of a continuous process of adaption that upholds the attractiveness of capitalism for people engaging in it.

In the outset, the ‘actors of the story’ are introduced: Capitalism itself, the spirit of capitalism and the criticism of capitalism. The first is defined as an “unlimited accumulation of capital by formally peaceful means” (p.4). The spirit refers to “the ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism” (p.8). Lastly, its critique must cope without an equally pointed definition because it changes with the beholder, namely the artistic critics who fault capitalism for its “inauthenticity” and “oppression” and the social critics who shame its “inequality” and “opportunism”.

The book takes inventory of management literature from the 1990s. If the job of a manager or supervisor is understood as to mobilize the company personnel, this will mean motivating them to partake in capitalism. Managers convey capitalism to employees; management literature tries to teach them how. Comparing the 90s publications with those of the 60s, Boltanski and Chiapello find emphasises on de-hierarchization, multidisciplinary and self-organization. The newer literature thus works in the opposite direction of Taylorism, formal authority and life-long careers that were typical for the 60s and shaped the perception of corporate work long beyond that.

Oppression and power relationships created through hierarchy were denounced in the spirit of the artistic critique. An authentic personality - so long as it happened to be risk-taking, versatile and able to confidently integrate to networks - was hailed. Meanwhile the social critique directed towards inequality did not receive an equally adequate response.

The second part of the book follows capitalism's response to both critiques through the decades. With regard to the aftermath of '68, Boltanski and Chiapello argue that the social critique was easy to ignore because it was coupled with the artistic demand for autonomy. The resulting agenda was 'utopian', asking for a world where "security would be guaranteed to completely autonomous producers whose appraisal by a third party would never be legitimate" (p.172). Social and artistic critique draw on different ideological sources, combining them can, according to the authors, spark confusion and make them easy to ignore (p.38). In the logic of the artistic critique, dependency and authenticity exist because of a divide between the bourgeoisie whose ambition to preserve and enhance its possessions forces its members into "meticulous forethought" and "rational management of space and time" on one side, and the ideal of the artist who is alienated, totally mobile and detached from the system of production on the other side because obeying systematic rules would mean denying him- or herself. This translates into a rejection of the standardization that manifests itself in the infinite repetition of divided tasks in Taylorism (p.441).

The social critique of capitalism is inherently different because it is not individualistic. It represents the working class. It does not primarily challenge the kind of work but its conditions and pay, down to its worst form, exploitation. It considers the very individualism that artistic critics and bourgeoisie have in common a source of inequality. Being egocentric fails to fulfil the moral standards of the social critique. The voluntary detachment from the world of production is interpreted as moral neutrality and ignorance towards the issues of the proletariat. Boltanski and Chiapello later describe the extension of social critique to the growing group of un- and underemployed and therewith the softening of its class-based ideology. This is considered necessary but detrimental to its punching power: "Unlike the model of social classes, where explanation of the 'proletariat's' poverty is based upon identifying a class (the bourgeoisie, owners of the means of production) responsible for its 'exploitation', the model of exclusion permits identification of something negative without proceeding to level accusations" (p.347). It is, therefore, delicate to introduce exclusion as a critical concept as it does not allow for conflictuality and, arguably, even permits to pass on the weight of security loss to the individual incapable of meeting the demands of modernity (in terms of skills, adaptability, know-how, in a word: employability).

The work of Guy Standing, most prominently his 2012 book ‘The Precariat’, may be seen as an effort to reintroduce conflictuality by making a case for a new social classification shaped by unequally distributed labour market insecurities. Standing firmly argues against the notion of exclusion, and sees his ‘class in the making’ precisely therein distinguished from, say, Marx’ *Lumpenproletariat*.

2.3 The Precariat: Labour Market Security Diet

The artistic critique claimed autonomy, rebelling against strict hierarchies and rules. Workers, according to Standing, must pay for its victory with a decay of welfare systems and the loss of labour market security. In his social classification, the growing group of highly flexible and dependent individuals on the labour market forms the precariat. Flexibility, in Standing’s view, results from business pressure on policy makers and produces different types of insecurities on the individual level, with only a selected few retaining stability in the form of high incomes or the life-long employment that had been the standard for most employees in OECD countries after World War II.

The labour market is globalizing. Online freelancers are part of the two billion people that operate in an open labour market (Standing, 2016). Therefore, even if employment insecurity will appear more immediate to workers in OECD countries, for it is contrasted by decades of economic growth and stability, its repercussions go beyond national boundaries. From a European perspective, Standing describes how the influx of workers, “accustomed to a standard of living equal to one fiftieth of what a western European worker in the 1980s would have considered the norm”, led to a decrease in real wages in OECD countries (in *Constructif*, 2016). Concomitant, national class structures fragmented. The old proletariat, the working class, is no longer identity-inducing and lost its signifiers to pop culture; or as Standing puts it: “People could describe themselves in class terms, and others would recognize them in those terms, by the way they dressed, spoke and conducted themselves. Today they are little more than evocative labels” (2012, p.7). Even without immediate status implications it still makes for a, shrinking (ibid., p.26), core of manual employees in old economies, around which Standing arranges his descriptions of social classes in today’s labour market.

Above the working class, in terms of income, a small group of proficians possesses comparably rare bundles of skills that makes them highly employable. Requited with high

incomes, they have embraced capitalism's response to the artistic critique and deliberately give up employment security. Put differently, "they live with the expectation and the desire to move around" (p.8). The salariat, by contrast, works in large corporations, government agencies and public administration. It still forms a considerably large group of employees in OECD countries that enjoys relatively high wages, paid holidays and company pensions in exchange for stable full-time employment, though it is shrinking, which Standing ascribes to governments' incentives to appeal to foreign investors by introducing market flexibility policies. They did so to attract investments, driven by companies that had adopted a modern management approach that patronised 'leanness', i.e. a functionally and numerically flexible workforce (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2004). The result were less secure jobs with more variable salaries: Precarious jobs, wrested from the salariat and, to a lesser extent, the proletariat (Standing, 2012, p.35).

Three overarching dimensions are essential to the precariat: First, job instability that manifests itself in fixed-term contracts, task-based pay or no job at all. Second, financial insecurity, making individuals dependent on their jobs and inclined to agree with unfavourable conditions. Third, the absence of a career notion which expresses itself in a lack of work-based identity (Standing, 2012). To more precisely define the precariat through the absence of labour security, Standing uses a conceptualization first introduced as part of the 'industrial citizenship' agenda. Therein, seven forms of labour security are specified: Labour market security (opportunities on the macro-level), employment security (protection against arbitrary firing), job security (protection against arbitrary reshuffle), work security, skill reproduction security (opportunity to gain skills), income security and representation security (p.10).

Standing considers his concept distinguished from previous attempts to define a social class 'under' the proletariat, like Marx' *Lumpenproletariat*, by not being limited to the jobless without hope of escaping social exclusion. As noted, "precariousness also implies a lack of a secure work-based identity" (p.11). A drawback that is not common to all low-income jobs. Standing refrains from defining insecure and low-income jobs as per se precarious because they may be logical first steps of a career in the making (and thereby may very well induce work-based identification). However, many internships and part-time jobs nowadays are not career-enhancing because they do not come with a reasonable prospect of full-time employment (Standing, 2012, p.75).

Contributed to the growth of the precariat to the point where Standing speaks of a class in the making has commodification. It is argued that by subjecting, for example, labour, education or firms the market forces of supply and demand, individuals are forced into evermore flexibility. Firms' numerical flexibility – a point of aspiration for businesses that policy makers increasingly complied with from the 1990s onwards – means that it became easier to hire and fire employees. Accordingly, internal division of labour is increasingly in flux, making it possible to outsource or offshore parts of the work or to revoke such decisions on a short notice. The Philippines are a main target country for outsourcing of knowledge work. Besides fulfilment by business process outsourcing organizations (BPO) that together employed one million people in 2010, tasks also are subcontracted directly to freelancing individuals (Beerepoot et al, 2013; cf. Chapter 3.1.2). Companies are 'lean' at wish, ridded of the risk and commitment long-term contracts meant to them. Additionally, freed to some extent from the complications of organised worker representation and the need to upskill employees (Standing, p.31).

“Flexible labour relations are imperative in the global labour process” (p.32) and they go beyond just hiring and firing. Functional flexibility allows companies to conveniently shift employees between plants and create contracts without clear occupational focus (p.37). This makes it harder for the individuals working in these companies to build careers because what they end up doing might not match their qualifications and thus does not benefit their professional development.

Flexibilization is a continuous process, “unfinished business” (p.37). Standing describes it as the result of increased competition on two levels. First, countries compete against each other for foreign investment. Enabling companies to be numerically and functionally flexible has become an imperative for states to remain competitive in a global market. Second, individuals offering their labour compete against their likes from all over the world. This development is insofar ‘unfinished’ as the mobility of labour within but specifically across borders is still hindered by factors such as language, regulations and occupational turf embedded in laws. With this in mind, I will argue in the third Chapter that each of these obstacles is relatively weakly pronounced in the case of the Philippines, making it, for one, a successful outsourcing destination, and for another, a country with a considerable “pool of workers who have no social security, no healthcare and no Security of Tenure” (Bill 4444, Philippine House of Representatives, 2016).

2.4 The Precariat and Why Perceived Employability is Important

To wrap up the chapter, this short section will combine the literature on conceptualization and contextualization of employability. In doing so, it reiterates some methodological implications. Earlier, it has been suggested that employability is a concept that people *want* to use but do not know how. This begs the question: Why does a word gain such prominence even though it fails to deliver a clear meaning? What makes it attractive to policy makers? Arguably, it allows to articulate the shift of responsibility to the individual that is implicit to Standing's observations. In OECD countries, unemployment used to be seen as the result of unfortunate circumstances (2012, p.45). Structural and economic factors and, at times, the governments' inability to create jobs (p.53) were more relevant arguments than shortcomings on an individual level. Hence, generous benefits protected workers against the most immediate effects in case they fell victim to those circumstances. "Now [unemployment] is depicted as a lack of employability, personal failings and excessive wage or job expectations" (Standing, p.46). The individual is regarded as incapable to offer the labour market what it demands. Coming back to commodification, this could, for example, be due to a failure to 'invest' in the right skills and education. Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy thus demanded that already primary schools should start teaching economics in order to increase employability later in life (p.69). The Philippines has a long history of similar efforts (Chapter 3.2).

Actual employability measures have produced little agreement as to their adequacy, yet they shape educational policy and constitute the foundation of judging the 'usability' of an individual's abilities. Although the spotlight is on singled out persons, hence it is considered an individual or micro perspective, it assumes the point of view of employers, policy makers and society who scrutinize the individual on its basis. Perceived employability, on the other hand, is indivisibly linked to an individual point of view. It has been used before to predict subsequent health (Berntson et al, 2006) and well-being (Silla et al, 2009), and was, in turn, predicated by educational status (in Switzerland) and willingness to change jobs (Wittekind et al, 2009).

With regard to theory, the co-existence of social and artistic critique of capitalism shows that the same working conditions can be considered unfavourable for different reasons. To understand those that Filipino freelancers quote for their career choices – and answer the question 'why do freelancers freelance?' – it is of greater importance to know who *perceives* her- or himself

in the position to choose than to know who *actually* is. That is because a person sure of having alternatives is more likely to be aware of her or his reasons to decide for one, than a person who has alternatives but does not believe so. Therefore, a quantitative assessment of perceived employability is assumed to be most beneficial to identify relevant groups for the semi-structured interviews and thus understand its role for precariousness.

Chapter Three: The Case – Work in the Philippines

In the literature review, I have discussed conceptualizations of employability. Thereby, its promise to measure the labour market fitness of the individual was highlighted. In this chapter, I will explain how its appeal to policy makers shaped Philippine educational policy from as early as the 1970s and continues to do so until today. Under heavy US influence through Bretton Wood institutions, the dominant individual perspective has led to employability becoming the main goal of primary and higher education in the Philippines. It will be argued that the concurrent flourishing of private universities indicates increasing commodification of education much like Standing describes it. Before, examining this in detail, however, the case will be introduced by presenting domestic labour market trends. This shall give an account of opportunities in organizational employment, relevant labour market security policies, and the evolution of the freelance sector. In doing so, a brief overview of freelance research is given to contextualize the phenomenon.

3.1 Philippine Labour Market Trends

The Philippines is an emerging economy with consistent but, in the long-term regional comparison, modest growth rates. While the country follows the path of industrialization, and agriculture's share of the economy is shrinking, poverty levels and underemployment remain high. The latter, in many cases, feeds into the so-called informal sector – characterized by the absence of regulation and protection – hosting an estimated 40% of the working population (Ofreneo, 2013). It is in this context that precariousness is considered the norm (Abao, 2014). Due to an overall young population, the labour force is growing fast. The halting job creation in mind, it must be feared that youth unemployment will soon exceed the current 15.6 per cent (National Economic and Development Authority, 2017).

Regarding the distinction between informal and formal sector, the question arises which regulations, or lack thereof, it is based on in the Philippine context. Put differently, what sort of labour market protection can a Filipino worker hope for at best?

The 1986 Constitution guarantees the ‘right to security of tenure’. In addition, and more importantly according to the Danish Trade Union, a Labour Code from 2002 “regulates hire and fire, human resources development, conditions of employment, hours of work, wages and Occupational Safety and Health Standards” (Ulandssekretariatet, 2014, p.7). Employment in a private organization or the public sector moreover gives access to well defined social protection schemes (ibid., p.16). A contributory social and pension system covers industrial accidents or death, and provides health insurance.

In 2016, a legislative proposal promoted by labour organizations called for regulation of subcontracting, trying to extent security of tenure and other rights to the informal sector. It refers to “millions of workers” whose rights to organize had been violated and “who have no social security”. The bill intended to limit subcontracting, and abolish manpower agency hiring and outsourcing.

“Contractualization has created a pool of workers who have no social security, no healthcare, no access to Pag-IBIG [Note: Home Development Fund Philippines], and no Security of Tenure.

This is work offering the labourer no hope and no future. This is precarious work and has no place in a decent society.”

House of Representatives, Bill 4444, Explanatory Note, 2016

The Employers Confederation of the Philippines, unsurprisingly, registered its opposition. It fears for the country’s competitiveness in business process outsourcing and refers to “the right of enterprises to reasonable returns on investments and to expansion and growth” (Ecop, 2017). Like several previous advances, the bill was not implemented to law. With the economic weight of the informal sector in mind – of which different estimates exist, e.g. one by the ILO that sets it at 61% of GDP – a prohibition of contractualization was not realistic and the proposal more of a symbolic effort (ILO, 2012).

Regarding workers in the informal economy, their share of the total labour force has decreased consistently from almost 60% in 1980 to about 40% in 2012 (Ofreneo, 2013).

Thereagainst, the share of underemployed persons, those who “have expressed the desire to have additional hours of work in their present job, or to have an additional job, or a new job with longer working hours” has remained constant at about 20%, now equating to 7,325,000 people (Department of Labor and Employment, 2013). It was a little higher in the World Bank estimates (Philippine Economic Report, 2013). Thus, whereas neoliberal reforms and a shrinking manufacturing sector have led to an increase in labour insecurity formerly unknown to most job holders in OECD countries, a job as such has never been a guarantee for secure living conditions in the global South (Ofreneo, 2013; Abao, 2014).

For this same reason, Munck dismisses Standing’s notion of a *new* global precariat, and criticises it as a ‘Eurocentric’ perspective. Eurocentric insofar as he sees it defined by not belonging to “a mythical, stable working class with full social and political rights”, which the global South has never had (2013, p.752). That is, he understands Standing’s effort not as a new classification but as a continuation of the exclusion discourse within the social critique from the 1980s onwards (cf. Chapter 2.2, p.15). Conversely, Hewison and Kalleberg (2013), while not denying the decade-long presence of informal work in other sectors, argue that in the process of industrialization, precariousness has been ‘imported’ rather than resulted from domestic trends in this sector, or just being the norm as previously suggested. In this view, if countries like the Philippines were to be a competitive part of global value chains, they had to enable flexible and insecure employment. In conclusion, disagreement is apparent as to the applicability of precariousness as an analytical term to developing countries.

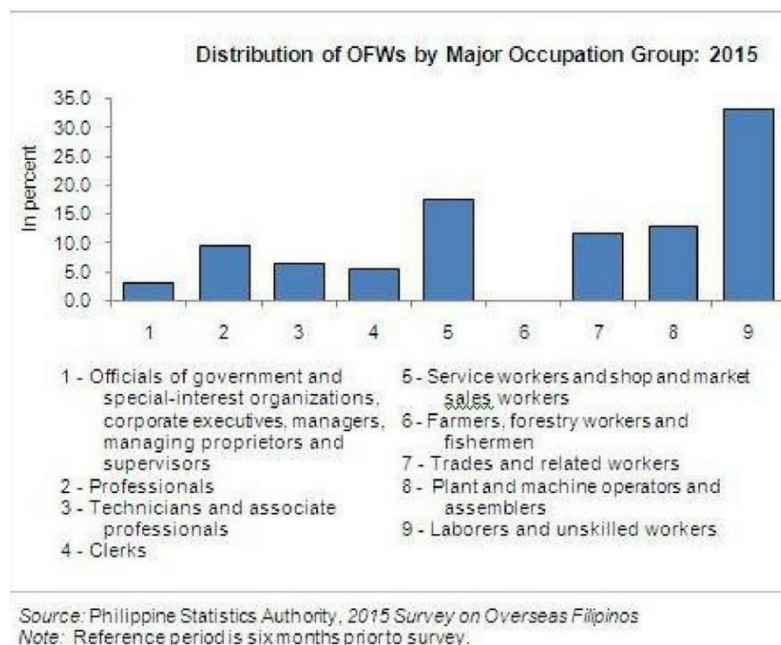
3.1.1 Where to Work?

Against this background, one must wonder which jobs are available to people who finish school in the Philippines. The following section will describe three common career patterns, as one of which freelancing is emerging. The other two are overseas work and organizational business process outsourcing.

Searching one’s luck in new labour markets is a trend not confined to freelancers in the Philippine context. Every day, approximately 3,500 Filipinos go abroad for work (Riep, 2015). So many, that there is an agency dedicated to them within the Department of Labour and Employment, and that abbreviations are made up to indicate their target countries (FOWS = Filipino overseas worker in Singapore). Many accredit this to a failure of the domestic labour market to produce

opportunities. However, this criticism has long been directed at the manufacturing sector. While China and India, but also Vietnam, Bangladesh, Thailand and Cambodia, experienced rapid growth by being target countries for manufactural outsourcing, the Philippines, due to its remote geographical location and higher wage level in comparison to these countries (Ulandssekretariatet, 2016), at the time came away empty handed. The overseas worker trend has been linked to this development, since manufactural jobs could have presented opportunities to those who go abroad as sailors or domestic helpers. Figure 1 shows that laborers and unskilled workers are the largest group among Filipinos overseas, followed by service workers and assemblers.

Figure 1. Overseas Workers by Occupation



Knowledge work is rarely exported in this way, despite the high levels of English proficiency many Filipinos bring to the table. It has, though, been central to the Philippines' rise as one of the main destinations for business process outsourcing (Beerepot et al, 2013). The widely spoken American accent made many firms choose the country over India when internet-enabled customer service became a possibility in the early 2000s (Frignal, 2009). Call-centres to this day account for 60% of jobs within the BPO industry, taking on administrative tasks as well nowadays. Thereby, the job spectrum was replenished with back-office and IT-support work. Still, most tasks must be considered basic, general and on the lower value adding end (Beerepot et al, 2013).

Initially, the BPO sector has been clustered around Manila, with 80% of companies and jobs located there in 2008. However, the recent growth which saw the workforce expand from around 500,000 people in 2008 to almost a million in 2015 coincided with a relocation to secondary and tertiary cities like Baguio and Dumaguete (Herguner, 2013; Oxford Business Report, 2015). This can be explained with companies' difficulties to find office space and enough qualified personnel. Qualification traditionally referred to excellent English proficiency and any college degree regardless of discipline, with the second requirement apparently watering down (Marasigan and Lambregts, 2015).

The transformation of smaller cities into regional hubs has put Philippine towns with sometimes little more than 100,000 inhabitants on "Tholons' Top 100 Outsourcing Destinations" list, a London consulting firm's attempt to keep record of the global hubs of BPO, predominantly featuring metropolises such as Sao Paulo, Bangalore or Singapore (Tholons, 2016). Thus, office job opportunities can be assumed to have increased in and in proximity to urban areas all over the Philippines. Although many cities have not seen a similar development and business process outsourcing only represents one part of the organizational spectrum, the extension of BPO industry beyond Manila suggests generally better chances for individuals from the city to get employed by an organization. The research design provides for a test of this assumption by relating perceived employability to the distance separating an individual from the closest city.

3.1.2 Freelancing as an Industry and a Research Topic

While often used interchangeably with 'contractor' or even 'contingent worker', the usage of the term freelancer in research quite consistently describes a person who does not receive a fixed monthly income, but is paid solely on the basis of the work carried out.

The Department of Science and Technology-Information and Communications Technology of the Philippines has estimated the population of *online freelancers* at 500 000 on the countryside alone (DOST, 2015). Media outlets that base their numbers on registered users on freelance portals claim as many as 1.4 million Filipinos work online as freelancers on Upwork.com alone (Rappler, 2015). The relevant population for this study will be greater than the first number because it also includes freelancers from the city, and smaller than the second because the mere registration on a website does not indicate that freelancing is every user's main profession and no fixed monthly income is received.

The most relevant portals are Upwork.com, Freelancer.com (self-reported: 730 000 Filipino users), Onlinejobs.ph (self-reported: 250 000 users in total, most probably from the Philippines) and Raket.ph, which resembles a classified ads-website and whose share therefore is difficult to estimate. According to Upwork.com, users from the Philippines together generate the third highest total earnings. Notably, the most common work fields are administrative support, sales and marketing, and customer service, all of which are also common tasks in organizational business process outsourcing (Rappler, 2015).

Concurrent with its rise in the Philippines and globally, independent contracting has appeared more frequently in research in the context of 'atypical employment'. In line with what has been outlined earlier, Ofreneo attributes the growth of short-term work to “the economy and its weak capacity to create stable jobs for a growing population” (2013, p.420). Consequently, his belief in legislative advances, such as the one presented earlier, is weakened by the conviction that “the neoliberal and crisis-ridden economic policy regime that has been in place for nearly four decades“ is the underlying reason for the persistent presence of what he too calls “precarious work” (ibid.). Both terminology and arguments give away an ideological proximity to Standing, without however, embedding the phenomenon in a context-specific social classification. Standing’s own is based on class structures produced by industrialization and their subsequent fragmentation, and therefore hardly applicable to the Philippines. Job insecurity, however, is a common denominator, since it can “objectively” be seen as implicit to independent contracting (Naswall et al., 2008, p.111). “Reasonable empirical evidence [which] suggests that contingent workers subjectively perceive more job insecurity than workers performing similar types of work on a more permanent basis” (Naswall et al, 2008, p.111; Klein Hesselink and van Vuuren, 1999, Berntson et al, 2006) has, however, been countered by inconclusive findings and the view that results depend on the type of work contract and the degree to which the workers prefer stable working conditions (Kinnunen et al, 2011; Silla et al, 2005, Isaksson and Bellagh, 2002). This, again, relates to the group of proficians who voluntarily decide against stable employment, and whose attributes have hitherto not been expected amongst online freelancers from low-income countries because they were not thought of as highly employable.

3.2 Philippine Educational Policy: A short historical account

The commodification of education takes large room in Standing's social critique. It goes beyond the mere highlighting of indicators of eroding ideals in schools and universities, and issues into the employability discourse. In the following section, I will review the history of educational policy in the Philippines, point out its particularities and refer to relevant theories from the previous chapter. Against this background, I will argue for the importance to investigate the role of educational status for perceived employability.

Employability as an educational rationale – a development that Standing observes and criticises with view to Great Britain and Europe – has a longer history in the Philippines. When in the 1970s and 80s former dictator Marcos' government indebted itself heavily to finance economic development programs, the country became dependent on funding by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Riep, 2015). Consequentially, both institutions demanded a say in domestic policy matters. While the pressure on Marcos to revoke martial law, exerted through Bretton Wood institutions, prompted most attention and political resistance, the World Bank's influence on educational policy was met with far less resentment. Up until today it continues to “impose curricular programmes designed to train students according to the manpower requirements of transnational corporations” (Remollino, 2007, p.13). These programmes, for example the Millenium Curriculum of 2002, provided for an emphasis on English, Math and Science while cutting on Social Sciences and Humanities.

At the time these changes were first introduced, in the early 1970s, the Philippines struggled alongside other countries in the region to get the kids to school for a start. The share of individuals without education was 15 per cent at the time, about on par with its developing neighbour countries. In the following decades, fuelled by said investments and IMF incentives for privatization, this number went down to one percent in 2015 (UNESCO, 2017). However, doubts have been entertained as to the quality of the education. In research, it is well-established that higher levels of education benefit GDP and GDP growth rates. The Philippines is a curious case that defeats this pattern: The country “should have witnessed an era of high growth since 1975, when it had the highest rate of completion of tertiary education among developing Asian countries – higher than Japan, South Korea, Taiwan or Singapore. This suggests that the problem in the

Philippines has been the quality of education, rather than its availability or accessibility” (Yap, 2012).

In the 70s, the commodification of education created a market, which swiftly was deregulated following the American example. Today, the country is home to about 2300 universities, most of which are private. By way of comparison, Germany, being only a fifth smaller in terms of population, has 400 universities, the UK 130. It should be noted that, besides the plethora of private institutions operated by companies like Ayala or Pearson, the state arguably lives up to the 1987 constitutional mandate whereby it shall “protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all” – with aforementioned reservations regarding quality. As of 2013, about 40% of students graduate from public universities; a significant increase from just 10% in 1980. Yet, the majority of students continues to enrol in of the 1,643 private colleges (World Education, 2015). Among these, some of the country’s top educational institutions are to be found, often with international esteem like De La Salle or Ateneo university. Both charge overall tuitions between \$3000 and \$4000 per year - this compares unfavourably to the average household income of roughly \$5000 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016). With both the limited number of students who can afford these top-shelf universities and the comparably high total number of graduates in mind (Ulandssekretariat, 2014), it must be assumed that a considerable share of private universities cater to students who want to have a degree but cannot pay high prices. Therefore, Yap's doubts as to the quality of higher education appear, at least, reasonable.

As outlined above, increases in education attainment could be observed very quickly after the reforms were introduced in the mid 1970s. Hence, many university graduates have already tried to gain access to the labour market in the last decades. This means that age is unlikely to interfere with the argument. Generational differences are not expected to be significant because the underlying forces, e.g. policy actions, are in place for almost 50 years. The research design will not differentiate between private and public university degree, both in the interest of simplicity and with view to the endorsement of the employability rationale by educational policy makers. The goal of the government-approved “Millenium Curriculum”, namely to produce a “globally competitive” labour force, illustrates this.

In sum, the failure to spark economic growth through extending the reach of higher education created doubts towards its quality. Thus, it can be argued that many degree holders experience only very modest benefits in terms of job chances at organizations, and therefore turn to freelancing as their best option. As to that, Riep states that “a college or university degree is redundant for marginalised learners because it is not required for the deskilled labour positions presented before them” (2015, p.10). It is, moreover and likewise, at least doubtful that a degree will dramatically improve freelance employability. To allow for a comparison, the subsequent method chapter explains how the significance of educational status for perceived employability on each labour market was tested in this thesis.

3.3 Work in the Provinces

The 2017 ‘Philippines Urbanization Review: Fostering Competitive, Sustainable and Inclusive Cities’, a joint study by government and World Bank, highlights “how people benefit from urbanization through economic growth, job creation and poverty reduction” (p.2). The country is among the fastest urbanizing countries in East Asia. As of today, 45 per cent of the population lives in cities, which account for an unproportional share of GDP (more than 70 per cent; World Bank, 2017). The report specifies further that the country’s seven largest cities alone provide 54 percent of formal jobs. By contrast, people from the provinces have less access to business opportunities. 80 per cent of the country’s poor live in rural areas (IFAD, 2017). It is in this context that the Department of Science and Technology proclaims freelancing as the way to “to generate more career opportunities for those in socio-economically disadvantaged areas” (DOST, 2015), and initiatives such as the ‘Rural Impact Sourcing Program’ and the newly founded ‘Department of Information and Communication Technology’ arise. Neither can, however, hide the fact that the digital infrastructure hinders progress in the provinces. The department itself, in fact, observes a “growing digital divide” (DICT, 2017). It must therefore be questioned whether this interferes with the employability of those who already are freelancing. More importantly, it shall be investigated whether the high hopes that the state expresses are justified in the sense that the opportunities are worthwhile in the eyes of those engaged with them.

Chapter Four: Research design

In this chapter, I argue that a mixed method approach is the best way to estimate freelancers' perception of their employability in different labour markets, and to understand its role for flexible work models in outsourcing target countries. The argument splits up in two: First, I make the point that previous research is profound enough to inspire a survey design and analysis for perceived employability, but not so advanced as to warrant a stand-alone quantitative research design solely geared towards testing previously established relationships. Second, I highlight the benefits of posteriori qualitative data collection referring to the opportunity to follow-up on quantitative conclusions. What characterises a mixed method design is the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, the usage of both for separate analyses and the application of “distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks” (Creswell, 2014, p.4). To be precise, this thesis uses survey data to reach sub-conclusions, and qualitative data to substantiate, test or further develop these insights. It thus employs an explanatory sequential mixed method research design (ibid., p.224).

The lack of theories in this relatively new thread of employability research, perceived employability, militates against a purely quantitative approach as it is typically used to test relationships between variables that have been established in previous research (ibid., p.231). With view to the guiding question, the predication of employability alone will not be sufficient to understand its role for freelancers. It can, however, reveal sub-groups within Filipino freelancers between which labour market opportunities differ. Thus, although short-term contracting, and therewith freelancing, has been linked to perceived employability before (Berntson, 2006; Süß and Becker, 2013), the originality of the case, particularly its setting in a low-income outsourcing country, suggests that a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures is best suited to understand both variable relationships and their impact on individuals than a stand-alone quantitative analysis. The concept of perceived employability has been applied and refined in other settings. As the literature review yielded, previous studies provide methodological inspiration in the form of items to be used in the new context of online freelance work in the Philippines.

Reviewing research, it became clear that employability, while often explicitly defined, has a vagueness to it that affects operationalization. Thus, new attempts of conceptualization brought

about evermore differentiations. First, this shows that employability is a big theoretical umbrella and must be narrowed down when operationalized. This was done by identifying *perceived* employability as especially relevant to the case). And second, that a reasonable list of skills or attributes as independent variables is hard to come up with, as exemplified by a relative shortage of empirical studies not only on freelance employability but generally, and ambiguous findings in the existing ones (cf. p.11). Along these lines, the first, quantitative stage aims for simplification. It acknowledges the importance of skills, but does not make skills variables.

The quantitative part of this thesis takes methodological inspiration in a study of Berntson et al (2006), wherein self-perceived employability was measured by a single item and its relationship to independent variables tested by chi-square tests. Generally, the empirical operationalization of perceived employability was advanced by Berntson (2006 and 2008) and Rothwell and Arnold (2007). To find out which approach was best suited for the case, I first attempted to adjust the latter, more elaborated framework to my requirements. Rothwell and Arnold developed a scale that differentiates between internal and external perceived employability, hence builds on the integration of dual labour market theory into employability research by Hillard and Pollard (1999; cf. also Chapter 2, p.12). Their operationalization starts out with 16 items and uses principle component analysis to rule out five and end up with eleven items, whereof four measure internal perceived employability, six external and one counts towards the overall score. It has been noted that the differentiation of freelance and organizational employability in this thesis does not reflect the categorization of internal and external labour markets in dual labour market theory. Therefore, the scale, although it presented an opportunity to make use of the rich body of employability literature, was limited in its applicability. Since it “measures self-perceived employability for people for whom employment in an organisation is either a current reality or a realistic prospect” (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007, p. 26), and the participants of this study are not employed in organizations, it was necessary to modify the items. This was done by rephrasing them when necessary. Already while doing so, a few logical errors occurred. Item (9), for example, is aimed at the benefits of status and personal relationships that dual labour market theory ascribes to the internal labour market:

“Among the people who do the same job as me, I am well respected in this organisation.”

Regarding the freelance labour market, a paraphrase does not make sense because fellow freelancers cannot be equated with colleges at a job. Thus, the influence of status among them will differ from status in an organizational environment. Doubts were reinforced through informal pilot interviews with two freelancers I contacted via Upwork.com to test the applicability of a modified scale, in which three items were kept (for example, Item (6): *“I could easily retrain to make myself more employable elsewhere”*) and eight altered (for example, Item (2): *“Even if there was downsizing in this organisation I am confident that I would be retained”* was rephrased to *“Even if there was a downturn in the freelance market I am confident that I would continue to get enough assignment”*). Both freelancers were confused at several questions. Given that a survey does not provide the researcher an opportunity for further clarifications, “problems of meaning” are hardly tolerable (Bryman, 2012, p.271). Therefore, I decided for the simpler operationalization developed and employed by Berntson et al (2006). Before the following section will explain this in detail, I will briefly return to my argument highlighting the importance of a mixed method research design in the context of the case.

As outlined above, the labour market dichotomy the survey analysis relies on – a distinction between freelance and organizational labour market that is expected to reflect in perceived employability – diverges from other operationalisations. This weakens the argument insofar as the associated assumption has not been ascertained through previous research, much less in the context of a low-income outsourcing target country like the Philippines. Moreover, the global trend towards flexibilization suggests that the line between ‘traditional’ employment in organizations and short-term contracting or freelancing becomes increasingly blurry (Chapter 2.3, p.16). An explanatory sequential design gives the opportunity to test the assumptions made for the quantitative part and thereby control for validity: Do the interviewees perceive these two labour markets as distinct; and do they estimate their chances of getting hired differently depending on where they direct their efforts? Thus, the qualitative analysis will not only produce results that fall outside the survey frame, but also serves to assess the value of the chosen quantitative research design for this and similar cases.

A last factor that motivated the choice of a mixed method research design and the integration of quantitative methods in particular, was the vast number of claims from policy makers concerning freelancing as an opportunity for the rural population, and employability as a rationale

behind changes in educational policy (Chapter 3, p.26). The former is not backed up by research. Although the mere number of 500 000 freelancers in the provinces alone makes a strong case for its potential, several factors may negatively affect the employability of province residents as against individuals from the city, e.g. more frequent power outages or unreliable network service. While the quantitative part will not examine specific factors, it allows to link perceived employability to location and thereby create the foundation for investigating reasons in the interviews, if assumptions should substantiate.

4.1 Quantitative methods

In the following section, the sample method and quantitative research design will be presented. More importantly, the items will be introduced, and their use explained with references to previous research by Berntson et al (2006).

The first stage of the study involved a survey that was brought to the attention of 1000 freelance workers from the Philippines. After close to 100 surveys were sent out to email addresses retrieved from the website Onlinejobs.ph on and led to only 6 responses, I made use of the option to post a job ad on the website Upwork.com. It was clearly indicated that the ad was intended for research purposes and no monetary gains could be expected from participating (Appendix A).

The post was deleted once by Upwork.com, but recreated by me the same day so that it was online for 14 days in total. To ensure a sample according to the below outlined criteria, freelancers were 'invited' to consider the ad. Without invitation, the post was not visible. This way, 904 registered users were put on enquiry. 167 answers meant a still modest but improved response rate of 17,3 per cent overall (including the email responses). Given the long lists of registered users, drawing a random sample was difficult. Instead, the sample was selected systematically. After narrowing down the category (for example, active Filipino freelancers on Upwork.com: 154,665) the complete number of people on the list was divided by the number to be selected from that list (f. ex.: 500) and thereby determined that, in this example, every 310th profile would be selected after taking a random starting point (Creswell, p.158). To improve the chances of selecting enough individuals who describe freelancing as their primary job, the profiles were also filtered for their last login date, which in all cases was within two weeks of when the survey was sent out. This kind of systematic sample guarantees that any type of order made by the

algorithms of the platforms (for instance, depending on reviews) can be disregarded since the same number of profiles will be selected from the top as from the end.

A survey design has the advantage that the perceptions of a large group can be scanned with relative ease (Creswell, p.157). This is important since research question and purpose pointed out the ambition to understand the role of employability for online freelance workers in the Philippines, and therefore require a research design that permits some degree of generalization with regard to the tested variables. With a sample size n greater than 100, the survey analysis can reasonably be used to draw first abstract conclusions. The survey was cross-sectional, meaning that all data was collected at one point in time.

As noted, a freelance worker for the sake of this thesis is someone who is self-employed and who completes assignments for different companies or individual clients as her or his main job (i.e. not as a secondary employment). Since a person can be registered on a freelance portal without belonging to the targeted population, the survey asked for the role of freelance work in the participants' breadwinning. Only if a participant considered it her or his primary job to take freelance assignments, the answers were used. For this reason, six responses were not used in the analysis. Further, the platforms Upwork.com and Onlinejobs.ph have been mentioned as means to get in contact with potential participants. Both have been chosen because they belong to the five platforms with the biggest Filipino user-base, can be searched for nationality and allow a member to contact another member without having to pay for it.

Measures

Employability. Self-perceived employability was measured by two Likert-items. This approach drew inspiration from a 2006 study by Berntson, Sverke and Marklund. In it, one item assessed perceived employability: 'How easy would it be for you to acquire new and comparable employment without moving?' Participants were asked to respond within a range from 1 (very hard) to 5 (very easy). The scores were then used to link perceived employability to two independent variables. A basis for comparison was given by the longitudinal design; the authors had access to two Swedish national surveys from the years 1993 and 1999.

The comparative element in the thesis at hand is not constituted by different time frames, but the distinction between freelance and organizational jobs. Therefore, the following two items were used to measure employability: 1. Freelance self-perceived employability: ‘How easy is it for you to land enough assignments to keep freelancing your main job?’ and 2. Organizational self-perceived employability: ‘How easy would it be for you to acquire comparable employment in an organization without moving?’ The response alternatives ranged likewise from 1 (very hard) to 5 (very easy).

Control variables. Gender (0 = male, 1 = female) and age (0 = 15 – 30 years old, 1 = 31 – 45 years old, 2 = older than 45 years) were included as control variables.

Education variable. Education was measured by an item asking for the highest level of education completed. Thereby, it was distinguished between none (coded as 0), high school (coded as 1) and university degree (coded as 2).

Location variable. The participants were asked to indicate the distance of their place of residence to the next urban area. Urban area was defined as a city of more than 100 000 inhabitants, of which there are 188 in the Philippines (Census of Population, 2015). To avoid misunderstandings, this definition was added to the item in brackets. Distance was assessed in kilometres (range). Answers varied between 0 and 170 km, whereby 94 per cent of participants lived in places that were in a range of 0 to 100 km from an urban area.

Methods of Analysis

The dependent variables are Likert type data, which means that, even though the numbers assigned to them are equidistant, the responses that they represent do not differ from each other in the same, or even any measurable, way (Sullivan and Artino, 2013). Therefore, they are ordinal and the use of parametric techniques for the analysis is restricted, or at the very least heavily debated in research. That said, several quantitative studies of perceived employability use linear regression (see Kinnunen et al, 2011; Berntson, 2008) because it allows measuring the precise correlation between two or more variables. Goodness-of-fit measures on the other hand, such as the chi-test which also finds application in previous research (Berntson, 2006) cannot specify the strength of a relation. They do, however, present a reliable method for testing if the chosen variable

significantly explains variance between two groups (Bryman, 2012, p.349). Still, variance between the categories needs to be assessed. Regarding the independent variables, the initial setup intended two categorizations, one based on the education variable and another one based on the location variable which was to be portioned into 'city' and 'province'. At a later stage, it seemed also feasible to keep the distances in kilometres like they were given by the participants, and make it the scale continuous. Therefore, the methods of analysis will differ between the two independent variables. Generally, variance analysis tests the influence of an independent variable on a dependent variable by comparing the dependent variable's values across categories of the independent variable. Thereby, it allows for comparisons of groups in terms of outcomes (Creswell, p.164) and, more importantly, makes it possible to test for significance using, for example, chi-square. A significant chi-square test would, for example, indicate a difference in employability between high school and university graduates. Previous research on perceived employability has used it to compare over samples in a longitudinal design (Berntson et al, 2006), proving its suitability for group comparisons in the field.

In a first step, the relationship between educational status and perceived employability was tested. The education variable is nominal, thus ordinal regression procedures were used. The chi-square test informed about the significance of the relation to both freelance and organizational employability. In step 2, I examined the explanatory power of the independent education variable, catering to sub-research question one. For this purpose, Pseudo R-square values were calculated. These showed how much of the difference in, respectively, freelance and organizational employability could be predicted by educational status.

In step 1b, the chi-square test was conducted for the location variable, which therefore was coded 0 = city and 1 = province. Urban area was defined as 20 or less kilometres distance from the city, individuals who entered a distance 21 kilometres or greater were categorized as rural population. Somewhat compromising the sequential nature of my research design here, I decided on this definition after the interviews highlighted tedious traffic and lacking transport connection as a barrier between the urban and rural population when it comes to taking organizational opportunities in the inner-city. Analog to step 2, a step 2b investigates the explanatory power of the location variable with respect to organizational and freelance employability by means of Pseudo R-square calculation. Depending on the ambiguousness of the results, the initial interval

measure of the location variable moreover gave the opportunity for plotting and sought out linear regression procedures. In a third step, the control variables were tested for their significance in relation to both employability measures using again a chi-square test.

4.2 Qualitative Methods

Semi-structured interviews

The qualitative analysis bears on data collected in six semi-structured interviews conducted in September and October 2017. The interviews lasted a little more than half an hour on average and were carried out in an open framework. A flexible interview guide (see Appendix C) allowed for two-way communication and a selective focus. The purpose was to enable an open dialogue between the interviewees and the researcher. Thereby, the reality of the interviewee could be assessed through his or her own descriptions (Kvale, 2007). It left room to respond to the interviewees' subjective appreciations of particular aspects of their 'lifeworld' (Kvale, *ibid.*, p.8), and thus made for a suitable instrument to deepen understanding of perceived employability in the context of the case.

Interviews were held via telephone and skype and in a one-on-one setting (i.e. no group discussions). After their transcription (Appendices D to I), the interviews were analysed by grouping and cross-comparing the data with regard to the insights the quantitative analysis provided, as well as themes from previous research and case-related literature. In methodological terms, this goes by the name of qualitative content analysis (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

Sampling

The participants of the qualitative interviews were purposefully selected to represent categories that have proven relevant in the survey analysis. Assuming generalizability, it was not important whether the individuals had also responded to the survey, but they had to be clearly classifiable into a category (e.g. graduate from an urban area). The conceptual focus on perceived employability naturally made freelancers themselves the most relevant group for data collection, rather than extending the focus to clients or organizational employers. Implicitly, this serves to avoid the 'top-down' bias that employability research has struggled with in the outsourcing sector

due to difficulties in gaining access to workers (Thite and Russel, 2010; Beerepot et al, 2013), and which has also been problematized in connection with the attempt to measure actual employability (Harvey, 2001; cf. Chapter 2, p.9).

4.2.1 Using Qualitative Data to Test Validity

Ensuring validity is one of the challenges of explanatory sequence mixed method research (Creswell, p.225). Although seen on its own, qualitative validity (also described as trustworthiness or credibility) would be one of the strengths of an interview study (p.201), the fact that this thesis decides to focus on the specific themes of education, location and career with view to precariousness and may thus neglect other important ones is a risk for validity. Hence, the qualitative analysis will begin with its testing. For this reason, the interview guide had to be developed after the quantitative analysis.

As noted, the interview data will be analysed using qualitative content analysis. This involves reorganizing the data by accentuating chunks and assigning key words to it, in other words, coding it (Creswell, p.198). Other than in purely qualitative research, these key words are likely to bear reference to survey results, which makes it all the more important to select the right focus in the interest of validity.

Regarding validity, Rothwell and Arnold's scale was tempting because the authors tested their framework by successfully distinguishing perceived employability from professional commitment and career success. Thereby, they proved content validity in the sense that the items measured the content they were intended to measure, and construct validity in the sense that items measured a hypothetical concept (Creswell, p.160). The systematic testing using principal component analysis arguably ensures external validity, or generalizability, something often denied experimental studies (Gerring, 2012). Since however, for reasons outlined earlier, the scale is not applicable to this case, validity needed to be addressed in a different way.

Additionally, this thesis translates insights from previous research into the distinction between freelance and organizational employability. As Munck points out: "If anyone wishes to argue for a new term in the social sciences they need to show that it is both analytically rigorous and empirically robust". Though the term 'freelance employability' is not new in its analytical usage – it has been researched by Süß and Becker before (2013) and also follows rather naturally

from applying employability to the case context – it has not yet been defined in demarcation from organizational employability. This underscores the need for a qualitative validity test and, thereby, for a mixed-method research design.

4.3 Methodological Considerations

It is part of empirical research to not only describe the methods but also to scrutinize them and comment on them where necessary. I have at length argued for a mixed method approach as the best choice for this thesis. Yet, both quantitative and qualitative analysis rely on self-reports, respectively self-perception, as their data sources. This is desired insofar as it equips this thesis with a new perspective to put the analytical term of precariousness to test. However, it brings with it two behavioural biases: First, a possible overconfidence bias in the survey responses. Second, a variation of the social desirability effect in the interview data. A third methodological consideration then concerns the quantitative analysis and a potential omission bias.

The problem of overconfidence can affect the relationship between educational status and perceived employability. If participants believe that freelance success is only dependent on their (social) skills and abilities (and the qualitative data suggests that most do) and they predominantly evaluate them as good, the difference between high school and university graduates will be marginal. On the other hand, participants could believe that organizational employability depends on how others (f. ex. recruiters) assess their qualification, that is how well they can signal their abilities, independent of how good their abilities actually are. Here, university graduates could express more confidence in their signalling because they want to look upon their education investment as reasonable, although both groups might in fact consider themselves equally employable. Generally, behavioural factors are likely to influence the results of self-reported survey data (Bryman, 2012, p.271).

The second potential limitation is given by the freelancers' commitment to their job choice, and a possibly resulting inclination to justify their decision by presenting the work positively. Additionally, the fact that the phenomenon of freelancing takes centre stage in the interviews might flatter interviewees with long-time involvement in it, and lead to idealized descriptions. It is therefore of utmost importance to “continually check, question, and theoretically interpret the findings” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.170). While behavioural bias in interview research shall not be underestimated, its impact on validity must not be overestimated either. Through awareness

of how topics are presented to the interviewees and the usage of control questions “objectivity about subjectivity” and therewith validity can be achieved (ibid., 242).

A problem concerning the quantitative analysis is that of omitted variable bias. If unknown factors make it more likely for certain people to take a higher education, and these same factors also are positively related to self-perceived employability, the relationship measurement will be biased. Specifically with regard to education, research has found this bias to be rather prevalent because ability was found to be related to both success in education and job success, earnings and similar variables (Pischke, 2016). This is primarily a problem with linear regression procedures, which are not used in connection with educational status in this thesis, yet highlights the possibility of spurious relationships.

Chapter Five: Quantitative Analysis

The following survey analysis bears on 166 individual self-entries that have been gathered through email and website contacts. These are all answers received, net of one freelancer who was not from the Philippines and six individuals who did not consider freelancing their main occupation. Moreover, six responses were from freelancers who did not finish high school. These were considered in the analyses with location as the independent variable but not in those with educational status as independent variable, since $n = 6$ is generally regarded as insufficient for forming a category. All participants responded to the two employability items, which – discerned into freelance and organizational employability – made for the dependent variables. The analysis distinguishes roughly between four types of participants: Graduates from an urban area (52), graduates from the province (37), high school graduates from an urban area (36) and high school graduates from the province (40). Table 1 presents the results for freelance employability.

Table 1. Freelance Self-Perceived Employability

Education			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
High School Graduate	Valid	1	3	3,9	3,9	3,9
		2	6	7,9	7,9	11,8
		3	34	44,7	44,7	56,6
		4	29	38,2	38,2	94,7
		5	4	5,3	5,3	100,0
		Total	76	100,0	100,0	
University Graduate	Valid	1	1	1,1	1,1	1,1
		2	7	7,8	7,8	8,9
		3	45	50,0	50,0	58,9
		4	36	40,0	40,0	98,9
		5	1	1,1	1,1	100,0
		Total	90	100,0	100,0	

Even though the frequencies alone do not reveal much, it is visible at a first glance that the response ratios vary less than those in Table 2, which summarizes the findings for organizational employability.

Table 2. Organizational Self-Perceived Employability

Education			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
High School Graduate	Valid	1	10	13,2	13,2	13,2
		2	16	21,1	21,1	34,2
		3	30	39,5	39,3	73,4
		4	20	26,3	25,3	98,8
		5	1	1,2	1,2	100,0
		Total	76	100,0	100,0	
Degree Holder	Valid	1	2	2,2	2,2	2,2
		2	10	11,1	11,1	13,3
		3	36	40,0	40,0	53,3
		4	32	35,6	35,6	88,9
		5	10	11,1	11,1	100,0
		Total	90	100,0	100,0	

The result of the chi-square test – conducted as a first step adhering to the research design – indicates a higher level of perceived organizational employability among degree holders as compared to high school graduates. The difference between the two groups is significant and, as Table 1 shows, the positive influence of university education considerably stronger than anticipated. Thus, the doubts as to the benefits of higher education regarding career development in the Philippine context did not substantiate. More specifically, a Pseudo R-square (Nagelkerle) value of 0.09 indicates that the difference in educational status accounts for 9% of the difference in organizational employability. Against the background, that the quantitative analysis also showed that location predicts organizational employability, the model should be considered relevant. Both variables together account for 20.7% of variation.

For freelance employability, the chi-square test indicates that the null hypothesis must be approved. In other words, the effect of educational status is not significant ($p=0.767$). Thus, educational status does not predict freelance self-perceived employability.

Step 1b intended the same procedure for the location variable, grouped into city and province inhabitants. For organizational employability, the model fits ($p=0.0$) and, as for step 2b, explains 12.2% of variance (Nagelkerle Pseudo R-square=0.122). Individuals from urban areas are hence significantly more likely to perceive themselves as able to find organizational employment. For freelance employability, the model fits less than ideal ($p=0.023$) and accounts for a relatively small proportion of variance (Pseudo R-square=0.034). This could be because a binary categorization, which was implemented to test for variance using ordinal regression procedures, treated all distances greater than 20 kilometres alike (cf. 4.1, p.35). Figures 2 and 3 plot the relation between organizational and freelance perceived employability. Generally, the high number of participants not from the city highlights the importance of freelancing as a job opportunity in rural and not-industrial areas. To understand the importance of location in greater detail, it was therefore treated as a continuous variable here, meaning that the distance in km from an urban area was not used to define categories but as an interval scale.

Figure 2. Organizational Self-Perceived Employability and Distance from Urban Areas in km

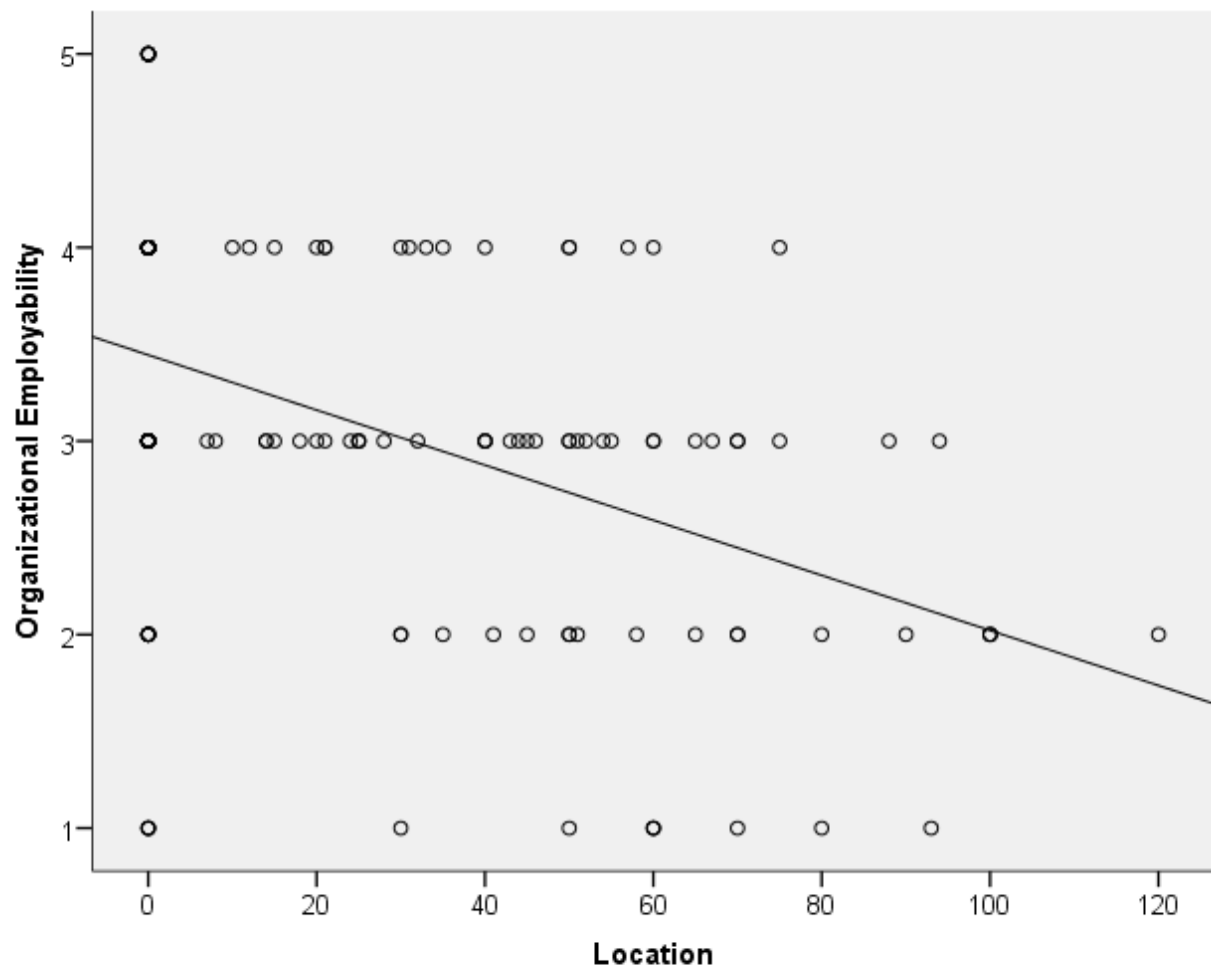
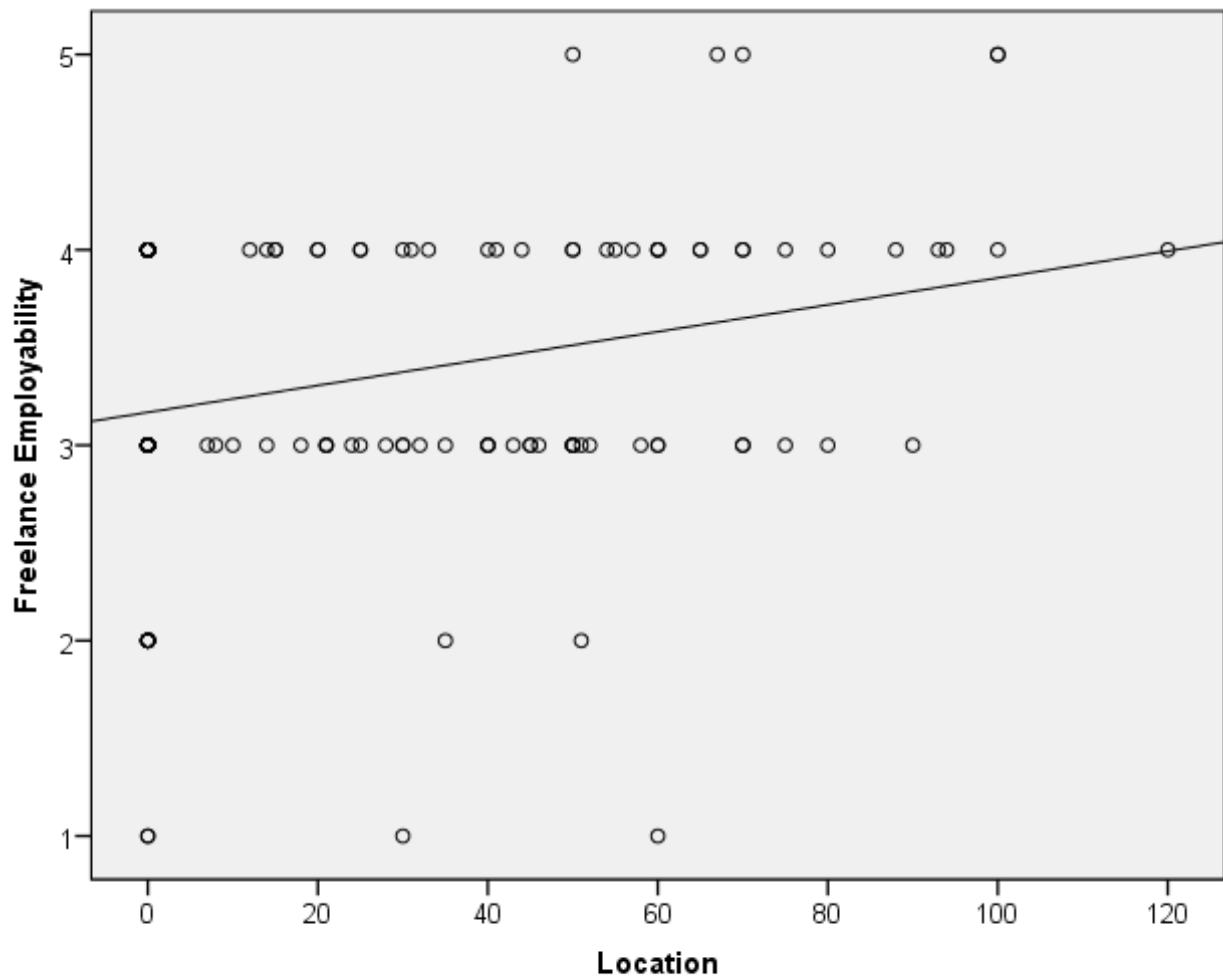


Figure 3. Freelance Self-Perceived Employability and Distance from Urban Areas in km



The graphs highlight that organizational employability, in line with what the ordinary regression yielded, significantly decreases, whereas freelance employability increases. It is important to note that the regression line used to illustrate the overall trend is a feature of linear regression and its applicability is limited due to the nature of Likert data. However, considering previous uses of linear regression procedures in empirical research on perceived employability (Berntson, 2008) its use for illustrative purposes can be justified (cf. Chapter 4.1).

Finally, the control variables were tested for their influence on perceived employability. Gender's proportion of explained variance was 0.028 with $p=0.042$, while age did not significantly predict freelance employability. Organizational employability was neither predicted significantly by gender nor by age group in this sample. In that regard, it must, however, be noted that the age groups were represented in different frequencies with only 18 individuals being over 45 years old. Therefore, it can be assumed that individuals in this age group are in general not as prone to engage in online freelancing than younger persons, and those who do freelance are likely to exhibit characteristics, e.g. pronounced computer skills, that are more similar to younger freelancers' attributes than they are typical for their age group.

5.1 Insights from the Quantitative Analysis

The results from the survey analysis suggest that freelancers from provincial areas perceive their employability on the freelance labour market more positively than freelancers who live closer to urban areas. This correlation persists when education is taken into account. These findings support the ICTO's portrayal of freelancing as a new "career opportunity for areas where there is high population but low employment due to lack of industry investors" (Delfin, 2015). This leads to the preliminary conclusion that the relative frugality of other perspectives on the local labour market in comparison boosts individuals' perception of their opportunities on the freelance labour market.

Education was measured in three categories, two of which – high school diploma and university degree – were represented in sufficient numbers to make conclusions. Differences in educational status did not translate into variations in self-perceived freelance employability. Thus, other factors need to be explored using qualitative data. Organizational employability was significantly predicted by both location and educational status. This finding contradicts the assumptions made as to a limited benefit of university education for the less affluent (cf. p.27). Based on the quantitative results, it must be considered a worthy 'investment' into organizational employability. Thereby, it highlights the question why freelancers educate themselves, if the aspired degree only benefits their job chances at companies, which they, however, voluntarily pass up.

Chapter Six: Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis bears on data collected in six semi-structured interviews conducted in September and October 2017. The role of education worked out from the survey analysis provided the starting point for the selection of the interviewees. Its stronger influence on perceived organizational employability compared to freelance employability raises questions as to why individuals who see themselves in the position to take a job at an organization decide against it, although freelancing as an alternative is thought to go with employment and income insecurity. Hence, for the qualitative analysis two groups are considered most important for gaining additional insights into the situation of freelancers in the Philippines. Interviewing freelancing graduates from urban areas shall explain why, despite both their suitability for and the availability of organizational jobs, they prefer freelance work. How do they perceive the insecurity that comes with it, how does their decision relate to the theories of Guy Standing and Boltanski & Chiapello? As a second group, freelancers from provinces have been chosen in order to understand their labour market prospects and the role freelancing plays in it. The quantitative analysis indicates a positive outlook on their part, but has limited explanatory power regarding labour market insecurities and influencers of employability in the future. Organizational opportunities for individuals from remote areas can be assumed few and far in between. Shall we then look upon freelancing as the least evil, or – as the Philippines' Department of Science and Technology (2015) proclaims – the work form of the future for the rural population?

6.1 Validity Test

The qualitative analysis offers the chance to test the validity of the survey results. It also allows to examine assumptions made for the quantitative analysis. First, I test if the chosen items surveyed self-perceptions of the participants' employability that resemble those of the interviewees. The applied quantitative methods were based on the premise that employability could be discerned into freelance and organizational realms. This has influence on the results because no item addresses employability in a general way. It further is essential to point out that this distinction does not come out of thin air. The literature review and case-related information suggest a growing gap between long and short-term, formal and informal or skilled and unskilled labour markets, with different groups of workers active on either, at times referred to as classes. Arguably, it is a

defining trait of the precariat that its members are limited to certain types of jobs. It must, however, be stressed once again that employment in an organization does not imply either long-term, formal or skilled work. Rather, it needs to be confirmed whether and how organizational and freelance work are distinct from each other in the context of the case, and whether and how such a distinction finds expression in the process of obtaining work.

To test if the findings made on the basis of this assumption correspond to the reality of freelancers, I asked all interviewees to compare their chances to find sufficient assignments as a freelancer to those of getting hired by an organization doing roughly the same tasks. In some situations, it was more expedient to ask the interviewees to apply a descriptive perspective focused on the work itself. Examining the freelancers' perception of their own work in comparison to how they experienced or imagined organizational work gave me the possibility to, first, conclude on differences between the work types in the context of outsourcing in the Philippines and, second, gather information on motivations to be applied to the discussion of sub-research question three. Finally, I followed up by asking the interviewees how rigid they estimate the difference in terms of income.

6.1.1 Freelance Versus Organizational Labour Market?

The need for dependability shapes the public image and literature's view on office jobs in outsourcing target countries. With many white-collar jobs being in business process outsourcing, such as customer service and IT support, the reliability promise given by the offering companies to international business clients can be expected to translate into pronounced control of employees. Hence, the application process could be used as a way to test the applicants' commitment, besides their ability. A freelancer with BPO experience describe it as long and tedious:

“In a regular call centre job you will be interviewed eight times and you will undergo about five examinations for you to be considered as one of their candidates”

Graduate from Manila

Adversely, a freelancer from the regional city of Dumaguete, which despite its small size prides itself to be a ‘Tholons’ 100 outsourcing destination’ (cf. p. 24), perceives the hurdles to land a stable job as less high:

“I think it's not that really very competitive now compared to maybe like seven years ago when I tried applying, because now I think there are some areas wherein they only require a candidate to be a high school graduate. Whereas during my time, you really have to be a Bachelor's degree holder to be able to get in.”

“They are really growing, and they need more people and since I think, a lot doesn't really like this area, so they have to find ways to recruit people. They are even offering sign-up bonuses”

High school graduate from Dumaguete City

This highlights that the ‘demand for adequate human capital’ (cf. Chapter 3), which motivated companies to move to second tier cities, has not been fulfilled to a degree that would warrant an extensive selection procedure. Yet, in Manila, where the competition evidently remains fierce, companies pressure for functional flexibility. One interviewee laments the firms’ intervention in his job preferences, and applauds freelance clients for not doing so:

“They are going to test you in ways that are not related to the job that you are applying for. Mainly, they have this process that you need to take all those examinations and then afterwards they are going to decide what particular position they are going to offer you. [...] At least, in a freelance work you will apply for a specific job posting and then you going to fight for that application and then you are going to be tested according to the position that you are applying for. Unlike in the big companies [where] they are going to scrutinize you according to your communication skills, application skills and that's really hard”

Graduate from Manila

After the application process, which some interviewees have successfully passed through and started a job in a local branch, the everyday work follows. How does this compare to the interviewees’ work life as freelancers? Hereby, both comparisons rooted in own experiences and perceptions of work in the organizational sector from an outside perspective appeared relevant. Approached for these, freelancers gave the following answers:

“In regular companies, you have your superiors. They’re always there to be monitoring you. You also have some subordinates, and you have to monitor them whether you like it or not. You have to be there and deal with them in your day-to-day activities”

Bachelor’s degree holder from Dumaguete City

“The preparation to go to the office, and the pressure that your team leader might not be satisfied with your performance, all of these pressures are not there when you're a freelancer”

High school graduate from Dumaguete City

This view of available organizational work stretches across almost all interviews, thus invites to further investigate career ambitions and motivations later during the analysis. Moreover, the observations are in accord with assumptions made for the quantitative analysis, as well as with its findings in the way that employability may indeed vary for the different labour markets for several reasons: While job suitability has to be proven to organizational employers only once and quality is then ensured by close direct supervision, freelancers see themselves as freed from the latter while being permanently responsible for the former, as they have to find ways to convince new clients persistently. This was, though, rarely considered disadvantageous by interviewees:

“Here as a freelancer, I have the freedom to choose tasks where I can feel most effective and I can have full control of my work time. I have an irregular time of working but I am a workaholic”

Bachelor’s degree holder from Dumaguete City

This underscores an appreciation of autonomy that aligns with the New Spirit of Capitalism (Chapter 2.2, p.14). Flexibility is rather framed as freedom from hierarchies and formalities than as an intrusion into private life.

In the light of flexibilization in the economy, smaller companies acting as sub-contractors via freelance portals have formed. One freelancer aspired this business model:

“About a month ago I created my own agency of freelancers. My job is actually a project manager, I bid for projects and then I give assignments to my virtual assistants.”

Graduate from Manila

This development, albeit not surprising with view to theory, may be seen as a merge form undermining the distinction between freelance and organizational work. On the one hand, freelancers are given barely more security because the companies are too small to guarantee for enough orders, on the other hand, they cut in the freelancers' income to finance themselves. Yet, their appeal to business clients and therewith their share is limited because, again due to limited size, most appear unable to provide the reliability BPO companies offer at a lower price, which would have been their competitive advantage. Thus, some interviewees would consider them as additional sources for assignments while generally a preference for independent contracting prevailed:

"I know of some who are managing those, I have not really tried working with them"

High school graduate from Dumaguete City

In sum, the interviewees' perception of organizational work aligns itself with the understanding gained from previous studies (see Thite and Russell, 2011; Ng and Mitter, 2005) that provided for the underlying premises. How, in comparison, is the view on freelance work, and what it takes to be successful? First, the entry barrier is low. Everyone can create a profile and offer services. Experience was generally considered more crucial than formal education, backing the quantitative results, which merely found a weak relationship between educational status and freelance employability.

"There is a big difference when it comes to rules and regulations. As a freelancer you can go ahead and work, with flexible time. You just have to make sure that you will meet the requirements of the client and you will meet deadlines. Unlike the other one [A/N: organizations], where you are going to be tied up with a certain period and schedule"

Graduate from Manila

While the income level was accentuated positively by many interviewees in comparison to jobs in organisations even before the topic was introduced, wage was also portrayed as a predictor of success in terms of finding assignments. Therein, it partly confirms a sub-conclusion of the quantitative analysis whereby freelancers from rural areas perceive their employability as higher because they are better acquainted with lower wages and more willing to compete on them. The effect might be reinforced by a quicker acquisition of experience as a result of this competitiveness

in the low-end sector, and hence further increase employability. I will revisit the bearing of experience and reviews in section three.

“I was getting whatever jobs I can get. They didn't even have a minimum hourly rate before, so you can just put the lowest rate you can possibly put there just so you can get your experience”

High school graduate from the province

As outlined above, the income level was framed positively particularly in comparison with organizational employment. Inferences as to actual differences in income are, however, boneless, for empirical data is lacking on the link between the expectable income of freelance or organizational work and the respective fields the freelancers work in. Yet, the appreciation of income levels is of interest in relation to the perceptions of how effort pays off:

“All you need to do is build up your nice portfolio and nice feedbacks from you previous clients and as long as the job post fits your skills, they will hire you instantly.”

Graduate from Manila

“Right now, I would say I am making five to six times more than what I was making in Manila, and considering that I am not even traveling anymore, that I don't even have to wake up early or set an alarm. Plus, if I want to travel, I can just bring my laptop with me and work in a hotel or resort or whatever island.”

High school graduate from the province

Thus, most of the interviewees expressed the feeling of making ‘a good deal’, of investing their time gainfully. This was rarely articulated on an absolute level but relative to the working conditions. That is, the freelancers were not primarily cheering for their high income *per se*, rather did they highlight the fact that they could earn well *without* bowing to strict hierarchies, direct supervision and control. This reveals an appreciation of what, in the spirit of the artistic critique of capitalism, can be called autonomy. It shall be deeper analysed later in this chapter and in the discussion.

The need for a qualitative analysis goes beyond validity testing. The quantitative findings raised questions that need to be answered in order to comply with this thesis’ purpose of understanding

the position of freelancers in the labour market and class structure. These concern both dimensions: the predictors, that is education and location as variables effecting perceived employability, embedded in the labour market dichotomy of freelance and organizational work, and the career dimension around motivations and preferences.

The survey analysis suggested, *inter alia*, a significant relationship between having a university degree and perceived organizational employability. This begs the question: Do the motivations of graduates who freelance differ from those of non-graduates? Given that a greater share of participants with a degree were convinced of having more opportunities outside the freelance market yet considered themselves freelancers, do they prioritize other factors over the greater stability the organizational labour market has to offer? Freedom and autonomy have become attributes of a satisfying job and motivators to engage in economic activity (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2004). Along these lines, the combination of quantitative findings and a recap to theory tentatively suggests that freelancing graduates have embraced ‘the new spirit of capitalism’. That is, they would value the new forms of work along the lines of artistic critique, i. e. flattened hierarchies and self-organization, higher than the loss of security. Therefore, the investigation of motivations, followed up by a comparison between graduates and non-graduates will serve as a focal point of the interview analysis.

Regarding predictors, the qualitative analysis shall investigate the reasons for the apparent importance of location for freelance employability. The survey analysis found that greater distance from an urban area correlates with greater confidence in one’s ability to get assignments as a freelancer, independent of educational status. This calls for an explanation of why the lack of proximate industry and, therewith, job opportunities positively influence individual perception of employability on a labour market that is global, hence works according to economic principles and does not pay regard to one’s location. If anything, we would assume a remote location to awake the suspicion of potential clients due to a possibly less reliable internet connection which could jeopardize the progress of projects from the clients’ point of view. One possible explanation, however, is that freelancers from the countryside are – due to the absence of industry – used to lower wages and can be expected to have lower costs of living. Since users of freelance websites decide on their (preferred) wage themselves freely (in the case of Upwork.com a 3\$/hour minimum wage is in place since 2014, based on self-reported working hours), this can create a ‘race to the

bottom' making the lowest bidders the most employable, supposing the same skills. Thus, a generally higher acceptance for low wages could make freelancers from the provinces more employable than freelancers from the city, reflecting itself in their respective perceptions. The best way to test this hypothesis would likely be another quantitative assessment, which in the interest of both simplicity and the limited scope of a thesis was not conducted. Alternatively, the responses given in the context of validity testing shall receive a more thorough analysis. This will be linked to an investigation of a career notion through the interviewees' idea of 'promotion' in their role as freelancers, either in terms of higher wages or other types of rewards corresponding to promotion in organizational employment.

6.2 The Role of Education

A prominent result of the quantitative assessment of employability was the significance of educational status for perceived organizational employability irrespective of location. The reputed weaknesses of the Philippine educational system reviewed in Chapter 3 did not form on the findings. In the light of commodification of education, it had been conjectured that particularly the more affordable among the country's 2300 universities would cater to the less affluent, offering them a 'product' whose benefits would not compare to those of a degree from one of the expensive universities, although both would represent the same educational status. The quantitative results were clear in their rebuttal of this proposition. Thus, the qualitative analysis goes beyond this to understand the role of education in a broader sense. What does it mean for people to have or to not been university educated? And, since education does not predict freelance employability, what does it take to land a client as a freelancer?

During many interviews, I thought to have discerned a notion of esteem with regard to higher education, that, in the absence of a clear career plan, motivated interviewees to go to college. Upon reading carefully through all of the transcripts again, no quote clearly documented this impression of mine, as against several that underscore a degree's importance for organizational employability.

"Most of the companies here only hire university graduates. So that is why it is hard for an individual who has only high school degree. They have a hard time to compete with other people or other professionals, so it is actually a necessity"

Graduate from Manila

The responses were ambiguous regarding the motivational effect of this. While making themselves more employable for the corporate world was an incentive for some, several interviewees made clear that motivation on their part was not needed, since the right for decision did not reside with them.

“What’s the point of going to school? But my dad wants me to go to school. He wants me to finish and go get a degree or something.”

Bachelor graduate from Cebu

As for the role of educational status in freelance employability, the interviewees widely agree on its relegation to a second place behind experience and its manifestation in the form of reviews. This serves to explain the quantitative findings.

“[I am] not actually very confident because I am a graduate, or I have a Master.”

Graduate from Manila

It also relates to the discussion of (hyper)specialization in literature (e.g. Malone, 2013):

“I think infield experiences are more important because you choose a specific kind of job that you are really good with and you could focus more, and you could sharpen the edge of your sword more and more for it”

Bachelor graduate from Cebu, working in IT

A different view that, however, was articulated repeatedly, focused on the application process and the communication with clients. Hereby, landing the client was portrayed as the proper difficulty, ahead of being able to do the assignments themselves – which were described as “mostly easy” and “standard work”. This relates to the advent of soft skills that also is prominent in Boltanski and Chiapello’s new spirit of capitalism. Both self-marketing and the pricing of one’s services (not necessarily in the previously mentioned sense of a ‘race to the bottom’ but alternatively as a way to signal the worth of one’s work), and interpersonal skills were portrayed as vital.

“Actually, interviews in the freelance world are pretty subjective, if they don’t like you in the first place, they won’t hire you.”

Graduate from Manila

It falls into line with Süß and Becker's reference to freelancers as 'one-person companies' (2013, p.224) who decide to take the responsibility of marketing their services, selling and performing them upon themselves. Looking at all interviews, however, the opinions as to which part was the most important for success were manifold. Several interviewees, for example, emphasised the constant need to stay on top of the game by educating oneself about the latest trends – a notion that is clearly related to ability view.

"You really have to learn new things, you might not get it through education, but you can actually learn that online. So, you have to learn the latest, I think that is very important"

High school graduate from Dumaguete City

The positive relation of education to perceived organizational employability renders education a possible 'investment' into a career. Despite the weaknesses of the Philippine educational system described in Chapter Three, a university degree could have been expected to be part of a career plan. However, the quantitative analysis has shown that this relationship is not significant for freelance employability. Consequently, it can be presumed that university education pans out less in a freelance environment. Against this background, interviewees were asked for career plans and the link of academic undertakings thereto. Even though the question was almost suggestive, inevitably inviting to sketch out a smoothed career path, few freelancers did so.

"It wasn't even my choice, but I went in and I decided, you know, I don't even know what I want"

High school graduate from the Province (referring to nursing school)

In this spirit, some interviewees made no effort to conceal that freelancing was a makeshift solution for them initially:

"I am already old enough to not be a priority applicant for any companies. They prefer younger people. That's why I have no choice but to search online and I found that it's better to grab the opportunities online than to keep on applying and get rejected in the end because of being over age"

Bachelor's degree holder from Dumaguete city

Responses were, however, ambiguous as to the momentary status of freelancing in their career plans. While some interviewees were determined to pursue a future in freelancing, other saw it as

a “stepping stone”. It is important to point out that neither view could be comprehensibly assigned to the categories from quantitative analysis. That is, in this small sample, the idea of freelancing as a stopgap did not appear to be more prevalent among, for example, graduates from the city than other groups.

“I see myself as a freelancer”

Graduate from Manila

“This is just a stepping stone. As I do freelance work, in every new task I get to learn a lot in the sense that I also get inspired. Let’s say for example, if I get to work for a client that has a webstore, it gives me an idea of what to do in the future”

Bachelor’s degree holder from Dumaguete City

Lastly, it was of interest to clarify whether some interviewees’ reservations regarding a freelance career stemmed from previously unrevealed drawbacks in terms of the work itself, or doubts as to the sustainability of the market. The latter would not be surprising given, for one, the novelty and adaptability of the online freelancing phenomenon as such, and for another, the recent changes in the portal landscape (e.g. the frequently mentioned acquisition of ‘Odesk’ by ‘Upwork’), both of which have the perpetual potential of disrupting the market and therewith affecting the opportunities of the interviewed freelancers. The qualitative data, however, did fully reveal the role this plays for career plans of freelancers from the Philippines. In part, because only three voiced any kind of concerns, but mainly due to the variety of influence factors the interviewees identified. That is, next to the fundamental difference in perspective of either seeing oneself fully in charge independent of macro-developments or seeing oneself as a ‘victim’ of larger trends, the latter, more rarely articulated, view moreover split up according to what factors were deemed most important to the development of the market as a whole. Prominent among these factors was the role of the state.

6.3 The State and Online Freelancing: Ignorant or Ignored?

As it does not directly connect to the guiding question, nor one of the sub-research questions, the relation of the interviewees to the state was not purposefully addressed in any of the conversations. Yet, it came up reliably.

Chapter Three treated the state's role two-fold. First, regarding the aim to increase the number of freelancers in rural areas (3.3, p.28), which naturally gives occasion to scrutinize its efforts. And second, in the context of legislative proposals to extend security of tenure and social benefits to freelancers, respectively prohibit subcontracting (3.1, p.20). Two interviewees highlighted current the lack of regulation; the following statement sums up the critique:

“It is a long way for freelancers to get working rights with the government. Freelancers here in Manila are not recognized by the government, they don't have any rules to support the freelancers”

Graduate from Manila

Thus, some interviewees see the government as obliged to regulate part of the insecurity that comes with freelancing. Beyond that, the responsibility of the government is seen in enabling people access to the new labour markets by providing specific education:

“It would be better if they would have some programs regarding training freelancers on how to be a virtual assistant, et cetera. I know that there are a lot of people out there who don't have jobs, but they do have skills.”

Graduate from Manila

This view implies a positive outlook on the freelance market globally, by portraying it as willing to absorb these able people; but this process is hindered by a state that does not provide them with the missing capabilities to make them employable. Hence, it is seen as oblivious to their struggle. This somewhat contradicts the critique reviewed in Chapter 3.2 as to the alignment of neoliberal educational policy to labour market demands (p.25). On one hand, this observation may indeed indicate a lack of investment by the government, following its endorsement of freelancing (although mainly referring to job creation in rural areas), on the other hand, the curricular focus

on, for example, English proficiency, is likely to benefit Filipino freelancers' employability in the global comparison.

Almost every interviewee emphasized that freelance income was effectively tax-free for him or her, often in favourable comparison to the income in organizational work.

“In the Philippines, we do not have that. If you want to pay, then good, if not, the government will never know.”

Graduate from the province

“But the thing is, if you work in an office environment in the Philippines you will be paying tax, but in freelancing you are pretty much tax-free”

Bachelor's degree holder from Cebu

The apparent contrast of expectations on the one side and weak sense of responsibility on the other indicates, while of course not exclusive to either the Philippines nor freelancing as a case, low trust in state institutions. The data, however, does not suffice to conclude on this ambiguity. Future research may address the question of whether activity on global online labour markets influences the relationship nationals have to domestic institutions. Specifically if, as in the case of the Philippines, the state's own capability to create jobs is frequently questioned (Chapter 3.1, p.25).

6.4 Graduates from the City: Young and Wild and Free

The group of proficians in Standing's social classification enjoys the freedom of flexible labour markets on two counts. For one, high employability allows them to move freely between jobs without being hit by the same loss in security. For another, they *prefer* this form of work, “the standard employment relationship is not for them” (2012, p.8). Since the quantitative analysis suggests that graduates are more confident in their ability to find a job outside the freelance sector, and the qualitative data confirms this, the attributes of a ‘profician’ or ‘free agent’ are to be recognized in this group rather than in the group of non-graduate freelancers.

With respect to the qualitative data collected through interviews with graduate freelancers, four features protrude:

1. Self-organization is treasured
2. A negative framing of work life in the process outsourcing sector, either from experience or not, regarding hierarchies and supervision
3. Social isolation in freelancing is faulted
4. Income in freelancing is a great factor

The second characteristic was expected but considering the apparent ability to, at least to an extent, move between sectors according to their preferences, this perception is very important. As a deciding factor against working in the BPO sector, the rejection of strong hierarchies mirrors the artistic critique of capitalism as described by Boltanski and Chiapello (2004). One motivator for graduates to choose freelancing is, thus, the opportunity to escape direct supervision into more autonomous work relationships:

“You just have to finish your deadline you can work whenever you want as long as you finish it within the week”

Bachelor’s degree holder from Cebu

“It depends upon the individual if you want to be in a job wherein you have to deal with a lot of people or jobs that you’ll just be on your own”

Bachelor’s degree holder from Dumaguete

This shows that beyond scheduling flexibility, the possibility for self-organization also reflects in the choice of tasks themselves. Both aspects were commonly brought up discussing the distinction between organizational and freelance work. I did not ask the interviewees to evaluate these differences, albeit they often did. Generally, the dimensions in which freelance work was evaluated were artistic rather than social, borrowing once again Boltanski and Chiapello’s terminology. This is, however, not to say that freelancing fully satisfied these expectations, as indicated by the third point. Yet, ‘artistic characteristics’ were more pronounced than expected in comparison to, what could be seen as, the critical social dimension of having to search for new jobs constantly and having to deal with income insecurity. Those were rarely brought by graduates themselves. To control for them, I did so myself in three of the interviews and received the following responses:

“Well, it’s really an issue because as a Freelancer, you don’t have a permanent income. Every time your contract closes, you have to look for another client. If I would be lucky enough to get a

client where the client can hire my services for a longer period of time, then it would be much better.”

Bachelor’s degree holder from Dumaguete

Thus, social dimensions were recognized and drawbacks acknowledged, often, however considered negligible due to overall higher income levels.

“So, it’s like prioritizing or balancing whatever you can do best at a good income.”

Bachelor’s degree holder from Dumaguete

“The pay is much higher when you go as a freelancer. So, there is a big difference when it comes to salary”

Graduate from Manila

This was initially surprising because graduates should be more inclined to compare their income to the – often quite handsome (Beerepot et al, 2013) – wages in the BPO sector, as employment there appears to be a more realistic alternative for them. Also, many interviewees describe keen competition on wages upon entering the industry. It is important to note that each of the interviewed freelancers started their activity on Odesk, respectively Upwork.com, before the mentioned minimum wage of \$3 per hour was introduced. Thus, some went as low as “around 90 cents” per hour to get a foot in the door in the form of reviews.

“A review or a feedback because I was pretty much a newbie and I didn’t have any of that. I had to bid really low, so I could have at least one feedback and I started really small and I’ve grown to \$4.4 per hour.”

Bachelor graduate from Cebu

It appeared to be this idea of progression that leads to a positive framing of wages despite modest beginnings, the confidence in receiving rewards for long-term commitment to the platform, good work and therewith good reviews. The last section of this chapter will investigate this perception further and thereby gather data on the notion of a career which is at the heart of sub-research question 3.

An apprehension of the BPO critique is strongly linked to the first point. By graduate freelancers, self-organization has been highlighted as an advantage freelance work has over organizational work. Therein it must, however, be split into the BPO sector, which provides the bulk of jobs, and other knowledge work in specialized organizations, which have been described more positively in the interviews regarding self-organized work.

But if you would go for web development or other kind of jobs that are more specific in career and technology type, it is more about the skills and the mindset 'I can you do this somehow'.

Graduate from Manila

By the same logic, another interviewee praises the possibility to self-organize as a freelancer, while being aware that comes at the expense of security:

"I am handling some in the morning, some in the night and some in the afternoon. So, I can really fit them in my schedule. One of them is just as needed so if they need me, they're going message me. Right now I think it's very stable but with freelancing you never really know how long you're going have that contract"

High school graduate from the Province

A prioritization of 'pleasant' work over secure work even reflects in the interviewees' critique of freelance work. Social isolation was emphasized as a main downside against organizational work.

"It kind of sucks to be alone for weeks and months and days just working on your own. And not having any friends at all. You don't get to see people."

Bachelor graduate from Cebu

6.5 Opportunities for the Rural Population?

Policy makers from the Philippines' Department of Science and Technology (DOST) have referred to freelancing as an opportunity for the provinces with least industry (2015). The quantitative data obtained suggests that a majority of freelancers from the provinces for their part consider it a relatively promising way to land "new, better or equal employment" as per the used definition of perceived employability. Therefore, it was tentatively concluded that individuals from rural areas

were more flexible in terms of wages and their thus increased competitiveness led to a comparably high confidence in succeeding as freelancers.

However, the inquiry of the Ministry's claim cannot end in evaluating the freelancers' perceived employability. In the apparent absence of other suitable employment, the question remains whether freelancing for the aspiring rural population presents an opportunity or the lesser of two evils compared to unemployment.

Against this background, the qualitative data underlines an appreciation of freelancing as a work opportunity. Most notably, interviewees highlighted independence from tedious and expensive travels and a tough working schedule.

"I had to travel three hours each way, there is traffic and the connection is bad because it is at night."

Graduate from the province

Particularly freelancers without further education saw themselves trapped in the local job market that faces them with the choice of relocating or struggling for employment. The option of relocation further loses attractiveness if accounting for high rental costs in first tier cities, that, according to the interviewees, are hard to keep abreast of even with the relatively generous wages in the BPO sector.

"I quit my job initially because I wasn't getting enough sleep anymore. I was traveling back and forth, and I couldn't even, with the pay they were giving me, I couldn't even afford the rent in the city"

High school graduate from the province

Conflicting with the, especially in comparison to the above outlined drawbacks, very positive portrayal of freelance work that appears to align with the government's ambition of job creation in the provinces, several interviewees are aware of fierce competition on the freelance labour market. With the necessity to continuously enhance one's skills in mind, the risk to fall from favour with the clients is always present:

“Since I was working fulltime in a hospital as well I was not able to enhance my skills on the latest trend which is social media and more on the online business stuff”

High school graduate from Dumaguete City

While this insecurity concerns freelancers from the city as much as it concerns province residents, the pressure of remaining employable will be higher for the latter because they are more reliant on the new job market online.

6.5 A Career in Freelancing: Experience and Reviews as Success Factors

The last section of the qualitative analysis highlights experience and feedback on the portals as determinants of employability for freelancers. While reviews are only one manifestation of experience that was emphasised by interviewees – skill acquisition and increased ability to present oneself well in job interviews being the most prominent others – the qualitative data suggests them as a strong predictor of employability. Regarding freelance employability, the quantitative analysis has shown that educational status is not significantly related, and location explains a limited extent of variation.

All but one freelancer named reviews, feedback or experience as the main ingredient of success. Hereby, I was careful not to suggest it myself. After it was brought up, I revisited the topic in most conversations in the context of career building, investigating the possibility to ‘move up the ladder’ in terms of income or bargaining power through the accumulation of positive reviews.

“It’s kind of hard here with freelancing if you really want to have bigger rates. It’s kind of hard but if you have good reviews and good feedbacks then that would work”

Bachelor’s graduate from Cebu

Freelancers expressed the willingness to temporarily forgo wages in order to receive positive feedback. Thus, already beforehand their belief in reviews as a success factor was strong enough to motivate this decision. The next chapter will discuss this in the context of labour insecurity, in view of the power imbalance between review-seeker and review-giver.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

This chapter seeks to combine quantitative and qualitative findings. Mindful of the particular combination of employability study and mixed-method research design, the following discussion will first devote a short section to the methodological takeaways. Subsequently, insights from both analyses are presented and critically related to previous research. Thereby, this chapter provides the logical foundation for the conclusions on the guiding question and sub-research questions. Despite the demonstrable existence of labour market insecurities, freelancers express a clear preference for independent contracting, fuelling doubts as to the applicability of the concept of precariousness to the case at hand. This preference was explained with an appreciation of the relatively high income and the increased degree of autonomy. In a last section before the conclusion, reputation insecurity is suggested as a new form of labour insecurity beyond those usually considered in research.

7.1 Evaluation of Methodological Choices

The analyses of the quantitative and the qualitative data suggest that a freelance environment elevates the relative importance of the qualitative analysis in comparison to what we see in literature on employability. The bulk of research concerned with evaluating individuals' opportunities on labour markets does so in well-defined borders of what satisfying employment means. Put differently, the clarity over which kind of jobs appear worthwhile for, say, economy graduates, allows for a framework that tests their perceived or actual employability empirically. For these environments, it has been argued that epistemological priority should be given to quantitative approaches (Sumanasiri et al, 2015). The novelty of online freelance work in its current form, however, particularly when embedded in the context of a developing country, and the ensuing uncertainty as to whether this form of work should be considered precarious conflict with this argument, at least for the case at hand.

The survey analysis of employability cannot take this conceptual unclarity into account. Neither can it capture the notion of career for workers. When Berntson (2008) argues that “being able to find new employment is a way of securing the continuance of one’s career” and concludes that “it is in this context that employability has become so important for the contemporary employee” (p.45), the question of how suitable these jobs – or successions of assignments – are

for career development has yet to be answered. The qualitative data collected provided for an improved, albeit still limited in ways that shall be explained, understanding of freelancers' prospects.

It has been outlined that comparing how freelancers perceive their situation to how theory describes social classification in the context of flexibilization and individualization forms the basis for identifying precarious elements in freelancing as a work-form in outsourcing target countries. Therefore, these elements are approached through a comparative assessment of survey and interview results. The following discussion sets out to do so.

It should be emphasised that perceived employability continues to carry great weight in the analysis. Its potential to signify security in an environment that is unstable for workers is pivotal in understanding freelancers' situation in terms of precarity. Even more importantly, it shows how the number of alternatives vary for different groups of workers, with graduates from urban areas more likely to be able to choose between organizational and freelance work, whereas individuals from rural areas are more likely to be dependent on freelancing. This very dependence is an indicator of precariousness (Standing, 2008). It leaves workers in no position to bargain for better conditions, clear agreements or adherence thereto. Adding to this, the qualitative data suggested that this factor is enhanced in cases where job descriptions are vague, and competition intensified. Hence, workers perceive themselves as easily replaceable and highly reliant on a flawlessly reviewed profile. The resulting insecurity is, however, mitigated by a relatively high pay, which all interviewees highlighted.

7.2 What Cushions Insecurity

A good income, even compared to the likewise well-paying BPO sector, makes labour insecurity easier to bear for many freelancers because the surplus can be saved for bad times. Therein, their situation is clearly distinguished from a precarious existence and more reminiscent of Standing's description of proficians whose "bundles of skills" earn them "high incomes on contract, as consultants or own-account independent contract workers" (pp.7). Paradoxically, with the income equality between global South and North in mind, their presence on the global labour market as workers who deliberately give up on labour market securities and an income comparable to OECD countries contributes to precariousness in the North (Dahlmann and Huws, 2006). Unlike proficians, however, several interviewees described themselves as generalists, doing "easy" tasks.

Thereby, they represent a large sector of freelancing websites offering virtual assistance, customer service or product research – fields that do not require the level of expertise that makes proficians indispensable to employers in Standing’s classification for OECD labour markets. Accordingly, it could have been expected that the generic nature of tasks would permit many potential candidates to compete for the same assignments and thus drive down the price. The qualitative analysis indeed indicates that this, to an extent, is the case, expressed by freelancers’ congruent reports about landing clients through starting with extremely low rates. The wages after this initial period, however, allow for a nest egg that makes the implicit income insecurity less threatening than a precarious existence would entail. The explanation for this is likely to be found in the very ‘globalness’ that is peculiar to the freelance labour market. There is good case to believe that the low wage level in the Philippines combined with attributes that most workers from the country share, e.g. high English proficiency, positions many in a niche in which average wages of similarly equipped foreign professionals can be undercut without reaching unsatisfactory wage levels on their part. The literature has found similar dynamics in BPO employees in India, who share both characteristics (Sengupta, 2011). New is that the redeeming effect of salary, respectively rate, also holds for employment and income insecurity, which are considerably less prevalent in the previously researched environment than they are in freelancing.

At this state, it is imperative to emphasize that freelance perceived employability has not been predicted based on personal attributes. That is, apart from location – whose influence has been tentatively attributed to a higher tolerance for lower wages in individuals from rural areas – the quantitative analysis has not put forth profile characteristics, such as experience, number of positive reviews, rates or soft skills, as beneficial to freelance employability. It has, though, found that educational status is barely significant. Thus, the puzzle as to why freelancers educate themselves formally remains unsolved. Partly it can arguably be explained by the decisive power being with the parents, and the assumption that these, as members of a pre-internet generation, base their decisions on traditions or employability determinants for organizational employment.

Ambiguously, all freelancers pointed out fierce competition, while emphasising different attributes as determinative for their success. Almost all considered themselves successful enough, independent of what they indicated as reasons. This aligns itself with the quantitative findings,

raises, however, the question of who loses the competition? The most likely answer seems to be: Everyone. Sometimes. But the comparably generous wages console for temporary ill success.

7.3 Career Progress: Dependencies and Sustainability

The investigation of freelancers' perceived employability in a low-income country told the story of how individuals face employment and income insecurity without lamenting it. Illustrated by the interviewed and surveyed urban graduates' preference for freelancing against organisational work, which offers a higher degree of security, stability seems to lack spell to many freelancers, inducing a comparison to proficans who "live without an impulse for long-term, full-time employment in a single enterprise" (Standing, 2008, p.8). Yet, the qualitative data does not indicate that it is common for Filipino freelancers to possess expertise that would make them indispensable for clients. Therefore, it is important to examine their career prospects. Standing urgently argues that a lack thereof necessitates a 'presentness', or "short-termism", that adds to jobs' precarity (p.18).

Regarding career building within freelancing, the interview data highlight its feasibility, to the point where interviewees doubt that beginners can – given a maturing market – reach their status, since the difference between one's own starting point and current status was perceived as substantial. The surplus expressed itself mainly in experience as indicated by reviews (see Chapter 7.4) and networks. Evocative of Boltanski and Chiapello's ideal type of the never-tiring networker, many interviewees framed their client relationships as mutually beneficial, compensating flexibility (in the sense of availability and reliability 'on-demand') on the freelancers' part with an increased number of opportunities to be offered when the time comes. The necessity to constantly work to the client's perfect satisfaction is somewhat implicit as this decides over the retention in the network. This shows that, in the absence of formal promotion mechanisms, career progress can be and has been achieved, but is fragile.

Berntson argues that flexibility of labour markets forces workers to 'individualize', meaning that "the need for individual strategies increases more intensely" for career success (2008, p.45). This is allied to the shift of responsibility to the individual Standing observed (2008). With regard to the case, however, transferability to outsourcing target countries is limited by the fact that individuals do not perceive this responsibility as a new burden. Put differently, "in this country, precarious work is the norm rather than the exception" (Abao, 2014). While this thesis argues against considering freelancing as precarious work *per se*, this remains the background

towards which individuals interpret their current employment situation. It is in this context, that freelancing is praised by interviewees for its flexibility, room for self-realization and waiver of direct supervision. These are the precise characteristics that were offered workers in OECD countries in return for security. With the recentness in mind that pertains to the outsourcing sector in general and BPO in the Philippines in particular, the security of tenure that it offers its employees is a mere novelty to most, compared to the norm of labour insecurity.

Unsurprisingly, the appreciation of freelancing is most pronounced in the groups of high school graduates and people from the provinces because organizational business process outsourcing is not, or only to a limited extent, available to them. When it comes to graduates from urban areas, whereof a majority does have the freedom to choose, the portrayal of freelancing suffers from an unavoidable selection bias, since the interviewed individuals by implication prefer it to organizational work. The full picture is missing the view of BPO employees with freelance experience. Nonetheless, it raises the question of whether freelancing is or is not seen as a career-less job; whether, for example, freelance work experiences are understood to be valued by organizations and therein helpful towards building a career. Beyond workers' perceptions, further research is needed and must be directed at the mindset of corporate employers. Owing to the novelty of the phenomenon, periods of freelancing may not be interpreted uniformly and could be regarded either as inability to find a corporate job or as evidence for skills that are sufficient to succeed on a global labour market. An alternative narrative is that organizational employers will on their part reduce elements of security granted to the employees in an effort to cut costs and further increase flexibility. Thus, the distinction between organizational work and freelancing – which, as matters stand, is pronounced enough consider the respective labour markets separated – would dissolve, and freelancing work experience become indistinguishable from organizational work experience.

7.3.1 Hyperspecialization and Career Perspectives

Hyperspecialization relates to skill development of professionals and can be defined as “breaking work previously done by one person into more-specialized pieces done by several people” (Malone, 2013), practically intensifying division of labour by means of information technology. The scope of skills acquired by doing the work can fail to suffice the requirements of occupations with a broader sphere and, thus, hamper organizational employability. More specifically, skill

reproduction security, including the opportunity to “make use of competencies” (Standing, 2008, p.10) and the opportunity to gain new ones can be affected. The qualitative data suggested that freelance work scatters skills acquisition, meaning it spurs generalization for some while it leads to intensified specialization for others. It must further be assessed that educational status provides equivocal categorizations to which either extreme could be linked. That is, hyperspecialization may be thought of as a consequence of both comparably high and low educational level, leading to repetitive assignments in Information Technology and web-design on the one, and basic tasks such as transcription on the other side.

The result is evocative of the social criticism reviewed in Chapter 2: Numerical flexibility for firms leads to functional inflexibility for freelance workers. It potentially confines individual labour mobility to the freelance market and a limited set of organizations. Further, it partly confirms Süß and Becker’s (2013) argument whereby outsourcing of technical work to low-wage countries like the Philippines leads to generalization among freelancers in high-wage countries. Their employability benefits less from technical knowledge itself “but rather from knowledge of organizational structures in the company that enable a more efficient use of technical knowledge” (p.230). It is, therein, noteworthy that the projects Süß and Becker found German IT freelancers to be engaged in, in their duration and temporary company-affiliation, clearly resembled Standing’s description of the profician’s mobile work life. Hence, it can be argued that, in high-end sectors, freelancers from low-wage countries compete on expertise – which, combined with firms’ pressure towards numerical flexibility, naturally leads to increased specialization – while freelancers from high-wage countries compete on organisational and process knowledge. Ensuring employability is arguably a more daunting task for the former group because technical knowledge and credentials change faster than organizational structures. This explains why interviewees commented on a constant pressure to educate oneself and fits into a grander theoretical debate about workplace learning (e.g. Garavan et al, 2002; Sefton et al, 1995). A deeper exploration would, though, go beyond the scope of this thesis.

Where tasks are general and little technical knowledge to compete on is expected, freelancers additionally face job insecurity. Interviews revealed that – even if not necessarily to their dismay – generalist freelancers are moved from pillar to post and back in terms of job focus. Tasks change according the preferences of clients. This arguably compromises the ability to retain

a niche in employment. However, freelancers highlight their awareness of the option to turn down a job offer if it is not in line with their preferences, also pointing out that this option is not budgeted for in BPO companies (6.1.1, p. 48)

A general skillset was considered important by interviewees outside of IT, and freelancing described as a means to avail oneself of these. That said, diversified skills acquisition was rarely framed in the context of organizational employability but rather as a necessity to appeal to freelance clients. These findings, nonetheless, relate to what Beerepot et al (2013) describe for the low- and medium-end segment of BPO employees who “carry with them a toolkit of portable skills, enhancing their flexibility and capability to self-sufficiently move through the labour market” (p.836). The empirical data were not sufficient to finally conclude on how specialization within freelancing compares to specialization in organizational work and therefore this thesis lacks the basis to present an own comprehensive categorization into either low-end, medium-end and high-end segment, or into generalized and specialized segment, but the qualitative data suggest that work task focus influences career prospects.

On a related note, the critique of the work itself, irrespective of career implications, has been subverted by the interviewees. Instead of lamenting repetitive work and micro-tasking, a majority rather welcomed the variety of tasks they encountered. Hereby, the small qualitative sample size comes into effect and prohibits a more detailed exploration with respect to different work realms. However, Boltanski and Chiapello’s argument for the *less* exploitative character of ‘Taylorist’ work – that it treated human beings like machines and thus did not force people to transform their personal characteristics into ‘abilities’ that would serve their employability – fades in this case because the work is described as flexible and autonomous. Consequentially, the “subjection of human qualities challenges the separation, inscribed in law, between work and the worker” (2004, p.249).

7.4 A New Form of Insecurity

This section introduces reputation insecurity as an extension to Standing’s conceptualization of insecurity in the context of online freelance work. Considering the importance of recommendation systems in portal-based internet sales of goods and services (for example, Chen et al, 2006), a significant impact of reviews on perceived success (and employability) could be assumed. As outlined before, it was not feasible to accommodate a coherent quantitative test of the predictive

effect of number or quality of reviews on perceived employability in the research design. Therefore, this thesis looked at it from a qualitative and, more specifically, from a career perspective. This was not intended initially but imposed itself on this research due to the repeatedly articulated impression of freelancers to have their career progress ‘stored’ on the portals (mostly Upwork.com) in the form of a positive reputation. This only in the second place refers to the previously mentioned network of past and current clients. In the first, it refers to a good position in the recommendation system, which is likely consulted mainly by potential clients, for whose acquisition there is need to provide for a continuous line of projects. One freelancer aptly summarizes the impact of having achieved such a position:

“I already established my reputation in UpWork. Clients are usually sending me invitations for interviews and I have lots of offers.”

Bachelor’s degree holder from Dumaguete

The qualitative analysis helped to sketch a career pattern, beginning with the readiness to compromise on all factors (Chapter 6, p.60) to gain experience and generate favourable reviews, and leading to a status where employability is high enough to be sure that enough offers will come. In its remuneration of experience, it is not unlike a corporate career. The critical drawback appears to be that this experience can, in fact, not be ‘stored’, even less so than organizational work experience. Rather is it susceptible to a client’s judgement at any point in time. Save the portal’s own dispute resolve mechanism in case misconduct can be proven, freelancers have no leverage. This makes their career progress is very fragile. Reputation always is dependent on the assessment of others, therefore by implication never secure. The actual insight is thus the strong positive influence of status enhancements, i.e. career progress, in freelance working life that is always at stake despite of previous achievements.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

What is the role of employability in understanding precariousness in the case of Filipino web-based freelance workers?

Prior to addressing this question, the results of survey and interview analyses will be summarized. Their application will serve to answer the three sub-research questions:

1. How does educational status affect the perceived ability of freelancers to find new, equal or better employment?
2. How does distance to urban areas affect the perceived ability of freelancers to find new, equal or better employment?
3. Why do freelancers freelance?

In turn, this will provide for a conclusion regarding the role of employability for the assessment of precariousness of online freelance work for Filipinos, the implications beyond this case, and associated propositions for future research.

The quantitative analysis highlighted the importance of educational status for individuals' confidence in finding an organizational job, while negating an effect on freelance employability. Regarding location, organizational employment was considered a realistic alternative to freelancing by urban graduates rather than by graduates from the countryside. Finally, survey data highlighted that freelancers from rural areas perceive themselves as more employable in their current profession than residents of urban areas.

The semi-structured interviews with individuals, both high school and university graduates, from remote locations and graduates from metropolitan areas affirmed the underlying premise that freelance and organizational labour markets are distinct in the context of the case. More specifically, the analysis once again emphasised the lack of organizational employment opportunities for individuals from the provinces. It further indicated that wages were both relatively high – and therefore a determinant in preferring freelance work to stable jobs even for graduates – and a factor freelancers competed on. On this basis, the assumption was pillowed that a lack of employment alternatives, which could arguably lead to lower income expectations, caused individuals from the countryside to be more competitive and thus perceive their

employability as higher than individuals from urban areas. However, the empirical data did not allow for measuring the importance of rates for employability to provide for a final conclusion. An alternative explanation could spring from behavioural theory: In comparison to meagre opportunities in rural areas, the participants may overestimate the benefits of freelancing generally and their own prospects in particular.

Another finding from the interviews was that freelancers have ambivalent views of their career perspectives, are, however, barely concerned about appreciation of their freelance work experience by organizational employers. The former has been attributed to the novelty of the work-form and structural changes in the environment (e.g. the platform Odesk being acquired by and migrated to Upwork.com; p.56), the latter revealed the importance of specialization versus generalization. With hyperspecialization dominating a recent discourse about tasking in independent outsourcing through freelance websites, career prospects had been assumed to be compromised by client pressure to focus on very specific tasks. This would result in expertise on one hand, and insufficient knowledge range for organizational employment or latitude to react on changing trends on the freelance market on the other hand. In this regard, the qualitative data collected was ambivalent, but could justifiably be split alongside specialists and generalists. The second group was overrepresented among the interviewees, though the small sample naturally vetoes a guess as to their overall share. As outlined above, both groups considered their work experience valuable towards possible future organizational employment, due to, respectively, the similarity to tasks in BPO companies for the generalists, and expert knowledge for specialists, i.e. IT.

Freelancers freelance because they prefer autonomy over the strict rules in the BPO industry, which for most emerges as the most realistic alternative. Their appreciation for independent organization of their work day is reinforced by case-specific obstacles that often go with organizational work, such as heavy traffic and odd working hours. Additionally, a freelancer's income compares favourably to wages paid by local companies. The data to a reasonable degree dissented the assumption that 'freelancers freelance because they have to', specifically regarding the case of graduates from urban areas who largely see themselves in the position to choose between organizational and freelance work.

To conclude, the answer to the guiding question is that the labour market situation of freelancers in the Philippines has several remarkable commonalities with that of the precariat as a ‘class in the making’ in OECD countries, without, however, incorporating its urgent ‘presentness’. Rather, the *global* labour market freelancers act on creates a unique environment that values the participants’ attributes, e.g. good English proficiency, higher than the local job market does and therefore compensates it better. It thus manages to combine elements of precarious work, such as income, job and employment insecurity and – for some – immobility, without leaving individuals as vulnerable as the concept of precariousness would suggest, simply because wages are not as low as they could be. By aggregating the demand of clients from all over the world, the freelance labour market has – as of now – determined prices for the services of many Filipino freelancers that exceed those they would content themselves with at a pinch.

The strongest precarious element is given by the constant possibility that one’s employability will be compromised due to a bad review. In an environment, which has completely abandoned any kind of security that goes beyond the contractual details of a single assignment (and even these can be ignored by clients almost *sans consequences*), employability is the only way to establish stability for the individual, and therefore indeed a “factor of control in a flexible working life” (Berntson, 2008, p.1). Against this background, dependency on a clean sheet in terms of reviews leaves freelancers at the mercy of the clients’ caprice at any point in time. Hence, there is a case for adding an element to Standing’s conceptualization of insecurity: Reputation insecurity. The question it issues into is if the effects are sufficiently mitigated by the financial buffer that the relatively generous income provides; that is, if the debilitation of the poverty threat makes them less precarious. Arguably so, with view to Standing’s logic.

The results punctuate the benefits of using the concept of perceived employability in under-researched labour market environments. In the absence of clearly defined career paths, it has proven insightful to relinquish interpretational sovereignty to participants regarding what defines a satisfactory job, i.e. not considering themselves underemployed. This benefit has been augmented by the participants’ and interviewees’ differing evaluation of their chances of landing freelance assignments respectively jobs in companies.

Returning once again to the guiding question, this time with a broader outlook, this thesis concludes that assessing employability substantially aids the understanding of the extent to which

online freelance work is precarious for Filipinos. It does so by feeding the greater theoretical debate about exploitation that reflects in the discussion about the suitability of precariousness as an analytical dimension for working conditions in the global South (for example in Munck, 2013).

Standing's definition of 'precarious' is ultimately based on the assessment of labour insecurity in a number of manifestations (Chapter 2.3, p.16). The existence of each kind of labour insecurity can be established in different contexts. While, of course, different narratives may lead to different conclusions even in the same contexts, one might still argue rather resolutely for the precariousness of a certain work relationship if one was able to back it up by proving the existence of labour insecurities. Thus, this model is transferable and aspires objectiveness. The subjective perceptions of workers would matter relatively little. If they were to diverge from the idea of *suffering* from the conditions, they would arguably have to be relegated to the status of an ideology, expressing a 'false consciousness' in the terminology of Marxist theory. This logic and the associated application of the notion of precariousness to working conditions in the global South is prominent in research and institutions (see Ofreneo 2013; Hewison and Kalleberg, 2012; Kalleberg, 2009; Ulandssekretariatet, 2014 and 2016). While (actual) employability is of great importance to this approach – because it can make the difference between a precariously employed worker and a profician – its significant bearing on individuals is simultaneously the basis for these scholars' social critique. Job security should for the main part be created by labour market regulations, not by individuals' ability to measure up to its constantly changing demands. The underlying assumptions are positivist, assuming the social world to be structured by laws, literal and latent, that determine the fate of the individual rather than his or her own actions. Standing portrays the labour market and capitalism as a whole as a system that predestines the position an individual will occupy in it with some certainty.

Boltanski and Chiapello see their work as part of a scientific current that takes "the normative principles and ideals that people claim to adhere to seriously", which they also are forced to do, if they consider them constitutive of the social order (2004, xi). In this view, the freelancer or any worker must be allowed free scope as to their (self-)allocation in the greater scheme. Her or his own perception is arguably the best evidence the researcher can gather in order to understand their position in the contemporary labour market structure. Are they "both physically and mentally available, reactive and mobile?" Can they "handle the ambivalence and are always

ready to exploit any opportunities that come their way?” (Huault, & Rainelli-Weiss, 2013, p.188). Or do they themselves feel exploited by employers who expect total flexibility and a labour market that forces them to always keep pace?

While reality may conspire against an objective assessment of precariousness, it is hard to deny that labour insecurity on the freelance market is an expression of a pronounced power asymmetry between client and contractor. The negative impact thereof has been conjectured to be offset by the freelance labour market’s higher valuation of a specific set of skills (English proficiency was proposed) as against its value on the domestic labour market. This may appear as a peculiar combination, foreclosing generalization. Yet, freelancers from Ukraine (Skybinskyi and Solyarchuk, 2014) and India may face a similar situation with regard to IT, respectively language and IT, skills. In these environments, scholars may address the notion of reputational insecurity, which this thesis found to be central in understanding career perspectives in freelancing. An in-depth assessment of how freelancers experience reputational insecurity and how it influences their behaviour, possibly even entices them to them to *employ* their human abilities in work relationships, emerges as the most promising assist to future research from this thesis.

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Appendix A: Survey Invitation and Items

Hi _____,

I am approaching you for your insights on freelancing from a Filipino perspective. Your profile on _____ says that you are currently accepting and applying for assignments. If you still live in the Philippines and freelance for a living, your answers will help me a lot to help research understand your situation on the job market. It only takes two minutes to fill out.

Best,

Nico

Survey Items:

Item 1: Do you consider freelancing your main occupation? (Yes) (No)

Item 2: Are you from the Philippines? (Yes) (No)

Item 3: How far is your place of residence from the next city of over 100 000 inhabitants? Please enter your answer in kilometres.

Item 4: Do you identify as: (Female) (Male) (Open field)

Item 5: Which age group do you belong to? (15 to 30) (31 to 45) (45 or older)

Item 6: What is your educational background? (Did not finish high school) (Finished high school) (University degree)

Item 7: How easy is it for you to land enough assignments to keep freelancing your main job? (1: Very Hard) to (5: Very Easy)

Item 8: How easy would it be for you to acquire comparable employment in an organization without moving? (1: Very Hard) to (5: Very Easy)

Appendix B: Survey Responses

For coding key, see Chapter 4

Nr.	Occupation	Country	Location	Gender	Age	Education	Organ. Emp	Fre. Emp
1	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	3
2	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	3
3	0	0	0	1	0	2	5	3
4	0	0	0	1	1	2	5	4
5	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	4
6	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2
7	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
8	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	2
9	0	0	0	1	0	2	5	3
10	0	0	0	0	1	2	5	3
11	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2
12	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
13	0	1	0	1	2	1	2	4
14	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	4
15	0	0	0	0	1	2	5	3
16	0	0	0	1	2	1	3	3
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172	0	0	100	1	1	2	2	4
173	0	0	120	0	2	2	2	4

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Validity Test:

- > Compare chances to get assignments as a freelancer to chances to get a job in an organization doing roughly the same tasks
- > How rigid do you perceive the difference between the freelance job market and the labour market for jobs in organizations?
- > What is a satisfying job to you?

General

- > Why do you or don't you get assignments?

Education

- > What has motivated you to take a university education?
- > How did you finance your education? Did you have to make debts?
- > 'Return on investment': Considering your motivations, were your expectations fulfilled?
- > Does it help you as a freelancer?

Location

- > Are there any organizational jobs for your qualification where you live?
- > How far do you live from where the jobs are?
- > Can you take jobs as an online freelancer that are not available in your surroundings?

Career

- > Do you have a plan for your career?
- > If yes, is freelancing a part of this plan or a necessity for other reasons?
- > In your opinion, is freelancing the work form of the future?

Appendix D: Graduate from Manila

Interviewer: Okay, let's start right away. I have seen on your profile that you have experience in the BPO sector. Working there, did you have regular working hours? Could you do it from home? Or did you have to go to an office?

Interviewee: I could go to the office.

Interviewer: Okay. Maybe then you can compare. Because I was wondering, between jobs in organizations, for example in customer service or generally the BPO sector, and freelancing in the Philippines, what would you perceive as distinctions? Is there a big difference between the two or are they merging into each other?

Interviewee: Yeah, actually there is a big difference between customer service, like you are going to work for 9 hours. The pay is much higher when you go as a freelancer. So, there is a big difference when it comes to salary. And there is a big difference when it comes to rules and regulations. As a freelancer you can go ahead and work, with flexible time. You just have to make sure that you will meet the requirements of the client and you will meet deadlines. Unlike the other one, you are going to be tied up with a certain period and schedule.

Interviewer: What about when it comes to getting the job? Do you think the requirements are different in the freelance market? What gets you the assignments as a freelancer? Or what gets you a job in one of these big companies in the BPO sector?

Interviewee: There is a difference when it comes to the regular job and the freelance job when it comes to the application process. So first, in a regular call center job you will be interviewed eight times and you will undergo about five examinations for you to be considered as one of their candidates. As a freelancer, all you need to do is build up your nice portfolio and nice feedbacks from your previous clients and as long as the job post you can do the job for them, they will hire you instantly. So that is the best part of being a freelancer.

Interviewer: Do companies mostly test you themselves as in these kinds of application tests that you talked about? Or do you also have to show that you have an education and previous experience in these fields?

Interviewee: Actually in a bigger organization it's the [inaudible word] when it comes to entering the company. They are going to test you in ways not related to the job that you are applying for. Mainly, they have this process that you need to take all those examinations and then afterwards they are going to decide what particular position they are going to offer you. So, it is actually different from freelancer. At least in a freelance work you will apply in a specific job posting and then you going to fight for that application and then you are going to be tested according to the position that you are applying for. Unlike in the other big companies they are going to scrutinize you according to your communication skills, application skills and that's really hard.

Interviewer: Yeah, I get this. And as a freelancer, do you perceive it as stress or pressure that you have to fight for each assignment individually? Because you can't really say "Now I got the job, now I can lay back because I know what I am doing" but have to search for assignments all the time.

Interviewee: Yeah, that is correct. We have to look for an assignment all the time. Because not all clients in the freelance world are offering a long term relationship or long term [inaudible word]. Basically they just offer project-based work that would only last for one or two months. Or worse, you are going to have a freelance work for only a couple of hours. Unlike in the bigger organization where they can provide you a long-term employment. That's the difference.

Interviewer: As a freelancer what makes you feel that you are ahead of the game? Do you ever have a certain feeling of certainty regarding what you can do, either because you are really experienced or, in your case, because you have a Master's degree, or great reviews. Is there ever something that gives you a feeling of security that you will get assignments if you want to?

Interviewee: For that question, kind of. I apply in different projects but I make sure that I know what I am applying for. So, if the clients will ask me if I do have experience in this or that, at least I can match their expectations. My key point is that I value the respect and time that my client has given to me, so that's why I am taking each project as valuable. That's why I am giving my very best to all of my projects and at least hopefully meet some deadlines. Not actually very confident because I am a graduate or I have Master's. For every project I am just hopeful.

Interviewer: But you are never really sure.

Interviewee: Yeah, because it depends upon the client itself. Maybe they are going to see your profile, they don't like you, they don't like your portfolio, et cetera. It depends. Even though you know the job, even though it is very simple I know you can do better. Actually, interviews in the freelance world are pretty subjective, if they don't like you in the first place, they won't hire you.

Interviewer: Do you mean that not only in skills but also personally, you would have to get along with the people interviewing you, right?

Interviewee: Yes, that is correct. They are very particular with communication skills. Maybe they would want a virtual assistant who can understand and speak very well, so along the way throughout the project they don't encounter any problems in regards to communication.

Interviewer: Okay, let's come back to education. You said that you don't really feel that a Bachelor's and Master's degree makes you sure. But do you think it gives you an edge, or do you think it doesn't really play that much of a role for freelancing?

Interviewee: For me it doesn't play a vital role in freelance work. As long as you can cope up with the skills that they are asking, you can actually get the job. But it is actually good if you do have a bachelor's degree. At least you will be confident, during the interview you can actually cope up with what they want.

Interviewer: So is it a requirement people would ask for or is it more practical skills they would ask you?

Interviewee: First they will ask you the practical skills, not the education. Can you do web design? Can you do technical writing? They can actually ask the skill itself. They are not very particular with the education background.

Interviewer: So if they ask you in the interview could you do web design, then basically in that moment all that you would have when you tell them "Yes, I can" are your words. So, what plays a role in convincing them that you actually can? Because theoretically, I could tell them that I can do web design and I can't do any of those things. Is it the personal convincing skills that are important?

Interviewee: That is the part where you need your portfolio ready. You are going to send a sample. "Yes I can do web design. If you want, I could give you samples of the websites that I have created

before.” They are going to check that “Okay your website is really nice, so maybe we can collaborate on other projects”. So, you have to have your own portfolio of web designs. For example, you are going to apply for a data entry position, you are going to have the screenshots or the print screens of your data entry samples. You just have to submit your portfolio to them, and for them to see.

Interviewer: Okay. Now I would like to talk about it from a career point of view. Because you are both a freelancer and you have had a regular job. When you think about the future and the career, which do you see yourself more in and why?

Interviewee: Actually I see myself as a freelancer because about a month ago I created my own agency of freelancers. My job is actually a project manager, I bid for projects and then I give assignments to my virtual assistants.

Interviewer: Okay. That sounds interesting. So following from this, would you say that when you got into freelancing, was it kind of a necessity because you didn’t have a regular job at that time? Or was it a conscious choice?

Interviewee: It was actually a conscious choice. When I was a newbie in customer service, there were a lot of people there, my workmates, who urged me to do Odesk. Before, it was called Odesk but now it’s Upwork. I was intrigued because I can earn extra money for us and for our family outside of a regular job. I tried it and I saw that it pays more than the regular job that is why maybe I am shifting careers now.

Interviewer: So, at the time you took your university education, when you did this, did you do it with any particular plan in mind? Like some sort of job you’d want a chance to get?

Interviewee: Getting the education is actually a necessity here in the Philippines. So if you can’t actually finish education you won’t end up like me. Most of the companies here only hire university graduates. So that is why it is hard for an individual who has only high school degree. They have a hard time to compete with other people or other professionals so it is actually a necessity.

Interviewer: To you, I hope it’s not a too personal question, did studying mean a struggle in terms of money? So, if you have to go and get the university education did you have a return model in

mind? Like knowing that you will have to do this and this to kind of get the money back in, do you know what I mean?

Interviewee: Yes. I had to apply for a student loan before so I have to work double jobs to pay my school notes. That's why I like freelancing jobs because this is very helpful for all of us.

Interviewer: Do you feel that convenience is pushing people to freelancing because that they don't have to deal with traffic any longer?

Interviewee: Yes, that's true. Most of us who are currently engaged in freelancing, we don't want that metro manila traffic. That is actually the main thing that we are facing. It's actually exhausting that you are going to work almost three hours before you can actually reach the office and another three hours to go home. That is actually the pain of having a regular work here in Manila.

Interviewer: That is really something. Then I read on the government site of the Philippines that, a few years back, one minister said that she considers freelancing as the work form of the future. Is that something that you could agree with or wouldn't see it all this way?

Interviewee: Actually, I can see that in this time period. It is actually a long way for freelancing to gain working rights with the government. Actually, freelancers here in Manila are not recognized by the government, they don't have any rules to support the freelancers.

Interviewer: What kind of support do they not have?

Interviewee: We don't have support, yeah.

Interviewer: You mean financial support or more as in recognizing that that is a valuable thing to do?

Interviewee: Both. They do not have any rules. The government did not enforce anything to train freelancers. It is actually a job for us that we can grow by ourselves. That's the reality here.

Interviewer: So you would wish for education for freelancers or something like this?

Interviewee: Yes. It would be better if they would have some programs regarding training freelancers on how to be a virtual assistant, et cetera. It would be nice. I know that there are a lot of people out there that doesn't have jobs but they do have skills, but they do not know the freelance world yet. So, it would be nice if the government would support freelancers.

Interviewer: Okay then, last question, what defines a satisfying job for you?

Interviewee: Actually, a satisfying job is delivering output or the target goal of a certain task. In that way, if you do deliver good results all the time, it's not just the money it is actually the feeling of fulfillment or feeling fulfilled. At least you have done a great job to contribute to their company and at least you will be able to show your skills. So that is the most satisfying and fulfilling thing of being a freelancer.

Appendix E: High School Graduate (Nurse) from the Province

Interviewer: Is there a lot of BPO industry or other kinds of organizational jobs that would compare to what you do as a freelancer?

Interviewee: Well, in my location not really. The area where I live in, the province is about two hours away from the city of Manila where most of the BPOs are located. I think the problem here is, when you travel, the traffic in the Philippines is pretty bad and working odd hours is really bad. Considering the expenses for traveling, the traffic and lack of sleep, I guess it's why people resulted to freelancing instead of going to BPOs

Interviewer: Okay I get this. This makes sense. So would you then consider this more like a resort because the traffic is so annoying and also the work? I don't know, or is it more, do you see it as more of an opportunity – something more ...

Interviewee: Yes, actually I quit my job initially because I wasn't getting enough sleep anymore. I was traveling back and forth and I couldn't even, with the pay they were giving, I couldn't even afford rent in the city. Even a decent studio, I couldn't even afford it with the pay they were giving us. So I guess I just decided to quit my job, I think I have been working in the BPO industry for about 3 years? I worked with AT&T, T-mobile, telecommunications companies in the United States, I even got promoted to assistant trainer, but I thought, I didn't want to continue anymore, it was just like the travel was so hard and it was very difficult, so I think this is better.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah I get this, your job is in Manila and you travel 2 hours for the job every day? Back and forth?

Interviewee: Actually it takes 2 to 3 hours every day so it's like 6 hours back and forth.

Interviewer: And if you worked for a US company, you would be assigned to work night time. Right?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: How would you compare application procedures? How would you compare your chances to get close to full time employment as a freelancer, get enough assignments to get by, do as much work as you want to, and on the other side, the application process to get into one of these organizations?

Interviewee: Yeah I get it. Well, with the BPOs in the Philippines, I would say that it is more stable compared to freelancing because, you know, it's an established company. It's a big company. They provide you with healthcare, The government contributions, they already take care of that. When you're freelancing you don't have healthcare. You don't have that assurance that, you know, you have a contract for this amount of you know, days, months, you know, years or whatever. Sometimes, you know, you just wake up one day and your client would tell you, you know there is a problem with the business, we are ending your contract next week. Sometimes it does happen. So when the task or project is complete. Then your contract has ended. And it's a new cycle, you have to find a new client again. So what I did was, instead of getting one full-time client, I got multiple part-time clients and what I did was, I managed them on different hours of the day and so basically now, I am handling four accounts. I am handling some in the morning, some in the night and some in the afternoon. So, I can really fit them in my schedule. One of them is just as they need it so if they need me, they're going to message me and right now I think it's very stable but with freelancing you never really know how long you're going to have that contract.

Interviewer: Yeah I understand this. And how does this reflect on your career plan? When you think about it, does that make you feel insecure? Or do you think it's basically all within your power? If you educate yourself enough or if you get more experience, then you can be sure that you will always be ahead of the market?

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely. Initially when I just started freelancing I had no idea what was going on or what I was doing. Upwork then was called Odesk and then Odesk merged with Elance becoming Upwork. So, before I really didn't know what I was doing, I was getting whatever jobs I can get. They didn't even have a minimum hourly rate before so you can just put the lowest rate you can possibly put there just so you can get your experience. So, I did that and I got clients even at the lowest rate and worked my way up and actually the amount of money that I'm making right now freelancing couldn't compare to, like, how small I was making in Manila. Right now I would say I am making five to six times more than what I was making in Manila and considering that I am not even traveling anymore, I don't even have to wake up early or set an alarm for myself and plus if I want to travel, I can just bring my laptop with me and work in a hotel or resort or whatever island I'm in so it's pretty flexible for me.

Interviewer: That makes sense – Then, in freelancing, you don't really have that formal notion of being promoted but do you, is there some way that you can identify where you say 'Okay now I have moved a step ahead'.

Interviewee: When comparing the kind of job that I had before to right now, being isolated from people sometimes you wish you had a working, good environment. Like you're hanging out with people, you know, you have breaks. But if I think about it, I'm better off freelancing. I don't need a title to tell me how good I am doing. I thought to myself, the money is more important than the title, because, regardless if I was promoted to whatever position like manager or trainer or team leader, if I wasn't even making as much a regular, you know, assistant or an agent then the title doesn't really matter to me.

Interviewer: Talking about what you do, how do you consider what you do in terms of generalization and specialization? Do you think you are doing something that is very very specialized? A specific task? Or do you see yourself more as a generalist?

Interviewee: That task that I'm being assigned to is just a general task. One of the clients that I have, basically, I am just doing some copy-pasting work for a website basically, based on reviews we are just gathering data, gathering reviews from people and putting it in our website. And then the other one is managing a social media account for Instagram. So that's easy as well. And the other one, I do some tracking for shipments in Amazon and then the last one, he is a plastic surgeon in Ohio and they have clinics in Ohio, Manhattan and Ft. Lauderdale. There's a couple of us, you know, some people from Jamaica and the Caribbean and some in The Philippines, the others in the United States so basically we're the people answering the phones for them for the clinics in Ohio-

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Interviewer: That's interesting-

Interviewee: Yeah, that's very interesting and I think I have got an advantage, I got hired because I had a nursing background so it helped because I was able to understand the medical terms, so I think that was, I think this is the only way that I'm able to use my Nursing background and I never really worked in a hospital so this is the closest I can get. But from all the jobs I have gotten I think

this one is the most difficult because of all the medical terms and a lot of explanations that I have to do to people.

Interviewer: That is also a good example for the next topic. Do you feel like your formal education, in your case nursing – is that important generally or are there other things more important to you being successful as a freelancer?

Interviewee: Well, my education. Honestly, for people in the Philippines, because your parents decide for you – generally in Asia, your parents decide what course you're going to take, regardless if you like it or not, you never really had a choice. It wasn't even my choice, but I went in and I decided, you know, I don't even know what I want. I know I wanted to take up arts but I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to get a job in the field of Arts. I wasn't even aware of the freelancing world 8 years ago or like 12 years ago back when I was starting school so I never had that idea and I did what my mom told me to take because they thought if you're a nurse you have better chances if you go to Canada, United States or whatever. So that's that. But I never really practiced it. It wasn't really something that I liked. I was always watching the clock whenever I come into the hospital. I never really liked it, but I did pass the board exam. Academically, I liked the medical side of it but the practice itself is not something that I like, so I don't really care that I'm not in that field anymore. I would honestly take any other kind of job rather than that.

Interviewer: And then, do you have the feeling that in the freelancing world, it doesn't matter which education you took from the beginning? Can you decide for yourself in which direction you're going?

Interviewee: Exactly, and I think, initially, when I started my profile in Upwork, I got hired because of the background I had, previously working in Manila in the BPO industry. Normally, if I'm a nurse and I wanted to choose a different profession, I don't really have any other choice other than going to the BPO industry. I don't have any other, you know, other job that I could get with that kind of background. So, that's what I got. That way, I mean, in the Philippines, the BPO industry is one of the highest paying jobs that we have in Manila so that's what I thought and after getting my experience I thought, you know, maybe I'm going to try working at home as a freelancer and that's what I did. I started at small rates then worked my way up. When I got a lot of experience and got a lot of feedback on my profile. I think now the clients just look at the work that I did online with the profile. Sometimes I give them a background when they do interviews. I tell them

that I did work in a call centre prior to working homebased but that's as far as it goes. They don't really care much about the experience before working homebased. So, basically, the feedback that you get on your online profile, if they can rely on you without supervision –

At this point, the connection broke. Later, the interviewee explained in a message that this was due to a power outage in the area. I tried to reschedule the interview but we did not find a time spot that would allow me to consider the data in the qualitative analysis.

Appendix F: Bachelor's Degree Holder from Dumaguete City

Interviewer: So the first one I want to ask you is: How would you compare the freelance market in terms of getting the job to the organizational job market?

Interviewee: Organizational jobs—you mean... those jobs... that you will be directly working for companies as a regular employee—or something like that?

Interviewer: Yeah, exactly. It could both be BPO jobs or anything else you feel is suitable for you.

Interviewee: Ah, okay. Well, when it comes to searching for jobs, it's much easier when you do it online or as a freelancer because there are platforms that are there, like for example: Upwork. We can easily search jobs. Unlike in companies—they may also use websites to search for possible employees—but for me, it's much easier online wherein the screening is just much quicker compared to those directly working with organized companies.

Well, another thing is it saves time, and more practical because I don't have to go personally to those companies and have to fall in line and then do all those interviews. So, here online, it's much easier because all I have to do is just present all my knowledge and skills and then in a brief interview, the employer can just decide right away. For me, it is just my observation because I used to be a Recruitment Officer before. And what I did was—I've been interviewing around hundred fifty applicants per day. So it's so time consuming actually and with all those processes, yes.

Interviewer: So you've been doing the recruitment for an 'offline' company?

Interviewee: I have been an HR officer for six years for Japanese manufacturing companies in Clark, Pampanga. Actually, these are labor intensive companies because these are manufacturing companies. I have to produce a lot of people to work there for a shorter period of time because many companies would prefer to have just six months work period, and then after six months, hire another set of people just to avoid regularization of employees. So, it's kind of sickening to have that kind of arrangement, but so far, they regularize employees for those who are really good with their work.

Interviewer: Regularized—that means that they get a permanent contract?

Interviewee: Yes they have a permanent contract after working six months.

Interviewer: Okay. And if they don't get it, they just get fired immediately?

Interviewee: Yes... if the superiors would think that they're not doing well, or if the company would see that it's not the good time for regularizing employees, so they just end the contracts of people.

Interviewer: I was also meaning to ask about the opportunities where you live, in Dumaguete City?

Interviewee: Yes, here in Dumaguete—this is a university town and a lot of opportunities are for teaching. But I am a graduate in a Bachelor's Degree and have not taken my Master's degree yet. So, I have difficulty looking for jobs teaching here. Another thing is that, when I resigned from my regular job that was in 2011, I am already that old enough not to be a priority applicant for any companies. They prefer younger people. That's why I have no choice but to search online and I found that it's better to grab the opportunities online than keep on applying and get rejected in the end because of being over age, or whatsoever or the opportunities available are not fit for me or something.

Interviewer: So you say that it gives you opportunities that wouldn't be there in the local job market? If you want to stay where you are the freelancing gives you a chance that you otherwise wouldn't have?

Interviewee: Yes, unless I would study again and take my Master's degree perhaps I can get the opportunity to work here.

Interviewer: Okay. And are you planning to do this or do you prefer working as it is right now?

Interviewee: No, actually I have no plans of taking my Masters anymore. Maybe because I'm an introvert kind of person and I have some passions which I have been repressing before like, I prefer to just paint—or do some creative stuff and make money out of it. It's kind of more fulfilling for me to do than doing jobs that are repeated every day.

Interviewer: Do you have that feeling also in freelancing? In the beginning I would guess that you can more or less choose which services you want to offer, but then I mean there is also a

market. So, do you have to adhere to the demands of the client? Is it easy to balance this or do you have to bend a lot to appeal to the people?

Interviewee: There may be demands of the clients that you may want or not want, but as a freelancer, you got the freedom to choose which projects where you can feel optimally effective and efficient. Unlike, let's say for example, you get hired to a certain company, and you're just limited to those things that are required for you to do. Here as a freelancer, I have the freedom to choose which tasks where I can feel most effective and I can have full control of my work time. I have an irregular time of working but I am a workaholic, that's why I prefer to just stay in the house and do whatever I want to do.

Interviewer: So you said that you have the freedom to basically say "Yes" and say "No" if there's something you're not sure about. But it's also your main job, and you have to get the money in. So, does this make it more difficult to say "No" to things you wouldn't like to do?

Interviewee: So far, it's not really that difficult for me because I already established my reputation in Upwork, for instance. Clients are usually sending me invitations for interviews and I have lots of offers. All I have to do is choose. So if I choose one, then it is my obligation to finish the contract as much as possible. Well of course I get to balance also the profit, because I cannot just get to do much work for a little amount of money. So it's like prioritizing or balancing whatever you can do best at a good income.

Interviewer: Ok. But if you have a lot of offers to choose from then it must be easy right?

Interviewee: Yes. And another thing is that I have clients with whom I have already finished doing their projects—but then they don't want to close my contract, because they would just call me anytime if they have additional tasks for me to do. They are just standing by, so it's okay. If I don't have contracts anymore, then I'll just reach out to them if they have some other projects for me.

Interviewer: Wouldn't it be hard sometimes when you want to go on holiday or something and then they tell you to do this? Isn't it difficult to say "No" even if you would rather just step back for a while?

Interviewee: No, it's not difficult for me to say "No" because I am honest in everything I do. If ever I really can't do it, I'll just have to decline the offer even though it's really tempting. But if I'm going to grab the opportunity—but then I cannot do it well because of some conflicting situations—then, I'd rather say "No", and explain to them. It's okay.

Interviewer: You said before something very interesting about being an introvert, and I was wondering how that relates to application processes as a freelancer because I heard before from other people I talked to that it's a lot about how you present yourself and how you click with the client. Do you feel that this is easy or is it more of a challenge?

Interviewee: No, actually it's more of a challenge if you're working physically in companies, not as a freelancer. In organized companies, you have to be there and you have to deal with all the people. But as a freelancer, it's a remote work. Most of the jobs that I choose are those that I don't have to deal with a lot of people. If possible, I'll just be doing it alone. I prefer to work with less supervision. I deal directly with the boss, so if there are things that I have to present or complain or whatever, I just make a report, and all we have to do is just answer e-mails or chat once a week or something like that. So it's much easier for an introvert personality. Although I'm an introvert, but I used to master the mask of an extrovert—because I used to work as an HR officer, and I have to deal with a lot of people. But now that I am a freelancer, it's kind of a release for me, it's kind of like I'm at home with myself. It's like, I'm kind of free.

Interviewer: Okay. That sounds good, I think. Okay, so one of the things I'm concerned about is in a broad sense—career. Because in freelancing—as I understood it now—there's a chance to work yourself up in terms of rates and wages, but there's no formal promotion. Do you think that there is an issue or is it something you're missing?

Interviewee: Well, it's really an issue because as a freelancer, you don't have a permanent income. Every time your contract closes, you have to look for another client. If I would be lucky enough to get a client wherein the client can hire my services for a longer period of time, then it would be much better. Or, if I can have security of tenure or receive some social benefits, then that would be much better. However, if I put myself in the shoes of clients, I'll also understand why they're not giving such to remote contractors. That's one of the cons in doing freelancing. Yes, you can't have fixed or regular income.

Interviewer: These things are offered by companies right? When you compare this to your steady job—to what extent do you have security of tenure? Or do they have it easy to fire even though you work in a big company?

Interviewee: Well, if you are working in big companies, then of course you'll be protected by the labor laws. If you're a regular employee, then they cannot just kick you out. They have to follow the law. As a freelancer, we're not covered by that protection especially that this is just contracting work—that's one of the cons. That's something we also have to think about as a Freelancer.

Interviewer: Weighing the pros and cons of generally everything, do you see freelancing as a part of your career like in a full time setting, continuously in the next five to ten years or is there something that's stopping you?

Interviewee: Actually, this is just a stepping stone. As I do freelance work, in every new task I get to learn a lot in the sense that I also get inspired. Let's say for example, if I get to work for a client that has a webstore, it gives me an idea of what to do in the future—of how I see myself. In fact as of now I already plan on putting my own webstore and using my own creativity to produce products and sell online. It's like getting a step higher than what I am into now. As of now, I'm just learning a lot.

Interviewer: Do you feel that all this experience you made as a freelancer is valued by organizations? If you would go back now to an organization in your surroundings and apply and talk to them in an interview, and you would talk to them about your experiences as a freelancer and what you learned. Would they value this or is a formal job experience more important there?

Interviewee: I think they'd value this because doing freelance work—for example doing administrative tasks—is just the same with doing administrative tasks in the office. In fact, we are learning more than what those people in the office are doing because we are exposed to different tasks that are given by the clients. Are you asking me if I'm going to use this experience when I apply for a job in the future? Is that what you mean?

Interviewer: Maybe you don't want to, but hypothetically, if you would—do you think it would help you?

Interviewee: Yes, definitely because we are in the technology age. Most of the things that we are doing are related to technology. For example, you have to be knowledgeable of different software, different apps to speed up work—and through freelancing jobs we learn a lot about that. So, it is an edge if ever we go into companies in which they are limited to certain software, and some tasks that are already there or traditionally there. Actually, it depends upon companies too because there are some companies that are just too traditional, and there are newborn companies which are also upgraded.

Interviewer: And then you would send them your profile, and they would check it or would you just tell them about it?

Interviewee: I prefer to write it down. It's my tendency to write CVs wherein I have to write down all the things that I have learned or what I've been doing so they can differentiate what I've been doing before and what I've been doing now. I consider freelancing as kind of a decent job. It's something where you get trained or gathered new knowledge and skills.

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewee: Another thing is that you can do work whenever, wherever. All you have to do is have the electric power and connection. So, I have tried that when I got a relative who died and he was up there at the mountains in our farm. All I have to do is just bring my computer, bring my portable wifi, and while I'm in the wake, I can do my work. So you're not limited to a space or a building. You can just do your work while enjoying or while on vacation. So, it's a plus.

Interviewer: Last question. You talked before about supervision that you probably also experienced in the organization you work in. How would you describe this?

Interviewee: In regular companies, you have your superiors. They're always there to be monitoring you. You also have some subordinates, and you have to monitor them whether you like it or not. You have to be there and deal with them in your day-to-day activities. But here as a freelancer—depending on the job that you are handling, I have the freedom to choose the jobs where I don't have subordinates. If there's a superior, it's just the boss and nobody else. So that's it. There are some jobs on freelancing that you also have to deal with a lot of people. So it depends upon the individual if you want to be in a job wherein you have to deal with a lot of people or jobs

that you'll just be on your own. You have the deadlines. You have the listed tasks to be accomplished on a specific period then that's what I prefer more.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Appendix G: High School Graduate (Nurse) from Dumaguete City

Interviewer: Let's get right ahead with the questions. First of all, I saw you live pretty close to Dumaguete City [incorrectly pronounced].

Interviewee: It's Dumaguete City

Interviewer: And this seems to be a hub for BPO and outsource work.

Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: So would there be lots of opportunities for you to do similar job as a freelancer to one of this organizations within the city?

Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: So you actively choose to be a freelancer?

Interviewee: Yes because, I believe it is more stressful and I have tried applying and that's what I have heard from my friends as well.

Interviewer: And what do you think makes it more stressful?

Interviewee: I think it has something to do with just going to the office itself and there are people who will manage you, compared to working at home wherein you manage your own time and you can choose not to take a bath and wear formal clothes. I believe it has something to do more on managing your own time compared to having actual people who will look after your work.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense. Would it be stressful to get there with traffic and that kind of stuff or wouldn't that be an issue?

Interviewee: In Dumaguete that's not actually an issue, because if you have a motorcycle it's like 5-7 minutes you are already in your workplace.

Interviewer: Okay, that is awesome, of course. When you had friends applying, or you also yourself applied, is it competitive to get the jobs or would they most likely give you a chance?

Interviewee: I think it's not that really very competitive now compared to maybe like 7 years ago when I tried applying, because now, though I am not so sure, but I think there are some areas wherein they only require a candidate to be a high school graduate. Whereas during my time, you really have to be a Bachelor's degree holder to be able to get in. Now I think they already allow high school level as a minimum requirement.

Interviewer: Is it because in your specific area there are a lot of BPO jobs evolving or do you think it's the general thing that the requirements go down?

Interviewee: I believe it has something to do with higher demands of workers in these big BPOs since from time to time I hear new accounts opening from this same BPO's. So they are really growing and they need more people and since I think, a lot doesn't really like this area so they have to find ways to recruit people. They are even offering sign-up bonuses.

There are around 4-5 big companies here in the city, though there are a lot of smaller ones that are not actually registered more of a homebased, in Upwork they have this agency type, so it's more of small type BPO.

Interviewer: Have you worked with them also or is it more about being completely independent?

Interviewee: I know of some who are managing those, I have not really tried working with them. It's a network of friends online and considering Dumaguete City as a very small city, I have friends whose jobs are basically managing a few freelancers as well and they are creating their own agency, and this people used to work in bigger BPOs, so basically they are just using their knowledge to build their own.

Interviewer: That's interesting. They are completely online, they do not have any office they just do it online and they do it only in Upwork, basically?

Interviewee: Yes, and I think there are other platforms, there's Onlinejobs [A/N: Onlinejobs.ph]and others.

Interviewer: Okay, what do you think is the most important for getting the assignments on Upwork or Onlinejobs?

Interviewee: I think education helps but I believe what is more important is that you should crave to learn new things. Because like me before, though I have been with Upwork for 4 years, and since I was working fulltime in a hospital as well I was not able to enhance my skills on the latest trend which is social media and more on the online business stuff. So you really have to learn new things, you might not get it through education but you can actually learn that online, so you have to learn the latest, I think that is very important. Though there are employers who are asking you to do things that you are not really familiar with, so you have to teach and look for resources. I have even tried enrolling myself to codeacademy, shawacademy, you have to get certificates just to prove that you really know this field.

Interviewer: I was going to ask this, so certificates would be the way for the employer to see whether you can do this or you can't? And then they check the certificates and if you have them you are fine or could you just say 'I can do this' and they trust you?

Interviewee: There were those who trusted me, there's even that employer of mine before where he told me I have to do something and I told him, I totally do not have any idea and then he just thought me all along how to do it and then I was able to do it. There are employers who are willing to teach you and there are those who really would want a test task, just to check if you really know. Most of them would really ask if you can understand instructions.

Interviewer: You said before that it is necessary to always be at the latest state of the art when it comes to social media or other things that come up that most assignments are in this kind of field. Do you feel that there is also pressure in it that you can't really ever lay back and just say, alright I can't do this and I really don't have to educate myself anymore or can I just do my job now? Or do you always feel the need to go further and look for a new kind of education?

Interviewee: Yes, I believe I really have to. To be competitive to others and make yourself indispensable so you really have to at least try, to say no and to say I cannot, is so hard to deal with someone who has that attitude.

Interviewer: With more experience, do you feel that even if the trends are changing, right now the social media, maybe in two years it will be something completely different, that you feel that you know what to do to always keep ahead of the game?

Interviewee: You don't need to necessarily know everything right away, but I believe on the process you really have to learn the trend, just to be competitive. But of course you have to make sure that you are within your boundaries, let's say if you are an engineer and you are told to do the ICD code which is done by medical people so I believe that's already like, it will take you years to actually learn those. So you have to work within your boundaries, I believe.

Interviewer: And then I have a couple of questions about the freelance market on the one side and this big organizations, not the ones on Upwork but on the really big BPO companies. Do you feel that there is a big distinction between the two or do you feel like they can emerge into each other in terms of working conditions. Is there a freelance kind of work in the big organizations, which is homebased, for example?

Interviewee: I believe for the employers side, the big organizations are more secure because they have more control on the quality of the product that is being produced compared homebased or

freelancing, I have known of people who will just log in their times and they do not work unless the employer will already ask for their output. So compared to product of this organizations like I've mentioned when there are people who are paid to look after your work. So I guess that is the thing, the assurance of the employer side is that the quality of the product there is really very good, though I am not saying that because there are also freelancers who are actually doing their thing. With the quality of the product, the big organizations really has an edge over freelancers.

Interviewer: Yes, and from your perspective, you as an employee or as a freelancer?

Interviewee: The good thing about it is that you are not pressured at all, and you are the manager of your own. I mean the taking a bath, the preparation to go to the office, and the pressure that your team leader might not be satisfied with your performance, all of these pressures are not there when you're a freelancer. And the risk itself of losing the job is on you because if you will not perform well then definitely you will lose the job, (so compared to BPO's you are actually putting their name at stake). But for me again, freelancing is better than working in BPO because I can watch the house and all that, and do those things and have a break within my house and I don't have to spend for the fare and I don't have the usual pressure at work. But the thing is you just have to keep and make yourself updated just to be competitive. Working in a big organization, one could actually have the certificates to prove that you are qualified to do this kind of job. Whereas in freelancing you just have to show what's in Upwork, or your portfolio and that's your basis to tell the future employers that you have this skills.

Interviewer: You mean in the big organization, the organization itself takes care of explaining to others why you are qualified or they just take on the job?

Interviewee: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay, makes sense. The only questions I have left is, I have read in an article on the website of the government of the Philippines its already a few years old though, they said that freelancing is in their opinion, the work of the future because it gives the people from the province, far from the city, the opportunity to work even if there is no work around. Do you think that it is too optimistic or there is something about this?

Interviewee: Before, there was no opportunity to practice my profession here in the province, it was like you have to travel and be far from your family to be able to practice the profession that you want. But with this new online freelancing, you can actually do that now. So, I agree with the government, the problem with the government though is that they were not able to make

[regulations regarding] freelancing in the Philippines. Because we do not pay taxes for what we get online unlike I believe in the US you have that I think. In the Philippines, we do not have that, if you want to pay then good, if not, the government will never know.

Interviewer: Yeah, so you think in the long run all the investments that are made into freelancing and improving the internet connection that, they are really not paying off because the taxes are not coming back in?

Interviewee: Freelancers are not paying taxes, so yeah it's true.

Interviewer: For you personally when you look at your career plan, as you talked very positively about freelancing, do you see yourself as a freelancer in the further away future. Or would you consider another job at some point in time.

Interviewee: If you look at it from the financial side, a lot of us freelancers would opt to go into it because if you compare it to the salary that you get when you work onsite it's like four to five times higher, that is how much you get with freelancing. Because in the Philippines, if you work as a nurse you only get around 20000 [Pesos = 335 Euro] monthly and in freelancing, you could get that for an entry level.

I have also observed that there are some foreigners who are pretty generous. We have this group in facebook for online freelancers and I have read of those who were generously given bonuses for being good employee and they were given this vacation, paid family trip and all, and you don't get those incentives when you work onsite.

Interviewer: Okay. So apart from the monetary value, even something more, that could not have in a normal job.

Appendix H: High School Graduate from the Province (2)

The following notes are, unfortunately, not a transcript of the conversation I had with the interviewee, but merely answers to three questions I sent her afterwards by email. She responded to by voice message. For our initial conversation, we had to fall back on a regular call due to bad internet connection. Later, I realized that our interview had not been recorded successfully. I am grateful for her additional effort that came with elaborating again on the three topics I felt were most important. The topic descriptions may seem blunt upon reading; this can be explained by the conversational context missing as a lead.

The meaning of education in the Philippines and chances to get a job in an organization.

Interviewee: Here in the Philippines your education level plays an important role as to what job you'll be getting. Big corporations, big organizations also prefer college graduates thinking maybe these people are more capable than those who are not college graduates. Of course, skill and talent and experience are important but education level is also a big, big factor. For example, someone who has a bachelor's degree has more chances of getting into big companies than someone who just finished high school or grade school. The tendency is that people who went to college get to have more successful careers than those who didn't.

In other countries, the way understand it is that going to college is fairly optional, right? Here in the Philippines, of course it's also optional but there's this pressure that you should go to college if you want to get into big corporations and have bigger salaries.

Why you decided to work for freelancing rather than work in BPO.

Interviewee: Working in BPO would take too much of my time and energy. With freelancing, I have total control of my time, the projects I want to work on, the clients I want to work with and I still get to stay at home in front of my computer.

The alternatives in the region where you live.

Interviewee: Alternatives, hmmm. I'm not sure, but of course you can always go with BPO, there are a lot of call centers near this area but that's not a good option for me since it would take too much of my time. There are also tutorial jobs available. I do this once in a while, I go to kids' homes when their parents ask me to so I can help them review for their upcoming tests. There's also online teaching, I taught English as a Second Language (ESL) to Japanese, Chinese people using this one site I found online. The pay there is also good but there's some scheduling conflict that's why I had to let that go. Some other things available in our area are working on fast food chains as servers or cashiers, other job posting that doesn't require you to be a college graduate, things like that. But I haven't tried those yet.

Appendix I: Bachelor's Degree Holder from Cebu City

Interviewer: Maybe as an intro, you could just tell a little bit about your freelance history.

Interviewee: Okay well, pretty much I started at around February 2012, and I started really small. Like a really small amount. Like I bid around point 90 cents.

Interviewer: Oh can you do this?

Interviewee That's really kind of ridiculous but since most of the employers will look for a, what would you call that? A review or a feedback from other employees cause I am pretty much a newbie and I don't have any of that. I'm going to have to bid really low so you could have at least one feedback and I started really small and I've grown to I think I'm now at \$4.4 per hour, so yeah pretty much a feedback is what your going to have to start with, you are going to have to had feedback first. I think I did.

Connection problems.

Interviewer: So, you were talking about feedback being really important. Can I ask you about this? Is there some kind of minimum wage per hour or per assignment in Upwork or did you use another website at that time?

Interviewee: No. At that time there was no minimum wage.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Literally they did not have it but they would take 10% of your wage whatever amount it is, no matter how low it is they would take like example your pay is \$10. They would take like \$.10 out of it.

I did try to work on other freelancing companies, freelancing websites but that didn't work for me. So, I did stick with odesk but then they had this Upwork. Odesk has been turned to Upwork because they had set standards already like they change the wage, the minimum wage to \$3, you can no longer bid lower than that.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I think it's highly impossible right now. And they did that you have to 'validify'. Is that even a word? Like you have to be valid? You have to show bank. You have to be verified. And you have to show pretty much some proof that you are a valid person. So that's when they started, I think that was a year ago? Or two years ago that they started to set their standards.

Interviewer: When you said were trying to try out other freelance websites. Was there also a time where you tried to go for a stable job? Or was freelancing always a conscious choice? Like your preference?

Interviewee Well I pretty much like freelancing because it allows me to work everywhere. Like it's very flexible, I could go on a vacation and still work on my laptop. I could go in a different country like right now I'm in Belgium but when I would go back to Philippines I can still work and its very flexible like I don't have a fixed time. Like I have to work eight hours or I have to start at 7 am and finish at 6. No, that doesn't work. You just have to finish your deadline You can work whenever you want as long as you finish it within the week. And that's really awesome about freelancing. It's what I really like about it.

Interviewer: Do you experience any disadvantages?

Interviewee You don't have...you pretty much don't have a social life. Like you know, the difference with the office environment and the freelancing environment is that in freelancing you are solo. You live and you work at home and you don't meet people.

But if you are in an office environment, you have colleagues that turn into friends. And you also have benefits, like medical benefits, insurance benefits. This stuff that you get if you work in an office environment.

But the thing is if you work in an office environment in the Philippines you will be paying tax as well, but in freelancing well you are pretty much tax free.

Interviewer: Would you, if you opted for some reason to go for the a stable job at some point, maybe in the BPO industry or another local industry that is roughly in the same area as what you do now. If you would go to these kind of jobs how would you perceive your chances?

Interviewee I think I'm actually very more into doing some stuff that challenges myself, doing new stuffs. If I try to go in a BPO environment, I think I will have good chances. I believe so because of my experiences. I think I have high chances there. Yeah I think it's pretty good.

Interviewer: So it's basically always an option if you wanted to? Because you will be qualified but you decide not to.

Interviewee I could decide to go for it. Because actually I'm also kind of longing for a social environment like this. I was actually thinking when I go back to Philippines maybe I could work for a BPO company. And apply for one. Because you know it sucks to be alone for weeks and months and days just working on your own. And not having any friends at all. So yeah. That's the disadvantage. You don't get to see people.

Interviewer: Then I have a couple questions about education, your specific education and education in the Philippines generally. What motivated you to go for a university education?

Interviewee Actually I don't really want go to school. Honestly. I don't. I'm like why go to school if you could work? I mean like, when you end college you will go to work anyway right? Yeah so that's what I was thinking. I'm already earning. What's the point of going to school? But my dad wants me to go to school. He wants me to finish and go to get a degree or something.

So I think yeah it's kind of an advantage, like my dad would probably say, would definitely say to me. Because I really reasoned to him that I don't want to go to school and he's like well ____, I know that you have experiences, I know when you show your resume to people when you apply. Well they could see that you have experiences, you've worked with different kinds of people but showing that you have a degree would be a major plus. So that's what got me thinking, like most people, most employers would definitely see if you are educated.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee If you are highly educated. So I'm like okay I have nothing to lose so yeah why not?

Interviewer: Do you feel that it helps you as a freelancer or are actual infield expertise are more important from your experience?

Interviewee I think infield experiences are more important because you chose a specific kind of job that you are really good with and you could focus more and you could like sharpen the edge

of your sword more and more for it. Like if I go to web development and focus on it, I'd get more skills, more knowledge about it rather than having different lot of tasks.

Like going to social media marketing and then going to, you know the difference is that you can focus on one thing rather than focus on a lot of things. It's great to have. My dad used to say this: trader of all things but major of none. So, it'll be great if you're a major of something but you could also do some stuff as well. But you must focus on one thing. And the skill set and knowledge is more focus on that thing and you could learn much.

Interviewer: Okay

Interviewee: I mean learn a lot rather than, you know, a lot of range.

Interviewer: Yeah I see. But connecting that back to the BPO jobs for example.

Interviewee Mhmm.

Interviewer: Have you, if you work as a freelancer in really specialized kind of jobs experienced problems applying for BPO work which is a little broader I would guess. Because it's a full time job, I would believe that you would do a lot of things not only web design for example?

Interviewee Oh yeah actually right now I pretty much, am also working more like a BPO ranging job, various tasks, different kinds of tasks. One day your employer would say I want you to research this and then another day he would say add content to these websites. So it wouldn't be different if I'd go from freelancing to BPO because it's more like kind of the same job but if I go to more of a web develop company who focuses more on web developing and I switched that from freelancing which is kinda hard. I think pursuing one specific career would be much better. I would rather go to a specific kind of job rather than freelancing.

Interviewer: Ok, ok.

Interviewee It's kind of the same actually, BPO and freelancing is kind of the same so yeah there's really not much difference, you are still doing the same thing, various kind of tasks.

Interviewer: Where you live in the Philippines, in the immediate surroundings are there a lot of potential jobs or would you have to travel far or change your place of residence?

Interviewee I live in Cebu City. Actually there are a lot of jobs yes but it depends what career you'd choose. If you could go for a call center which is pretty much everywhere it's a lot. Most of them actually take high-schoolers who could speak English and then that's good, you're in.

But if you'd go for a web development jobs that are more specific in career and more technology type they would look for your skills and mindset if you can do this, you can do that, if you can do java, if you can do c. If you can do a lot of languages then you're. But if you are pretty much you know, dumb and not know anything then you're out. But if you'd go for a call center and BPO? It's pretty much everywhere in Cebu City. There's a lot of jobs for that in Cebu City.

Interviewer: Okay, but the thing you're really aiming for is –

Interviewee: I'm really aiming for web development which is really hard when most employers would want your experience. They would want to see if you know different kind of language because web development is not only with HTML and CSS they would also like you to add some plugins like java and jquery. So yeah, it's kind of hard to struggle with other web developers that are more, more precise in that career. Like, they are better at you. They are senior web developers already, they know a lot of languages. They are very flexible with it. Like c languages, phantom languages, they have a lot of languages to learn. It's really hard but I think I would rather go for it than a BPO job because in BPO you are major of none.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: You're just doing a lot of stuff but you know, a lot but you don't really focus on one thing.

Interviewer: Yeah I would guess, web development is also better paid right?

Interviewee: Yeah yeah it is better paid, but you got to start as well like most jobs are, you're going to have to start low as junior web developer and then go to senior developer and a lot of stages to get there and a lot of competitors, so yeah it's kind of hard but we're going there someday.

Interviewer: I'm sure that's going to work. How would you think – because talked about different languages for being a senior developer – how would these companies verify this? Would they just interview you and then you would perhaps demonstrate your knowledge in languages or is it more

like a CV kind of thing: I've worked there, I've worked there or is it a university education, what do you think is most important?

Interviewee: I think the most important part is knowing the language. Most IT companies would verify your knowledge. I did um an internship for Ripeconcepts, its an American company. What they pretty much did was, I sat there and they want me to code this, they want me do this, and they're going to see if they would take me as an intern so they would see if I'm capable of doing something that could contribute to the company.

Interviewer: I see.

Interviewee: But if I don't know anything like know nothing at all? They would be like: what's the point of you interning having a bachelor's degree and you don't even know how to code? Like what's the point.

Interviewer: Yeah that would make sense.

Interviewee So actually, there are a lot of my classmates who graduate who don't know how to code, honestly.

Interviewer: Oh computer science. That's surprising.

Interviewee It is! My sister graduated as an IT and she doesn't code honestly. Like most of, that's how shitty the education in Philippines is. You don't see the skills. The students there, you don't see the skills, like pretty much I'm going to go to school sit in class and that's it, your going to get your diploma. So that's why IT companies in Cebu or in Philippines want to see if you can code. Because some are graduating for a degree and know nothing.

Interviewer: So, how much is freelancing a part of your career plans? When you think about the future, five to ten years, you already talked about becoming a web developer, what kind of role does freelancing play?

Interviewee Yeah I think freelancing would be pretty much part time role. Like what you would do on weekends. You can chill but you are still earning something, because pretty much all the jobs in freelancing are very chill like you don't stress out. You don't have to worry about errors and all the coding and stuff so it's pretty chill. You can work part time, like do it on weekends and

you can still earn. I think that's, I think in the future that's what I'm going to do at least you have side money or something. And it's tax free.

Interviewer: What is lacking for you to rely on it? Let's say in five years you would be freelancing and have to rely on this thing to work out, what makes you not want to do this?

Interviewee Well, the thing is, I don't really see myself doing freelancing for five years because that's going to sound lonely. No social interacting with people or anyone or colleague. It's a lonely kind of work so I feel like no I'm not doing this for five years, just sitting at my home and working.

It is very very awkward and not really that fun to do. I mean, jobs are not really that fun to do sometimes cause it gets boring but when you have colleagues, when you get to talk about it, right? You have colleagues that "oh hey this job sucks, I want to go". I like that. I think that's really cool. That's why I'm going to put freelancing aside for maybe part time work. Doing it for five years and doing this alone well, I don't think that would work for me. Unless, if I freelance and travel, travel, travel. It's the only part. If it works like that then cool, but if does not I'd rather go for an office environment.

Interviewer: Okay and this kind of career progression aspect in an office environment? You can get promoted. But in a freelance environment, as you said, you would be able to take better rates.

Interviewee Well yeah, yes you can, you can take better rates and get better jobs but it's just, well the thing is, when you got promoted in an office environment it feels, you know, uplifting because everyone is saying "Oh okay, Good luck! Congratulations!"

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee Like that, but in a freelancing environment you got a bit of bonus, but it's not really how do you say that?

Interviewer: Not that rewarding at the same time?

Interviewee Yeah it feels not as rewarding as well because some of the employers are like: 'Okay I am going to pay you \$4 an hour and you are doing a great job so I will pay you \$5 an hour every year.' No they don't do that. What they do is constantly on that level for years. And if you want to go for a bigger, like bigger salary, you could ask your employer but they could decline you so,

either that or apply for bigger rates right? But you still have to compete with other freelancers for that.

Interviewer: If you would go for the bigger rates?

Interviewee If you want to apply for bigger rates you're going to have to compete with what? Hundred freelancers? So it's kind of hard here with freelancing if you really want to have bigger rates. It's kind of hard but if you have good reviews and good feedbacks then yeah maybe that would work. But I would rather go for a company. Because some of the companies are required to, for example you're already a year in the company right? And you're doing a good work they are required to promote you to another level and have a bigger salary so.

Interviewer: Oh yeah it's more of a regular career path where you know where you're going to get, right?

Interviewee: Yep exactly. Yeah that's pretty much it.

Interviewer: Alright, that's also true for the interview.