

Regimes of self-improvement: Globalization and the will to work

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Regimes of Self-Improvement: Globalization and the Will to Work

by

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Regimes of Self-Improvement: Globalization and the Will to Work

Stephen Covey died on July 16, 2012. Born Mormon in Utah, having received a PhD in Religious Education from Brigham Young University and an MBA from the Harvard Business School, Covey was an author and corporate icon. His most popular book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, sold more than 25 million copies worldwide. In it, Covey focuses on defining seven key practices conducive to corporate success and worldly achievement. They are: (1) be proactive, (2) begin with the end in mind, (3) put first things first, (4) think win/win, (5) seek first to understand, then to be understood, (6) synergize, and (7) sharpen the saw. Years after its initial publication, Adrian Zackheim, president and publisher of Portfolio, Penguin's business imprint, commented, "[*The Seven Habits*] was one of the first books in recent times that was really directed at prioritizing the way you worked, so you could be more effective as an individual." Zackheim went on to emphasize the lessons for self-government evident in Covey's philosophy, explaining that the book "wasn't about how to be a manager or how to run a company. It was about how to conduct yourself."¹

Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* distills what I refer to as the will to work—a will that has been made to travel. Scholarship on globalization has focused on flows and networks of knowledge, goods, people, and capital across disparate spaces.² However, drawing on research in Indonesia on the translation of books and training programs such as the *Seven Habits*, I argue that a crucial yet under recognized dimension of contemporary globalization is the inculcation of a will to work. Indeed, many of the phenomena that are identified as characteristic of globalization—including mass consumption, the circulation of cultural forms, the off-shoring of labor, and free-trade zones—are dependent on eliciting a

particular type of laboring body: the willing worker. This is a laborer who has been inculcated in a regime of self-improvement that effectively makes him- or herself an efficient producer without the necessity for external compulsion. The cultivation of the will to work renders a laborer who offers their toil in the conviction that it is in their self-interest to do so.

Self-help texts and training programs like *The Seven Habits* and its derivations are pivotal to eliciting the will to work and creating a regime of self-improvement. Translated into thirty-eight languages and implemented as a human resources training program in over 140 countries, *The Seven Habits* is one of the most widely circulating English-language self-help texts and training seminars in the world. I first encountered a televisual representation of Covey at Krakatau Steel, while I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Indonesia between 2003 and 2005. I soon learned that Indonesians have been one of the book's most devoted (and earliest) audiences. The Indonesian company PT Dunamis was the first overseas licensee to offer a live interactive human resources training program based on *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

When the country's recently elected president introduced Covey at the Jakarta Convention Center in November 2005, he did so to a rapt audience of thousands of mostly middle- and upper-middle class Indonesians. In his opening remarks the former general and current president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, drew on a frequently invoked narrative of the country as deficient and behind other nations.³ He said that Indonesia was "still lacking the kind of national dynamism that have [sic] propelled other nations to true greatness."⁴ Turning to terms specifically drawn from Covey's arsenal of concepts, the President stated, "it is my hope...that the worlds of wisdom that you will hear from Stephen Covey will bring us a step closer to awakening [a] culture of excellence."⁵

The image of Covey, a respected Mormon elder, promoting his message of Protestant-inflected self-discipline amidst a throng of mostly Muslim Indonesians was intriguing. What, I wondered, does the broad appeal in Indonesia of Covey's techniques to inculcate a will to work reveal about the country's efforts to enhance its competitiveness in a global economy? Furthermore, what does the dissemination of his techniques and their adoption and re-embedding in different cultural contexts reveal more broadly about globalization? This essay suggests that Covey's presence in Java reveals the global circulation of a particular will to work that, as Max Weber pointed out years ago, is the effect of characteristically Protestant practical reason. Importantly, although this will to work is likely born of the particular strain of worldly asceticism characteristic of Mormonism, Covey carefully excised any explicit references to Mormonism and indeed Protestantism in general from his management philosophy. The disembedding of this will to work from its explicit Protestant (and Mormon) overtones enables its global circulation. Finally, I show how self-styled Indonesian spiritual reformers sought to re-embed a will to work—one strikingly similar to that distilled by Covey—in religion, specifically Islam. This re-embedding entailed a training program, and indeed a new regime of self-improvement, that proved tremendously successful in Indonesia, indeed across Muslim Southeast Asia, and fuelled new global ambitions among its progenitor.

Stephen Covey and the Specter of Benjamin Franklin

Born in Salt Lake City, Stephen Covey was a devout Mormon whose grandparents were influential members of the church hierarchy. He obtained a bachelor's degree in business administration at the University of Utah and then served a two-year mission proselytizing the Mormon faith in London in the early 1970s,⁶ as is common among male church members. It was

after he was asked to train other missionaries that Covey discovered the zeal for teaching that would ultimately come to lie at the heart of his franchise.⁷ After returning to the United States he obtained an MBA from Harvard and then enrolled in a doctoral program in religious education at Brigham Young University. He was granted a PhD in 1976 based on his dissertation, “Effects of Human Relations Training on the Social, Emotional, and Moral Development of Students with Emphasis on Human Relations Training Based upon Religious Principles.” In many respects the dissertation served as the groundwork for *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, which was first published twelve years later. In the dissertation, Covey notes similarities between human relations training and religious education, and argues that human relations training can be more effective if it integrates moral and religious principles.

After finishing his dissertation he lectured on organizational behavior in Brigham Young University’s business school. By the early 1980s his classes were among the most popular at the institution, regularly drawing enrollments of over 500, and Covey saw a ripe business opportunity. Inspired, in 1985 he left academia to establish a consulting firm, the Covey Leadership Center, which sought to enhance corporate productivity through character development.⁸ In 1989, drawing on his dissertation (albeit stripped of explicit reference to religious principles), his university lectures, and the materials he developed for his consulting firm, he published the first edition of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. By 2004, the book had become one of the best-selling books of all time with over 15 million copies sold, *Time* magazine had named Covey one of the twenty-five most influential Americans, and he had counseled the Presidents of South Korea, Mexico, and Colombia and three-quarters of the CEOs on *Fortune* magazine’s list of the 500 largest US companies. The translation of *The Seven Habits*

into thirty-six languages had extended the reach of Covey's regime of self-improvement around the world.⁹

Today, the *Seven Habits* training program that seeks to inculcate Stephen Covey's ethical maxims among corporate employees and private individuals around the world is the intellectual property of the Franklin Covey Company, a professional services firm that produces calendars and planners and provides time management training and assessment services for organizations and individuals. Franklin Covey is the result of a 1997 merger between Stephen Covey's Covey Leadership Center and the Franklin Quest Company. Franklin Quest was the offshoot of a time management seminar business founded in 1982 by another member of the Mormon Church, Hyrum Smith. In 1984, Smith, a former insurance agent, rechristened the business as the Franklin Institute and introduced the Franklin Day Planner.¹⁰

The centrality of planned time and the reference to Benjamin Franklin conveyed in Smith's company is no mere coincidence. It suggests how the will to work is central to globalization today. In defining the "spirit of capitalism" and the will to work that he found at its core, Weber quotes at length from two of Franklin's books. These texts are the eighteenth century analogs of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* insofar as they offer a similar stripe of advice for self-improvement. The central tenet that Weber cites as the paradigmatic example of this spirit is that time is money.¹¹ Weber quotes the following counsel from Franklin:

Remember, that *time* is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon *that* the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides.... After industry and frugality, nothing contributes more to the raising of a young man in the world

than punctuality and justice in all his dealings; therefore never keep borrowed money an hour beyond the time you promised, lest a disappointment shut up your friend's purse for ever. The most trifling actions that affect a man's credit are to be regarded. The sound of your hammer at five in the morning, or eight at night, heard by a creditor, makes him easy six months longer; but if he sees you at a billiard-table, or hears your voice at a tavern, when you should be at work, he sends for his money the next day; demands it, before he can receive it, in a lump.¹²

Below, I show how Covey's training programs echo this emphasis on maximizing the utility of time. Indeed, this ethic stands at the core of Stephen Covey's regime of self-improvement.¹³ This methodical attention to time is thus a critical dimension of the will to work on which globalization is premised.

From Work Spreading to a Will to Work

Through a set of videos that formed the core of the *Seven Habits* training program, Covey's visual appearance was beamed directly into Krakatau Steel's training center. The company is a massive state-owned enterprise located in the province of Banten at the western end of Java. Krakatau Steel had been originally funded with Soviet development aid, and after the military coup of 1965 the company became a centerpiece of the authoritarian President Suharto's developmentalist ambitions and realignment with the capitalist West. Krakatau Steel produced a material that was viewed as critical to the state's nationalist project of modernization. In this sense, it was absolutely central to what the anthropologist James Ferguson has called "faith in development"—the optimistic conviction that facilitating modernization would bring

economic growth and enhanced living standards.¹⁴ From the 1970s until the mid-1990s, Krakatau Steel had been the recipient of billions of dollars in state development funds. However, such investment was brought to an end in 1998 after the near bankruptcy of the Indonesian government and the changes associated with what Indonesians referred to as “*reformasi*” (reform), which brought about the end of authoritarian rule and increasing democratization.

[Insert figure 1. Caption: “Steel production facilities at Krakatau Steel.”]

Although for decades Krakatau Steel had been a key site in the project of nationalist development, between 2002 and 2005 when I conducted ethnographic fieldwork at the company it faced a number of pressing challenges. The long-standing state subsidies that had ensured the company’s viability were eliminated in 1998 due to pressures on state budgets. Tariffs on imported steel that had for years protected the company from international competition were eliminated in April 2004. Furthermore, China had emerged as a steel superpower and employees feared that once the demand for steel within China began to ebb, China would in turn flood Indonesian with cheap steel. In addition, new legal protections for workers offered unprecedented possibilities for political mobilization by factory employees, including the formation of a new (and for the first time independent) labor union, thus creating a (formally) free labor force. In the wake of the decline of the Suharto regime, corruption, long a public secret, became an open sore at Krakatau Steel as it suddenly became possible to openly discuss fraught political questions like collusion, corruption, and nepotism. Finally, and perhaps most ominously for some employees, the Indonesian government sought to privatize Krakatau Steel, which many feared would trigger sweeping job losses for members of a workforce that previously were able to count on lifetime employment.

Increasing pressure for the company to compete with producers outside Indonesia and the looming threat of privatization prompted anxiety about labor practices. Given a new political and economic climate, the company's existence could no longer be justified according to its status as symbol of modernization, development, and progress. One foreman in the slab steel plant at Krakatau Steel explained to me that, prior to the late-1990s, "the social was the most important and profit was secondary," but "now profit is number one and the social mission (*misi sosial*) is number two." He said that this "social mission" was premised upon "*padat karya*" or "dense work," which refers to the practice of hiring more workers than necessary to operate a business. This is common at many Indonesian businesses, including both state-owned enterprises and private corporations, as a trip to any department store in the country will attest. At Krakatau Steel, a thinly veiled debate pitted those who sought to preserve the company's earlier mission to "support the livelihoods of the masses" (*hajat hidup orang banyak*) against those who desired to make the company competitive in an increasingly global steel market by subjecting its operations to stricter cost-benefit standards and making its workforce more productive. For years, employees of the company had been given generous salaries and benefits under the presumption that state-led modernization was as much a social project as a commercial one.

At Krakatau Steel, a latter day incarnation of what Clifford Geertz called "work spreading"¹⁵ was apparent in one especially intensive portion of the production process, where molten steel is transformed into sturdy slabs weighing up to thirty tons each. Other company employees explained that workers in the slab steel plant are more "hot-headed" and attributed their emotional volatility to the dusty, deafening, sweltering climate of the plant. Hariyanto¹⁶ had the arduous task of ensuring the smooth exchange of molten steel from giant ladles into the massive casting machine. He took turns with a co-worker in half-hour blocks to monitor this

transfer. The heat and noise generated in this portion of the steel-making process made it a physically demanding job, but Hariyanto said that rotating the job with another employee made it tolerable because the hardship was “divided in two” (*dibagi dua*). He said that the job could likely be performed by a single employee and was anxious that his position, a single task performed by two people, could be made redundant should efforts to further rationalize the production process be implemented.

[Insert figure 2. Caption: “The casting machine at which Hariyanto worked in Krakatau Steel’s slab steel plant.”]

The new imperative to efficiency entailed the replacement of what Geertz called “work spreading” with a new will to work. Managers had come to the conclusion that instilling a will to work was the foremost obstacle to addressing the economic competition that Krakatau Steel faced. Managers opined that employees were too well-compensated and comfortable and the security and prestige of working for an enterprise designated “strategic” by the state had made them “arrogant” and lacking in initiative.¹⁷ The company had a long history of investment in education and training, and in fact had constructed a separate facility for these purposes (the Center for Education and Training, known by its Indonesian acronym PusDikLat). The company had an ample budget for employee training and, prior to introducing the Seven Habits training managers, had hosted a number of human resources training programs, such as *Achievement Motivation Training*, *Coaching the Winner*, and *Kaizen*, the last of which is regularly credited for Toyota’s rise to dominance.¹⁸ During my research at the company, Krakatau Steel added *Seven Habits* to the list, and managers spoke enthusiastically about the program’s promise to transform what they had identified as a deficient “work culture” at the company.

Managing Habits

The *Seven Habits* trainings at Krakatau Steel entailed lengthy, sober sessions. The program lasted four days and was held in an auxiliary meeting room at PusDikLat consisting of about four large round tables at which participants sat in groups of four or five. The centerpiece of the training was a video recording of Stephen Covey delivering the training to a mostly white audience somewhere in the United States. The videos were all in English with Indonesian subtitles. At least half of the sessions involved watching Covey lecturing and illustrating the main points of the training. Gusniarto, the leader for one of the sessions I attended, repeatedly emphasized that he himself was just “a facilitator” and that “Stephen Covey is the instructor.” Covey’s televisual performance was remarkable and the medium did little to blunt what his skillfully honed charisma could accomplish. His sober, dark business suit and his completely hairless visage lent him a look that was somewhere between an ascetic of the market and a psycho killer. An intense stare conveyed through a pair of piercing eyes punctuated many of the lessons that he sought to impart, admonishing his audience to take control of their lives.

In the *Seven Habits* training program, the inculcation of the will to work is premised on self-transformation and, through changing oneself, changing the collectivity in which one is enmeshed. The alteration of one’s will was the central means through which self-improvement would be achieved. This message of transformation and self-improvement resonated widely at Krakatau Steel, particularly given the broader political and economic shifts taking place around the company. In an early video, Covey introduced the training by saying that “the purpose of *The Seven Habits* is to teach you to lead your life in a truly effective way...we have to implement the habits, not just in business but in the family as well.” He defined a habit as “the intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire...we make our habits and our habits make us.” After the video

segment ended, the facilitator, Gusniarto, explained that “a habit can be changed no matter what your age; the question is, does our heart want to change, but we know that we need to change...But to be successful we must *want* to change ourselves.” He continued, explaining that of knowledge, skill, and desire, desire was the most important, and that “changing our habits is hardest at the beginning.” These two lectures were supplemented by an exercise in which people were to write down their worst habit and most of the participants expressed the opinion that they did not work hard enough or were “lazy.” It was not clear to me whether this was something that they sincerely felt or whether the participants reported it as a flaw given that they understood it to be the characteristic they were supposed to be working on.

In the afternoon of the first day of the training we began methodically working through each one of Covey’s septuplet of habits, which were divided into three categories. The first three habits were introduced under the rubric of “private victories” and were intended to impart lessons of independence and “self-mastery.” The habits that were highlighted during this phase of the training were to be proactive, to begin with the end in mind, and to put first things first. These habits were designed to constitute a willful subject by emphasizing the need for agency, rationality, and efficiency. Exercises were supplemented lectures and stories about each one of the habits. For the first one we were assembled into groups and assigned a locally specific exercise based on recent problems at the company and intended to illustrate what proactive behavior actually meant. The exercise was introduced on sheets of paper with a scenario as follows: “This June you hear that there are no longer sufficient raw materials available for steel production. A manager asks you to continue production using available scrap material that is of substandard quality. You know deep down that if you follow these orders it will have negative results, both in terms of the quality of the product and for the production machines. What do you

do?" The group I was working decided that the problem was a result of the way raw materials were procured and then outlined five steps to redress this issue. First, we proposed to make an assessment to determine the demand for raw materials over the next one to five years. Then, we suggested building business relationships with suppliers of raw materials. Third, we proposed reviewing the systems of providing goods and services to the company. Fourth, we suggested raising the percentage of contracted items. Finally, we suggested always having substitute materials at hand for when such problems arose.

Next we were instructed in two further habits: beginning with the end in mind and putting first things first. Gusniarto told us that these qualities also defined good leaders, because leadership required that one be goal-oriented and skilled at prioritizing tasks. Continuing this lesson on leadership, he used PowerPoint to project nine portraits and then asked each of the three groups of between four and five people to pick the leader that they "most respected." The portraits depicted Hitler, Gandhi, Stalin, Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, Mother Teresa, Pol Pot, Winston Churchill and the late-nineteenth century Indonesian author and national heroine Kartini. To my shock and confusion, the first group chose Hitler as the leader they most respected.¹⁹ They justified the choice by explaining to the rest of us that he was a model leader because "he had self-confidence, discipline, bravery, integrity, and a mentality of steel (*mental baja*)." Our group chose Gandhi and the last group chose Mandela. Gusniarto later told me that Indonesians had for too long been characterized by the blind obeisance to authority. During the Suharto years, he said, everyone "had to follow" the country's leaders: "It was just like communism, there was no freedom of thought. But now there is much more freedom, we have to choose as individuals."

In introducing the second habit (being goal-oriented), Gusniarto encouraged participants to work backward through their own lives to try to figure out what we wanted to accomplish and what we wanted our legacy to be. He asked the group, “What is our meaning in life? To answer we must start with our final goal.” He then segued into another video, in which Covey posed a set of existential questions to his audience: “where do we get our sense of who we are? Where do we get our sense of what life is about?” After the video ended, Gusniarto asked rhetorically, “if we don’t manage our life, who will manage it for us?” The answer was clear. “We must design our life,” or else he warned, “we will be stuck with regrets.” The exercise that was paired with this habit involved writing out our life mission. Those around me wrote down things like “to be a good father” and “to help the company succeed.”

These three habits (exercising initiative, being goal-oriented, and prioritizing tasks) constitute a regime of self-improvement strikingly similar to that animating Franklin’s worldly asceticism. They contain the same concerns with individual initiative, waste, and inefficiency. Although they do not bluntly liken time to money, they represent the same perspective insofar as they are designed to configure a maximizing agent. Ultimately, the lessons imparted by Covey are intended to rationalize action and make one more efficient. A proactive subject with clear goals who prioritizes is a willful subject who exercises her or his own agency. This subject formulates an interior motivation for work without procrastinating or the need for external motivation.

During the final two days of the training, a new facilitator replaced Gusniarto to guide the participants through the final four habits. Haidar was younger, more enthusiastic, and moved quickly through the exercises delivering staccato streams of instruction. At one point he broke in a lesson on the fifth habit, on empathetic communication, and delivered an impromptu lecture on

the importance of nutrition and dietary willpower. He admonished the participants to avoid fat, fried foods, and junk food, picking up modernization's narrative of Indonesia as behind the developed world. He said, "People in America and Europe are already ahead of us. They don't eat junk food anymore, but we still eat it. We think it is trendy." The juxtaposition of a facilitator in his twenties lecturing a group of mid- and lower-level Krakatau Steel managers, most of whom were in their forties and fifties, was mildly disconcerting, but Haidar never seemed to waver in his righteousness and seemed completely committed to the knowledge he conveyed.

The second set of habits were introduced under the rubric of "public victories" and were intended to impart lessons of interdependence and how to align an individual will with the wills of others for collective benefit. Thus, whereas the first group of habits was designed to improve individual conduct and the government of the self, this second group was intended to align one's individual will with the wills of others.²⁰ The habits that were emphasized during this phase of the training were: to look for win-win solutions; to first understand another and then work to be understood; and to "synergize," by which was meant that in cooperative work the sum total of action was better than the individual component parts.

Haidar interpreted the fifth habit (first understand, then be understood) through the lens of calculative reason. He explained, "We shouldn't view cultivating friendships as a loss. Devoting time to human relations is an investment—not a cost!" By finding self-interest and principles for maximization in social relationships, Haidar revealed the calculative subject at the heart of the *Seven Habits*. The principles are designed to make the participant realize how to optimize individual motivation and productivity. Even the final habit, "sharpening the saw," which encouraged participants to balance work with recreation and rest, was couched in terms of efficiency and productivity. In one of the video supplements, Covey reminded the audience that

pure devotion to work could be counter-productive and lead to “burn out.” Rather, participants needed to be sure to “schedule” time for engaging in activities like visiting with friends, exercise, spending time with one’s family, and, of course, “nature walks.” Through balancing work and leisure one would ensure an effective lifestyle for the “long-term.” In recapping the seventh habit, Haidar likened humans to instruments that needed regular upkeep, stating, “We are like machines we need to be maintained.”

The central technology that the training program used was a mundane calendar, *The Seven Habits Organizer*. As it was Friday, the final step in the training in which I participated involved each participant planning out a sample calendar entry for the upcoming week, taking into account both work and domestic obligations. Everyone filled in their meetings, appointments, and deadlines. The organizer even had a “sharpening the saw” section so that one could methodically plan out one’s “free time”—leisure and recreation activities. Cultivating the will to work was dependent on a methodical, individualized daily plan. The *Seven Habits Organizer* is readily available for sale online from Franklin Quest and enables one to inculcate the practice of meticulously planning out one’s daily life hour by hour, day by day, week by week, and year by year.²¹ Perhaps predictably, none of the participants in the training program raised the fact that a life so planned leaves no time for spontaneity or whim.

The Spirit and the Will

The *Seven Habits* was not the only regime of self-improvement that was used at Krakatau Steel. Even more popular, both at the factory and across the country, was the Emotional and Spiritual Quotient (ESQ) training.²² This program differs from Covey’s creation most notably in its pronounced appeals to Islamic history and practice as an inspiration for the cultivation of a

will to work. The program is the brainchild of Ary Ginanjar, a charismatic former business executive, who conceived of the program after undergoing a rededication to Islamic piety during his middle age. Ginanjar has ambitions to follow in Covey's footsteps as a management guru: after it was first established in Indonesia in 2002, ESQ quickly permeated the country, spread rapidly across Southeast Asia, and has even been held as far afield as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Netherlands. These elaborate "spiritual training" programs mix the latest human resources management theory with collective prayers and lessons in Islamic history. Ginanjar combines the measured prudence of Covey's *Seven Habits* with an Islamic version of the fire-and-brimstone oratory characteristic of American televangelists. In contrast to Covey's recipe for a methodically lived life and its absence of any reference to spirituality, the explicit invocation of religion in Ginanjar's program was striking. In this section I explore Ginanjar's programs to show how efforts to inculcate the will to work were translated into an Indonesian milieu and to show how the globalization of the will to work takes on new inflections as it travels. The explicitly Muslim cultivation of a will to work in Indonesia also further reveals the implicit Protestant overtones of Covey's *Seven Habits*.

In his books, seminars, and training programs, Ginanjar instructs participants that the five pillars of Islam contain a formula for commercial success. Thus, he asserts that a work ethic conducive to business success is present in the five pillars of Islam. For example, the fourth pillar, the duty to fast during Ramadan, is recast as a directive for self-control and individual accountability. In terms startlingly evocative of Covey's, the third pillar, the obligation to give alms, is taken as a divine endorsement of "strategic collaboration," "synergy," and exercising "win-win" approaches in both business transactions and relations with coworkers. Ginanjar

describes the prophet Muhammad as the model for a successful corporate executive and participants are encouraged to emulate his example in business and trade.

The highly engaging, interactive ESQ sessions have attracted over one million participants. Ginanjar uses the latest high-tech media centered on a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation. His presentations feature graphs, charts, tables, and ubiquitous bullet points, as well as entertaining film clips, vivid photographs, and popular music with a driving bass line and catchy lyrics. Ginanjar uses a diverse array of popular media, web sites, and academic journals, drawing as much on Hollywood blockbusters as the sage scholarship of Harvard Business School.

[Insert figure 3. Caption: “A sign adjacent to the slab steel plant at Krakatau Steel, reminding employees that ‘work is worship.’”]

Thus, spiritual reformers sought to inculcate the will to work not only through appeals to individual faith and devotion, but also through introducing principles from scientific management. Following discussion of the star principle on the second day of the training, Ginanjar introduced the “leadership principle”, which drew on the second pillar of the Islamic faith (*aqidah*), commanding conviction in prophets. This principle was illustrated with a graph drawn from an article published in the *Harvard Business Review*²³ by J. Sterling Livingston.²⁴ The leadership principle was further illustrated in film clips from *The Message*, a 1976 film about the life of Mohammed that stars Anthony Quinn as Hamza, the prophet’s uncle, and Irene Papas as Hind, the leading antagonist of Mohammed in Mecca. Mohammed was invoked as a visionary leader and a model for a modern CEO who inspired his followers in spite of the fact that the first Muslims faced persecution and the possibility of destruction of the faith. Drawing on the lesson from the Harvard journal, Ginanjar asserted that the quick Islamic expansion

during the religion's early years was attributable to the fact that early Muslims did not know they would be successful, but their leaders were able to convince them that their struggles were nonetheless not lost causes.

The gripping climax of Ginanjar's program included a simulation of events that take place during the annual *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca. Most compelling for participants was a recreation of the circulation around the *kaaba*, the central shrine in the main mosque in Mecca. An SUV-sized replica of the *kaaba* was placed in the center of the room and participants rotated around it chanting in Arabic "there is no God but Allah." Participants also reenacted the stoning of *jamrat al-aqabah*, in which pilgrims hurl rocks at three representations of the devil, by hurling small wads of paper at three demonic images elaborately drawn and posted on flip charts. These reenactments were designed to intensify the Islamic piety of corporate employees and, by so doing, to increase their corporate productivity.

Ary Ginanjar harbors ambitions to rival Covey as a global management guru and motivational trainer. His transnational ambitions were evident in what he termed "Vision 2050." This was an addendum to his notion of "Developing a Golden Indonesia 2020," which sought to expose the entire population of the nation to ESQ by the year 2020. After achieving the "spiritual reform" of Indonesia, Ginanjar hoped to compete globally with other management gurus, like Covey, by making his version of employee training available around the world by 2050. In fact, many of his employees optimistically asked me whether I thought his training program would work in the United States and even suggested that perhaps I could be the licensee for bringing it to North America.

Two Regimes of Self-Improvement

There are two central differences in the way that the Seven Habits and the ESQ training programs sought to inculcate a will to work: the mobilization of affect and the visibility of explicitly religious references. The Seven Habits was delivered in sober tones and often sounded like a university lecture. Although at certain times ESQ was narrated with similar nuance, it was regularly punctuated with intensely affective displays and passionate oratory characteristic of American televangelism. Furthermore, there were no explicitly religious references in the *Seven Habits* training, although the Puritan roots of the will to work espoused by Covey would be apparent to anyone familiar with Weber's arguments about how Protestantism created the conditions of possibility for the emergence of capitalism. In contrast, ESQ was explicitly religious, with a focus on how many of the key concepts in the human resources and success literature could be found in Islamic history and texts, especially the Qur'an and the *sunnah*.²⁵

In contrast to the theatrical delivery of spiritual training, the Seven Habits sought to inculcate a will to work in restrained tones. Instead of an elaborate multimedia presentation with film clips, calisthenics, and a booming sound system with speakers that pulsed through the bodies of participants causing them to physically vibrate, the Seven Habits was inculcated through a combination of stories, lectures, and group exercises, interspersed with video recordings of Stephen Covey himself delivering much of the actual content of training via a medium-sized television placed in the center of the room. Most portions of the program consisted of essentially sitting and watching television. Covey's videotaped specter did not reach the same vast oscillation between highs and lows that Ginanjar's vastly more melodramatic presentation achieved. Covey spoke with the temperate cadence of a Midwestern farm equipment salesman as he clearly set out the precise steps that one should undertake to achieve "effectiveness." This understated affect was reflected in the live "facilitator" who coordinated

the training and supplemented Covey's presentation with stories and lectures. At one point during the training, when illustrating the second habit (begin with the end in mind), Gusniarto led the group in a meditation asking participants to imagine their own funerals. He gently described what it would be like to have all of one's friends and relatives at one's grave site. In the background music played softly on a portable tape player. It was mildly depressing, but did not tug at the heart as did the thundering ESQ oratory.

The second major difference between the Seven Habits training workshop and ESQ spiritual training had to do with the explicitness of the religious references that each program made. Ary Ginanjar explicitly proclaimed that ESQ was "based on five pillars of Islam and six pillars of [Muslim] faith," although he was careful to note that it was based on what he asserted were "universal" spiritual principles. He told me that ESQ was universal "because Islam is universal." In contrast, explicit references to religion were completely non-existent in the Seven Habits workshop. Indeed the absence of such references is likely a key reason why the program has been exported the world over, including to many countries with a majority of non-Christians, like Indonesia.

The Seven Habits training was favored by non-Muslim Krakatau Steel employees and several explicitly contrasted it with ESQ. One of the small minority of Christian employees at the company, Marius, reversed Ginanjar's argument about the universality of ESQ, saying that Covey's workshop was in fact the "universal" one because it contained "the values of all religions." He continued, claiming, in contrast to Ginanjar's arguments, that "ESQ is specifically for Muslims...it is for those whose spirituality is low, so that they can build it up again." He further asserted that the current management of Krakatau Steel supported ESQ because they were "inclined toward Islam. But you know (the former CEO of Krakatau Steel) Sutrisno did not

want to support ESQ but was forced to by the union. He was worried that if they brought in ESQ, then there would have to be Christian training, Buddhist training, Hindu training, Confucian training, and so on. It is too expensive!” He also asserted that the Seven Habits training was superior to spiritual training due because it was interactive, as the participants were provided with workbooks and the daily planner exercises. In contrast, he said, in ESQ “people just sit there dazed, stupefied, they just accept it!”

The relationship between Covey’s model for individual success and religion was not nearly as explicit. Although there are no overt references to particular religious practices in either the training or in Covey’s book, the program is imbued with the spirit of worldly asceticism that Max Weber identified as key to the connection between Protestantism and capitalism. It would not take any great leaps of faith or logic to connect the *Seven Habits* to Covey’s Mormon upbringing, but in his books and training he makes no reference to Mormonism whatsoever. Rather, in the videos that accompany the training program, Covey argues that the habits he identifies are “based on natural laws” and “are universal” moral principles independent of “culture-bound” values. Gusniarto, the Seven Habits training facilitator, similarly argued that it was “based on universal principles that are part of human nature like justice, which is found in every religion, or love, or honesty or fairness.” Indeed, it is the proclamation of these values as universal which likely heightens the international appeal of the program and enables its global circulation. The mobility of the will to work in the *Seven Habits* is evident in its decontextualization and re-embedding in a new setting.

Conclusion: The Will to Work on Oneself

By identifying efforts to inculcate a will to work as a critical, yet under recognized, dimension of globalization, I draw on the analysis of Krakatau Steel managers and other Indonesian officials who sought to address the problem of increasing global competition through the cultivation of a work ethic.²⁶ The attraction to Covey's will to work among Indonesian elites reveals that they recognized that global competitiveness requires a kind of work ethic which was largely absent in state-owned enterprises (and other firms) in Indonesia. According to managers, employees of Krakatau Steel and other state-owned firms did not see any virtue in diligent labor. Managers believed that most employees had grown comfortable with their job security and relatively generous salaries and benefits. Even on the factory floor, employees like Hariyanto were cognizant of the fact that labor was not distributed according to the logic of optimal productivity. Indeed, they were aware that hiring practices had historically been geared toward providing jobs through *padat karya*, "work spreading", and the company's "social mission" to raise living standards, rather than an efficient distribution of labor.

However, the fact that the popularity of programs such as ESQ had eclipsed the Seven Habits in Indonesia reveals that the globalization of a will to work cannot be translated wholesale into different contexts. In conclusion, regimes of self-improvement are most effective when premised on localized norms. Indeed, while the *Seven Habits* was popular in Indonesia, it had nowhere near the mass appeal that characterized ESQ. The translation of Covey's regime for self-improvement into Islamic practices and idioms reveals that, although Indonesian leaders clearly saw the inculcation of a work ethic as critical to global competitiveness, they believed that this would be more effective if expressed in Islamic practices and idioms. Today ESQ and Ary Ginanjar are likely much better known on the streets of Jakarta, Surabaya, and other large cities in Indonesia than are *The Seven Habits* and Stephen Covey.

In conclusion, Weber identified the performance work as if it were a calling as a product of the Protestant reformation. In the ominous conclusion to *The Protestant Ethic*, he noted that although it emerged in the west, the spirit of capitalism would not necessarily be restricted to the West. By Franklin's time, Weber notes, "the religious basis [of the spirit]...had died away." However, "the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs."²⁷ In Indonesia today religious beliefs and practices are deemed pivotal to reanimating the will to work that Weber identified as central to capitalism. Indeed, Weber's ominous warning now sounds prophetic. "No one knows," he wrote, "who will live in this cage in the future."²⁸ Today, it appears that the iron cage has become a global condition as the obligation to one's calling and the regimes of self-improvement that this duty constitutes extend their icy reach.

Notes

¹ Brian Skoloff and Michelle Rinde, "Stephen Covey, '7 Habits' Author, Dies at 79," *Associated Press*, July 16, 2012, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/motivational-speaker-stephen-covey-7-habits-highly-effective-people-author-dies-79>.

² Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006); Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

³ Indonesia's deficiency compared to other nations has often been invoked as a prerogative for development initiatives and all manner of technocratic interventions. See Sulfikar Amir, "Symbolic Power in a Technocratic Regime: The Reign of B.J. Habibie in New Order Indonesia," *Sojourn* 22, no. 1 (2007):83-106.

⁴ Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, *Indonesian on the Move: Selected Speeches and Articles by the President of the Republic of Indonesia* (Jakarta: Bhuana Ilmu, 2006), 21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶ Crabtree, James, "The Rise of a New Generation of Mormons," *Financial Times*, July 9, 2010, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/938ff454-8a32-11df-bd30-00144feab49a.html#axzz2Mgh5MG52>.

⁷ Timothy K. Smith, "What's So Effective About Stephen Covey?" *Fortune Magazine*, December 12, 1994, http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/1994/12/12/80049/index.htm.

⁸ Smith, "What's So Effective About Stephen Covey?"

⁹ Catherine Elsworth, "Find Your Voice, Change Your Life," *The Daily Telegraph*, November 22, 2004.

¹⁰ Hoover's Inc., "Hoover's Company Records," (2001), last accessed December 9, 2011.

¹¹ Kevin O'Neill observes how the equation of time with money is a central tenet of corporate Christianity in Guatemala, where "time as a moral imperative" structures the labor rhythms of call centers staffed by former gang members. See Kevin L. O'Neill, "The Soul of Security: Corporatism, Christianity, and Control in Postwar Guatemala," *Social Text* 32, no. 2 (2012):21-42.

¹² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 14-15, italics original.

¹³ In making this argument I draw on Micki McGee's argument that Covey and Franklin both represent an ethics of "self-mastery" that is characteristic of American capitalism. See Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press 2005), 6.

¹⁴ James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 247.

¹⁵ According to Geertz, "work spreading" was characteristic of rural Java and captured how peasants extracted a meagre subsistence from ever-increasing labor inputs among members of a community on smaller and smaller parcels of paddy field. While this arrangement ensured adequate sustenance, it also kept all community members in a state of what Geertz called "shared poverty". See Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

¹⁶ This and names of other research participants below are pseudonyms. I use pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of all research participants, with the exception of public figures.

¹⁷ Sulfikar Amir, *The Technological State in Indonesia: The Co-Constitution of High Technology and Authoritarian Politics* (London: Routledge, 2012), 77-93.

¹⁸ Terry Besser, *Team Toyota: Transplanting the Toyota Culture to the Camry Plant in Kentucky* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

¹⁹ Benedict Anderson reports a similar experience of disorientation, as if looking through an “inverted telescope,” at a speech in 1963 by the first Indonesian President, Sukarno. During the speech, Sukarno extolled Hitler’s virtues, much to the consternation of a “European diplomat” for whom Anderson was serving as translator. See Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), 1-2.

²⁰ Covey’s theories, his attention to the relationship between government of the self and others, and his focus on embodied dispositions resonate with work on governmentality. See Michel Foucault, “Governmentality” in *The Foucault Effect*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104; Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Barbara Cruikshank illustrates how the politics of self-esteem is embedded in the way contemporary problems of self-government are articulated and enacted. See Barbara Cruikshank, “Revolutions Within: Self-Government and Self-Esteem” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas S. Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 231-52.

²¹ Paul Stephens and Robert Weston note the centrality that time plays in the self-help literature. See Paul Stephens and Robert Hardwick Weston, "Free Time: Overwork as an Ontological Condition," *Social Text* 26, no. 1 (2008):137-64.

²² I have described this employee training program at length elsewhere. See Daromir Rudnykyj, *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

²³ J. Sterling Livingston, "Pygmalion in Management," *Harvard Business Review* 65, no. 5 (1988).

²⁴ Livingston was born in Salt Lake City, and taught for many years at Harvard Business School. Like Mitt Romney and many others, he proves an example of the affinity between the Harvard Business School and the Mormon church. See Clayton M. Christensen, "If Harvard Business School Were a Religion, It Could Be Mormonism," *Washington Post Online*, May 11, 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-05-11/national/35455387_1_mormon-leadership-wrong-question-lds-church.

²⁵ The *sunnah* are texts that record words and deeds attributed to the prophet Muhammad.

²⁶ Douglas Holmes and George Marcus refer to this type of analytical strategy as "para-ethnography." See Douglas Holmes and George Marcus, "Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward the Re-Functioning of Ethnography," in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier, (Malden: Blackwell, 2005).

²⁷ Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 123.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.