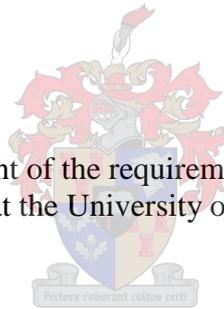


***IBM Incorporated:***  
**An exploration of an Egyptian work ethic as constructed by South  
African expatriates working in Cairo**

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
(Sociology) at the University of Stellenbosch



**Supervisor: Dr R. Begg**

March 2012

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this research assignment/thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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## Abstract

Sociologists concern themselves with exploring, describing and explaining that which is different, unknown or misunderstood. I will endeavour to focus on the latter. International migration and the emergence of a global village have compelled one to embrace the “other” with insight and vigour. This thesis explores the experiences of South African expatriates living in Cairo, Egypt. The primary objective of this study is to explore and describe the *constructed experiences of South African expatriates working in Cairo*. The purpose of my study, however, is not to delineate an Egyptian work ethic as a typology or an ideal type, but rather to reflect on the experiences of tension and divergencies as constructed by South African.

The methodological framework underlying this thesis is that of interpretivism. A qualitative study, which included semi-structured interviews and observations, provided the researcher with rich and nuanced data. Theoretical approaches of Max Weber, particularly *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and Weber’s incomplete works on Islam, are used. In agreement with Weber’s works, the main argument of this thesis is that an Egyptian work ethic is not solely fashioned through Islamic tenets *per se*, but that social, political and economic factors in Egypt are significant contributors.

## Opsomming

Dit is die moeilike taak van Sosioloë om die vreemde beide te verstaan en te beskryf ten einde sin te maak van 'dit wat anders is'. Die fokus van hierdie tesis is juis 'n poging tot die laasgenoemde. Die toenemende belangrikheid van internasionale migrasie vereis 'n betekenisvolle interaksie met mense van ander kulture, geloof en waardestelsels. Hierdie tesis sal die ervarings van Suid-Afrikaanse ekspatriote in 'n Egiptiese werksomgewing ondersoek en die moontlike bronne van konflik identifiseer. Die primêre rol van die studie is om die subjektiewe konstruksies van 'n Egiptiesewerksetiek, soos ervaar deur Suid-Afrikaners in Kairo, te identifiseer. Die doel is egter nie om 'n spesifieke en akkurate werksetiek te beskryf as 'n 'ideale tipe' nie, maar eerder om te besin oor die struwelinge wat Suid-Afrikaners in 'n vreemde milieu ervaar in terme van hul Egiptiese kollegas en hoe hul hierdie struwelinge en verskille interpreteer. Eindelik word hierdie tesis geplaas in die globale wedywing tussen die Euro-Amerikaanse Weste en Islamitiese Ooste.

'n Interpretatiewe metodologiese raamwerk word gebruik om data-insameling en -analise te benader. 'n Kwalitatiewe studie, met behulp van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude en gepaardgaande observasies is gebruik om data te versamel. Die teoretiese werke van Max Weber, meer spesifiek, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, asook sy onvoltooide werke oor Islam, is gebruik om die navorsingsvrae te beantwoord. Samehangend met Weber se werke, is die deurlopende argument van die studie dat 'n Egiptiese werksetiek nie alleenlik deur Islam en geloofswette gevorm word nie, maar dat die sosiale-, politiese- en ekonomiese realiteite van Egipte geweldig invloedryk is.

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## CHAPTER 1

### 1. Introduction

Sociologists concern themselves with exploring, describing and explaining that which is different, unknown or misunderstood. I will endeavour to focus on the latter. International migration and the emergence of a global village compel us to embrace the “other” with insight and vigour. However, historically this has not been the case. It seems that humanity fails to understand and tolerate those who appear to be different. Mankind tends to celebrate commonalities and exaggerate differences rather than learn from and embrace variation.

This thesis explores the experiences of South African expatriates living in Cairo, Egypt. Manifested in the study are many factors that influence these experiences: not only as South Africans in a foreign setting, but as newcomers confronted with a culture as rich and complex as that of Egypt’s. During my interaction with South African expatriates I realised that most of these cultural tensions surface in the workplace. The present study, therefore, came fully to fruition only in Cairo as I realised that the different historical genealogies, cultural contexts and religious fabric shape the experiences of both South Africans and Egyptians in their culturally diverse workspaces. To understand these experiences further, I will explore the historical contexts of religion and material conditions of both societies, early in the study. The aim of this thesis is to provide a description of an Egyptian work ethic as perceived and fashioned by South African expatriates through their interactions with their Egyptian colleagues. It is ultimately my contention that a subjectively perceived work ethic in contemporary Egypt is not *only* fashioned through a historical trajectory, but that it is also influenced by present-day social, political and economic realities.

Ancient Egypt was a superpower historically. The building of the pyramids, amongst many significant accomplishments, required a specialised bureaucracy unknown in its era. The history of Egypt, however, uncovers layers of change as the Egyptian civilisation stood confronted with new rulers, cultures and, ultimately, a new religion. Today Egyptian society is almost completely unrecognisable from the land of the pharaohs which flourished four millennia ago. It seems, therefore, natural to ask what has happened to Egyptian society. What influenced, and ultimately ensured this society’s “fall from grace”? What events have placed religion at the forefront of all Egyptian activities and how has such an advanced,

ancient civilisation changed to become a “backward and underdeveloped” republic? In a global arena where capitalism, democracy, secularisation and neo-liberalism are advanced as ideals, where do the present Egyptian government’s policies of “corruption”, Islamism and despotism fit into the picture?

In order for me to scientifically explore the dynamics between societies and their economies, I will primarily draw on the scholarship of Max Weber. Max Weber, honoured as one of the greatest thinkers in the discipline of Sociology, left an academic legacy, both empirically and methodologically, to which many social scientists aspire. Weber applied himself to the comparative study of world religions and their relations with a particular business ethic. It is through these undertakings that his most famous text, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1992) surfaced. Not only has this text directed the way in which the relationship between religion and capitalism is understood, it also emphasises the importance of religion in the workings and economic successes of various societies. Although many criticisms have been lodged against the writings of Max Weber, he indubitably remains one of the most prominent scholars within the social sciences.

When one considers a particular work ethic it is necessary to explore the material conditions within a specific society (or indirectly the history of capitalism) which led up to the existent business and economic practices and values. Max Weber (1992) signals modern, rational capitalism as “the pursuit of profit, and forever renewed profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise”. By the term “rational”, Weber means that this type of capitalism is “methodical and systematic in nature” (Swedberg, 2010:22). Weber argues that a desire for wealth has existed in most times and places which, in itself, has little resemblance to capitalistic action (Weber, 1992: x). This capitalistic action, which he describes as “a regular orientation to the achievement of profit through economic exchange ... through the rational organisation of labour [which] includes routinised, calculated administration within continuously functioning enterprises” (Weber, 1992: x, xi) only exists in the Euro-American West and only since relatively recent times. Weber, however, is not ignorant of the development and advancements observed in Eastern societies, but claims their limitations to be due to an absence of systematisation and rationalisation (Weber, 1992: x).

Weber’s academic endeavours, therefore, were “intended as analyses of divergent modes of the rationalisation of culture and as attempts to trace out the significance of such divergencies

for socio-economic development” (Weber, 1992: xiv). It is important to note, however, that Weber does not claim that differences in the rationalisation of religious ethics are the sole, momentous influences that distinguish both Western and Eastern civilisations’ economic development (Weber, 1992: xvi). Rather more important is that any attempt to elucidate the cultural differences *vis-à-vis* economic and business values should aim to “characterise ... from the view-point of cultural history, whilst identifying what departments are rationalised and in what direction” (Weber, 1992: xxxix).

It is important to take cognisance of the particularities of both societies in question, but it is also necessary to place these cultural contexts within the global discourse, both empirically and methodologically. Samuel P. Huntington (1993) wrote that his prophesised clash of civilisations would be manifested along the fault lines of the “more secular and liberal West and the more sacred and traditional Islam” (Belt, 2006:48; Ahmed, 2002). The Euro-American West characterised by secularism, a culture of freedom and change founded on human reason and scientific materialism, would come face to face with Islamic civilisations built on a fundamental duty of justice, stewardship and divine revelation. “In Western civilisation only, cultural phenomena have appeared, which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having universal significance and value” (Weber, 1992: xxix). The “universal significance and value” of Western culture, in addition, deems the traditional Islamic civilisation as “unfit for survival in the ever-changing world” (Belt, 2006:48). If one situates the Euro-American West and the Islamic Orient as adversaries you fall risk of essentialising both “cultures”. It is, however, important to concede that the Euro-American West values materialism, individualism and freedom in contrast with spiritual traditions, the tribe, community, justice and honour esteemed by Islamic societies (Belt, 2006:49). “So as in many ways as they are perfect complements, [they] are also polar opposites – the kind of opposites that do not attract, but repel, like oil and water” (Belt, 2006:49).

The Euro-American West has historically positioned itself as the centre of knowledge production. This methodological approach concerns many Oriental scholars, such as Said (1978) and Salvatore (1996), because it implies the renouncing of Orientalism whilst engaging with Islamic knowledge development. This approach does not make use of “ideal types” or theoretical typologies stemming from the Euro-American West. “Orientalism has been an academic undertaking to explain ‘why the Islamic Orient, in spite of its bright past civilisation, had become at some point in history tendentially static and incapable of moving

ahead” (Salvatore, 1996: 460). Weber’s ideal type, as a key concept to Weberian methodology, expresses a theoretical conceptualisation through which the researcher can order and analyse knowledge gathered. Farris (2010:279) claims:

Ideal types express Weber’s neo-Kantian conception of the relationship between reality and knowledge in which the former is a meaningless infinity in constant change, to which human beings give their own meanings, and the latter is the rigorous, disciplined capacity of the scientist to put some order in this chaos.

Although Max Weber died before completing his work on Islam, a sufficient body of literature exists to supplement Weber’s incomplete works. One of Weber’s greatest contributions in his work, concerning methodology within the social sciences, is that of a comparative historical sociological approach to understanding contemporary and existing phenomena in a society. Weber argues that in order to examine the economic life of society, one should place it within the “context of the historical development of culture as a whole” (Weber, 1992: viii). Such a methodology of historical study requires a sensitivity to the central role of material factors in shaping a society’s cultural course in history. It is therefore important to explore cultural phenomena grounded in its historical context as “the cultural values that lend meaning to human life, as it was held, are created by specific processes of social development” (Weber, 1991: ix). Consistent with Weberian methodology, I will begin this thesis with a crucial, yet brief, historical overview of Egyptian society with regard to its material, religious and political components.

The methodological framework underlying this thesis is that of interpretivism. A qualitative study which include comprehensive semi-structured interviews and observations, provide the researcher with rich data. The research fieldwork was conducted in Cairo, where snowball sampling provided the respondents studied in this thesis. From a methodological framework it is important to consider that both Egyptians and South Africans are geographically “Africans”, but it is important to consider Orientalist, Islamic and Euro-American theoretical frameworks in the analysis.

It is crucial when one explores an Egyptian (and ultimately an Islamic) work ethic to consider an investigation of the (dominating) role of religion within that society. I find it particularly relevant to identify the enabling or disabling role that Islam plays in the economic

development of Egypt. Weber's (1992: xl) opinion is that religion significantly influences the development of societies:

For though the development of economic rationalism is partly dependent on rational technique and law, it is at the same time determined by the ability and disposition of men to adopt certain types of practical rational conduct ... When these types have been obstructed by spiritual obstacles, the development of rational economic conduct has also met serious inner resistance. The magical and religious forces and the ethical ideas of duty based upon them have in the past always been among the most important formative influences on conduct.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber's primary concern is with the relationship between Protestantism and the emergence of values that fit with the development of capitalism in Protestant societies. Weber, therefore, attempts to identify which factors contribute to the actualisation of modern capitalism. He identifies many circumstances which distinguish the historical totality of Islamic societies from those of the West. As Bryan Turner (1974:12) states:

Indeed, Weber regards Islam as, in many respects, the polar opposite of Puritanism. For Weber, Islam accepts a purely hedonist spirit, especially towards women, luxuries and property. Given the accommodating ethic of the Qur'an, there was no conflict between moral injunctions and the world and it follows that no ascetic ethic of world-mastery could emerge in Islam ... Weber shows that with prebendal feudalism and patrimonial bureaucracy which were characteristic of the Abbasid, Mamluk and Ottoman dynasties, the pre-requisites of rational capitalism could not emerge.

Weber identifies feudalism to describe the elements of a Muslim economic ethic in that "the most pious adherents of the religion in its first generation became the wealthiest" (Begg, 2011:72). In addition to the elements mentioned by Turner (1974:13), he cites Weber's claim that the absence of a "rational, formal law, autonomous cities, and independent burgher class and political stability" were deciding factors in shaping the material conditions of Islamic societies. In *The Hajj*, Begg (2011:77) explores this idea further:

I now know why the Ottoman Sunnis lost power for the Islamic world against the growth of modern capitalism. Their leaders aspired to renunciation of this world through twirling, magic and the cult of saints while western capitalist countries reasoned more secularly on building weaponry for their national defence and security and they also mastered the management of their modern bureaucracies. For the Sunnis it became a matter of salvation in an afterlife. Their extension of this world into an afterlife grew increasingly more important for them as philosophy, mysticism

and theology became intertwined. They kept their eyes on the history of the past while the present was snatched away by a more efficient enemy looking at the present and the future.

Weber's principal argument in exploring Islam (and this is my argument), is that it is not Islam – distinguished as a set of values that an individual internalises – which hinders the progress of capitalism, but rather a set of Islamic applications in the socio-economic and political sphere which creates a hostile environment for the growth of capitalism and material goods as seen in the West. Turner (1974:13-16) explains Weber's argument further:

It was the needs of warriors as a status group which determined the Islamic world-view and not a psychological attitude or a social value which shaped Islam ... Industrialisation was not impeded by Islam as the religion of individuals ... but by the religiously determined structure of Islamic states, their officialdom and their jurisprudence ... The main point of Weber's analysis of Islam is not that the early warrior ethic precluded capitalism, but that the political and economic conditions of Oriental society were hostile to pre-capitalist requisites.

Weber places the blame on dogma proclaimed by the Holy Law, or *Shariah*<sup>1</sup>, as a rigid and causally influential framework which sets the social scene for Islamic societies (Turner, 1974:13). I argue in the conclusion of this thesis, that an Egyptian work ethic, as perceived by South African expatriates, is not consistent with that of an Islamic work ethic as identified by Islamic scholarship. In addition, I contend that an Egyptian work ethic is not entirely fashioned through Islam as a religion, but also by the Egyptian political and socio-economic reality. Turner (1974:20-21) emphasises this point:

Thus, in the case of Islam, Weber could be understood as claiming that a certain set of attitudes (hedonism, fatalism and imitation of established traditions) and the specific values of the Shar'ia were incompatible with capitalism, but to understand why those attitudes were prevalent at all we need to explore the social circumstances of Islamic states (patrimonial bureaucracy) ...

Furthermore,

In practice, Weber is far more concerned with the analysis of the military, political and economic circumstances of Oriental society than he is with the 'world images'

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<sup>1</sup>“A code of approved social behaviour was developed by the Prophet Muhammad, and his companions were later appointed, when the Islamic community expanded in the early days of the Islamic state, to institutionalise, perpetuate and preserve the codes and ensure compliance with the principles of *shari'a*” (Lewis, 2006:7).

which arise under those circumstances ... He treated the role of values as secondary and dependent on Islamic social conditions.

Weber's observation, as cited by Turner (1974), shapes my argument. Egyptian society could be described as becoming despondent, in recent decades, in response to corruption, mismanagement and lack of freedom. A novel by Alaa Al-Aswany (2004), *The Yacoubian Building*, presents an integrated reality of different characters living in the (often unspoken) realities of modern Egypt. Although fictional, Al-Aswany touches on many (controversial) elements of modern Egypt and Islam. A central theme of his novel is that of class – portrayed by the protagonist as a son of a doorman desperately trying to become a policeman. He succeeds brilliantly in all his exams, but stumbles into the Egyptian elitist mentality of “your father is a boab<sup>2</sup> and therefore you will never be more than a boab”. This lack of social mobility, civil rights and political freedom hangs like a cloud of black smoke over Egyptians. It is here that one can argue that these socio-political realities influence, to some extent, an Egyptian approach towards work. Belt (2006:42) accurately describes modern Egypt when he sketches an Islamic leader's return to Egypt after a lengthy period of time:

... returned to Egypt only to be humiliated, seeing all around him what one American journalist saw: ‘An apathetic public, economic mismanagement and a wildly out-of-control birthrate have become the cancers of Cairo, sapping its strength and leaving its dazed inhabitants the victims of what is known in Egypt as the IBM syndrome — *inshallah* (if God is willing), *bokra* (tomorrow), and *malesh* (never mind). It doesn't matter what gets done or how it's done. If not today, then tomorrow, God decides anyway, so why worry?’

International migration of professionals has become common practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Expatriates, therefore, are continually assigned to cultural milieus with which they are unfamiliar and are compelled to accommodate new cultural schemas. The cultural diversity of transnational corporations' (TNCs) work environments has fashioned a new category of employee: the expatriate. Expatriates are confronted with host environments and host cultures with which they are mostly unfamiliar. Not only are they compelled to survive hostile cultural environments at times, but they also have to successfully adapt to a different work milieu in which ethics and values arguably differ from that back home.

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<sup>2</sup> A ‘boab’ (doorman/janitor/watchman) is found at the entry to some apartment buildings. He receives a monthly tip for performing various small services in many apartment buildings. Each occupant contributes to his salary. ([http://www.egypt.alloexpat.com/egypt\\_information/maids\\_in\\_egypt.php](http://www.egypt.alloexpat.com/egypt_information/maids_in_egypt.php)).

I argue (more clearly in the subsequent sections) that a Western work ethic or approach towards business is one that includes individualisation and the rationalising of the maximum use of time and monetary resources. In this regard I argue that a Western work ethic is equated with the Weber's Protestant work ethic. Ideas underlying the Protestant work ethic (and ultimately the ethic of South African expatriates) include: *Time is money; credit is money; one should make one's money work for you; money is of a profiting nature; to spend money frugally and not make debt; to not waste time or money and work hard for your riches* (Hamilton-Atwell, 1998:81).

Methodologically, it is important to concede that my South African perspective in arguing and exploring Egyptian (Islamic) work values from a Western viewpoint, may bias the data. Although I am mindful of falling into the traps of Orientalism, the scope and subsequent limitations of this Master's thesis may provide a debilitated justification for such sources of error. I realise that the methodological considerations of my South African background, and therefore my research position as an insider, might translate into subconscious, ethnocentric and Eurocentric conceptualisations. In the following section I would elaborate on my decision of exploring an Egyptian work ethic from a South African vantage point.

Subconsciously I posit a Euro-American (and ultimately South African) work ethic as the norm, whilst considering anything divergent as the "other". The reason why I studied South African expatriates from within a Euro-American theoretical framework is three-fold. Firstly, the cultural affiliation of South Africans (particularly white South Africans) with the Euro-American West, places them within the Western social and capitalistic milieu. The origins of this cultural affiliation, Pillay (2011) argues, results directly from South Africa's colonisation by the British: "South Africans, whose culture is still today dominated by the thinking of "Enlightenment" (Pillay, 2011). The concept of Enlightenment is important to our discussion and will be dealt with in Chapter 3. It implies achieving a process of rational rather than ignorant, superstitious or mystical thinking. Secondly, numerous South African expatriates in Cairo have spent many years working in countries of the Euro-American West. Thirdly, (and this I will argue more clearly in the following sections) Calvinism, which influences South African expatriates' work ethic, originates from Europe.

## 1.1. Rationale for Study

In the previous section I constitute the main purpose of this thesis as an exploration of an Egyptian work ethic as South Africans working in Cairo experience and construct it. I acknowledge that in my conceptualisation of the primary research question I engage in Orientalism. Why did I not study a South African work ethic from an Egyptian point of view and why did I use South African conceptualisations as my primary data? The answer is threefold. Firstly, being of South African origin, I was seen as an insider by my respondents which made establishing rapport easier. Secondly, I had key informers in Cairo which made my sampling easier. Thirdly, giving the (financial and timely) limitations and scope of a Master's thesis, and the inability to speak Arabic, interviewing Egyptians were very difficult. Not only am I culturally and linguistically and outsider, but many Egyptians seem to distrust non-Muslims. Establishing rapport with Egyptians would then have been not only difficult and timely, but it would have been costly to involve translators.

The reason why I chose a study of this nature is multifarious. I have travelled to Egypt and subsequently became fascinated not only with Egyptian culture but also the case underlying Egypt's decline. I am also attracted to Islamic studies and the synergy between religion and variant societies. The fall of the Berlin Wall signalled the end of the Cold War, and for some theorists such as Francis Fukuyama (1992), the end of history. It seems, however, that man does not find contentment with peace and many strategists have identified a new enemy of the West – Islam (Salamé, 1993:22). The events that took place on September 11 have cognominated the Islamic Orient the global antagonist. Not only am I generally intrigued by cross-cultural interaction, but the subsequent counterchange (or lack thereof) between the Islamic East and the Euro-American West has aroused my interest in an analogous topic of study.

In addition to the account provided above, it is a known fact among Islamic scholars such as Turner (1974); Belt (2006) and Ahmed (2002), that a substantial body of knowledge on Islam is either lacking or misunderstood. As Bryan Turner (1974:1) states: “An examination of any sociology of religion text-book published in the last fifty years will show the recurrent and depressing fact that sociologists are either not interested in Islam or have nothing to contribute to Islamic scholarship”. Ahmed (2002:42) emphasises this need to study Islam as a world religion:

Studying the main global religions in interplay, sometimes clashing, sometimes in alliance, can provide a clue. Of these, Islam remains the most misunderstood. All the religions are in need of understanding, as they are usually viewed through the lens of stereotype and caricature, perhaps none more so than Islam.

It is for this lack of scholarship and enquiry, I argue, that misconceptions and apathy towards an engagement with Islam lies at the root of many tensions between the Oriental East and Euro-American West. It would be naive to claim that a mutual understanding and respect between the Islamic East and Euro-American West would shade and erase all fault lines, but creating spaces for inter-cultural development within the transnational workplace would be a start. Belt (2006:58) reiterates the dire need for inter-cultural communication:

At the heart of this clash is our lack of motivation to engage in real dialogue — dialogue that goes beyond the intellectual suicide of merely looking for common ground; dialogue that goes directly to the hardest things that each side says in private among friends. Presently, we have two monologues, but no dialogue, and no hard work committed to produce the synthesis of the ‘more perfect union’ of the West and Islam that we all know is possible. Our politically correct and postmodern ideology assumes that all religious ideas and cultures are the same, creating an unwillingness to confront a group that claims to be speaking on behalf of religion and engage it in a dialectical type dialogue aimed at producing real synthesis.

Despite the fact that these two “cultural groups” might not be as contradistinctive as they may seem, tension among the Oriental East and Euro-American West is not a new phenomenon. Shah (2005:465) argues that these tensions escalated after the end of the Cold War:

During the Cold-War period, the ‘Oriental’ – ‘Occidental’ distinction hardly gains currency in the public imagination. That was because the world’s political fault-lines were not aligned along cultural lines, but more across political ideologies and class distinctions. At best such discourses between ‘East’ and ‘West’, ‘Oriental’ and ‘Occidental’ are the stuff of bourgeoisie or even neo-liberal discourse, where notions of the East could even evoke romantic images of the exotic East, to be romanticized [*sic*]<sup>3</sup> by the bourgeoisie imagination, but politically and economically exploited in actual practice.

Over and above my personal interest in the topic in question, I maintain that this thesis might be of interest to other academics. Many novels have surfaced about the individual’s encounter with a foreign abode. Labour sociologists, conversely, are interested in the (cultural) adaption of expatriates to their host country and workplace and how this will affect their work

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<sup>3</sup> Quotes provided throughout the text are presented as in the original text.

performance. A focus on the individual, constructed experiences of expatriates, as recorded in this study, will highlight the social issues which accompany temporary migration. Such information may prove valuable to companies or organisations that employ transnational personnel. Sociologists and anthropologists invest much time and effort into ascertaining the lived, constructed realities of participants. It is therefore necessary not to rely solely on “facts” when studying the displaced, but the varying contexts and situations as experienced by these expatriates. As Amartya Sen (1997:7) clearly states:

The world in which we live is very mixed, and our sentiments, principles, passions and irritations come in many shapes and forms. The conditional variability of our principles and sentiments often does have a regional component and can be linked with history and culture.

This study is, therefore, relevant within the context of globalisation which has blurred the borders between strangers. Such increased globalisation of the world economy with TNCs mushrooming world-wide, has involved the research of “foreign”. Labour sociologists, as well as scholars of migration, would share my interest in this field. It might also interest psychologists who have concerned themselves with studying the “acculturation” (Berry, 1990) of expatriates to their foreign hosts, and human resources managers of TNCs could also benefit from applying the results of such a study to their work. Ali & Al-Owaihian (2008:7) believe strongly that the Islamic work ethic has widely been misunderstood or ignored in management and organisational studies and therefore require the attention of scholars. This includes exponents of business studies, as well as industrial sociologists, who endeavour to delineate various business and management styles across cultural groups. This study, however, will produce an individually constructed work ethic as fathomed by South African expatriates as it stands in relation to their own. Parboteeah, Hoegl and Cullen (2009:120) elaborate on the neglect of religion in business studies:

Such a neglect of religion may be due to the fact that international management researchers, trained in the scientific methods based on logic, are wary of investigating issues that may not be perceived as necessarily conforming to the traditional scientific model. This explanation is feasible given that it is recognized that social scientists have long viewed religion as immune to the positivist approach. Furthermore ... researchers have also been reluctant to study religion as such studies have provoked unease and controversy. Such controversy occurs because religious adherents find it difficult to believe that religion can be understood through science.

It is therefore not only important to understand Islam on a global scale, but crucial on both an empirical and practical level. This is affirmed by Parboteeah, Hoegl and Cullen, (2009:120) who state: “Despite this acknowledged importance of the role of religion in most societies, it is surprising to note that international management scholars have largely ignored religion in their research”. In acknowledging the significance of the global workplace it is also useful to note that “the very conception of business ethics is an important topic in international comparisons” (Ederle, 1997:1476). A study of this nature has become increasingly relevant as business people and organisations, globally, are confronted with common challenges in their various workplaces. Ali & Al-Owaihian (2008:6) explain further:

While the evolution of work ethic and the meaning of work in the Western world may correspond to the nature of the European society and its held values and beliefs, one should not overlook the fact that other societies and civilizations have their own work ethic and beliefs. Their experiences may not mirror those of the West. More likely, these societies have had developed conceptualization and views of work that manifest their cultural realities. This is especially true for Confucian and Islamic civilizations. Over centuries, both civilizations have accumulated a wealth of knowledge and experience pertaining to work and economic enterprises. Their achievements were a testimony to the existence of thriving cultures.

I aim to place this thesis in an important and global context, but it is also important to embrace cultural differences in our quotidian life. This is particularly relevant within the South African context. The following section endeavours to delineate precisely what this thesis sets out to do.

## **1.2. Key research questions**

The following study aims to explore the cultural experiences of South African expatriates who are positioned in Cairo, Egypt. Notwithstanding the extent of globalisation, westernisation and the consequent immersion of cultures into a global melting pot, each new assignment presents a set of specific cultural values, practices and ethics to challenge the success of the expatriate. “Managers need an appreciation of the ethical norms of different groups and cultures in order to gain complete understanding of the cultural environment in which the firm must operate” (Rice, 1999:345). As this thesis explores the perceived business and work ethic of Egyptians, in relation to those of the South African expatriates currently working and living in Cairo, the research presents the individually constructed conceptions of an Egyptian work ethic fashioned through religion, the social fabric of Cairo, classism,

racism and the Egyptian political climate, whilst also positioning it in relation to their own work ethic.

The primary objective of this study is to unearth and comprehend the *constructed experiences of South African expatriates working in Cairo*. The purpose of my study, however, is not to delineate an Egyptian work ethic as a typology or an ideal type, but rather to reflect on the experience of tension and divergencies as constructed by South African expatriates and then to place my findings within the global discourse of cross-cultural research.

Research questions include:

1. Do South African expatriates perceive a peculiar “Egyptian work ethic”?
  - a) If so, how does s/he describe such a work ethic?
  - b) If any, what are the differences perceived among South African expatriates’ own work ethic and that of their Egyptian colleagues?
2. How does Egyptian culture, history, socio-economic and political climate influence an Egyptian work ethic?
3. How does the work of Max Weber theoretically contribute towards exploring the interplay between society and economy?

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the above questions sufficiently and scientifically. In order to do so, it is important to consider the historical processes and trajectories (as emphasised by Weber) leading up to the realities within modern Egypt.

### **1.3. Chapter Outline**

The following thesis will be presented in six chapters. The second chapter acts as a literature review in order to provide background information on the concepts utilised throughout the study. The chapter will start by presenting a brief historical overview of Egypt and Islam. Subsequently a typology of migrants will be given whilst applying this model to the expatriates studied. The chapter will then present a description a arguably particular South African work ethic. Values taken from Max Weber’s Protestant ethic will be used to compare the work ethic of South African expatriates. An exploration of Islamic work ethics will follow. Subsequently, the *IBM* philosophy, which illustrates the conduct of business in the Islamic Middle East, will be explored while concluding the role and relevance of religion in the workplace.

The third chapter will focus on the theoretical frameworks used in substantiating collected empirical evidence. This chapter will look at international migration theory and how it sheds light on the expatriate experience. This chapter will also look at work ethics and ethics in general, as a theoretical construct. The work of Max Weber will be particularly important and relevant in this chapter as his writings on Islam and *The Protestant Ethic* will serve as a guideline for the proposed research questions. Theoretical concepts such as rationalisation, bureaucratisation, modernity, disenchantment and secularisation will be key ideas in the attempt to define and debunk ideas in this chapter.

Chapter four will provide a discussion of methodology used in this thesis. The methodological frameworks and assumptions used will be explored and explained in conjunction with the limitations and sources of error associated with these methods. The methodological insights of Weber (such as *Verstehen* and objectivity) will be applied and elucidated on in this chapter while also providing the operationalisation of the study. Max Weber introduced us to the concept of *Verstehen* which forms the core of the constructivist and phenomenological paradigms. The founding assumption of *Verstehende* sociology places the actor's definition of the situation as a starting point from which all understanding thereafter is based (Turner, 1974:43). *Verstehende* sociology, therefore, does not seek to find truth, but rather the social actor's truth. *Orientalism* as theoretical framework, in addition to its limitations, is also relevant in this chapter. The chapter will conclude with a personal methodological reflection.

The fifth chapter will provide the results from empirical data gathered as well as the discussion surrounding the fieldwork completed. This chapter will be divided into core themes highlighted by both the data gathered and the theory used. These themes include the *IBM* philosophy; religion in the workplace; and the relevance of emotional intelligence among others.

The final chapter includes concluding remarks, a personal reflection as well as shortcomings of the study and future recommendations. It is in this chapter that I attempt to draw accurate conclusions from the data gathered while considering the limitations of the theoretical and methodological frameworks used. The contribution of this study and recommendations to researchers interested in furthering this project will be provided.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. Literature Review

Any study, if it is to be worthwhile to scientific scholarship, necessitates a thorough engagement with existing knowledge and research on the topic of inquiry. The following literature review, therefore, serves as an acquaintance with scholarly material on the topic of Islamic and Egyptian work ethics and the many factors that interplay in the construction of such an ethic. The first part of the chapter will look at the relevance of religion in the workplace. There is a consensus among some academics that religion still has some priority in the workplace (Parboteeah, Hoegl & Cullen, 2009:120). Parboteeah *et al.* (2009:124) claim that all major religions prescribe work as an obligation to the individual:

Religion, as an important social institution, has a strong norm-setting influence on a wide range of societal life, given that religious teachings explicate behavioral prescriptions. This suggests that independent of an individual's level of religiosity, the strength of religion as a social institution specifies a significant contextual influence. Such influence occurs because all major religions, over centuries and generations, have explicated (e.g. through scripture) and reinforced (e.g. through ascription of societal status for living a diligent life) work-related behavioral prescriptions. This results, over time, in norms shared by the members of a society; in this case norms regarding work as an obligation to society.

Notwithstanding the weight of religious teachings on the individual's approach towards work, it is important to acknowledge the role of broader social institutions and processes (such as the family or industrialisation) in making sense of an individual's behaviour. Social institutions, therefore, guide individual behaviour in producing formal and informal norms which invariably determine such behaviours, attitudes and values within certain delineated boundaries (Parboteeah *et al.*, 2009:124). Enderle (1997:1482) elaborates on the significance of social institutions:

By 'social institution', the author means 'a concentration of social forces, of a practical as well as of an academic nature, in support of the moral quality of decision processes in business'. It is 'a mixture of basic concepts, well-tested methods of moral analysis, local customs in commercial transactions and in employment policies, historically grown assumptions of fairness, decency, and misdemeanour, long-term positions of power, and market constraints', and takes seriously the national and local specificities in moral thinking and acting.

Personal beliefs and the socialisation of religious teachings and societal mores, present a set of ethics which steer, to varying degrees, how societies operate. The normative and behavioural influence of religion on the individual, however strong, does not necessarily nullify the individual's agency, but rather constrains the individual's behaviour, attitudes and values. Thus "people adapt their own values to fit the opportunities and demands of the significant societal institutions in their lives" (Parboteeah *et al.*, 2009:124). It is also worthwhile to state that individuals do not respond identically to the "incentives and disincentive embedded in the institutional context" (Parboteeah *et al.*, 2009:124) but rather act to internalise these norms which lead to noticeable variances among social actors. Obligations of institutional norms determine the individual's standing in society regarding his acceptance or not and it is imperative to note that these normative prescriptions and their subsequent pressures are stronger in more religious contextual environments (Parboteeah *et al.*, 2009:124).

Accompanying globalisation and industrialisation is the notion of secularisation which requires religion to be shifted into the private sphere and out of the public realm. This notion of secularisation and Weber's concept of disenchantment will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter. It is, however, fundamental to the thesis to unearth the role of religion in the Egyptian workplace and to assess how this may or may not lead to tensions experienced by transnational workers – in this case South African expatriates. The following section, therefore, explores an Islamic work ethic and how religion shapes corporate culture within the Egyptian workplace. I will also discuss factors possibly influencing an Egyptian work ethic and possible incongruencies with a prescribed Islamic. An Egyptian (or perhaps Middle Eastern) work ethic has been identified by literature as the IBM philosophy. This philosophy is crucial to the framework of an Egyptian work ethic. I will therefore discuss the IBM thesis in detail as it is compared with a Protestant or Euro-American work ethic.

The chapter will conclude by a conceptualisation of a South African work ethic whilst identifying underlying Protestant ethics. Also investigated in this chapter are the characteristics of expatriates in general to ascertain whether there is a difference between the work ethic displayed by South African expatriates *particularly* in as compared to that of expatriates in general.

Max Weber engaged in comparative historical studies in his efforts to compare societies and their economies. Weber therefore values the historical facts in shaping his comparisons. Staying true to Weber's methodology, this thesis would benefit greatly from such an approach. Taking Weber's approach therefore may perhaps yield different answers to the research questions posed, but due to the scope of this master's thesis seems a bit ambitious. Notwithstanding these limitations I acknowledge the importance of historical trajectories in fashioning economies and I will therefore provide a brief historical overview of Egyptian society.

## **2.1. Historical Context**

The history of Egypt is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating. For centuries, Egypt stood statuesque among the ancient superpowers. The past centuries – and especially the last – have witnessed her steady fall from grace to a country amidst great political and economic turmoil. With a history as rich as the pharaohs who once ruled it, Egypt's past stretches for more than five millennia. It is, therefore, not the purpose of this chapter to provide even a brief overview of Egypt's history nor is it necessary to take the reader through the complex intricacies that have fashioned modern Egypt. Instead, I will elaborate on the history of Cairo which is more relevant to the objectives of this study, to reach an understanding of present-day Cairo. The movement of peoples both in and out of the city have been tremendously significant in the formation of Cairo. Foreigners and non-Egyptians have been key to the development of Cairo, and present-day Egypt as a whole. Roth and Weber (1976: 307) emphasise the importance of such a historical approach as a methodology in inquiry: "It is the subsequent task of history to find a causal explanation for these specific traits ... Sociology as I understand it can perform this very modest preparatory work".

This study's focus, therefore, will be on exploring the history of Maadi, a suburb of Cairo which was built for foreigners and infidels<sup>4</sup> and it has remained the chosen habitat for today's expatriates and most of those interviewed for this study. As a suburb, it is very different from the rest of Cairo's suburbs. This "isolation" from the rest of Cairo notably influences the experiences and perceptions of respondents. Thereafter, the trajectory of Islam will be deliberated as religion is a core theme of this study and its fundamental historical role in Egyptian society needs to be explored. What follows, then, is a brief and selective overview of relevant periods and aspects of Egyptian history so as to sketch the scene in which

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<sup>4</sup> Muslims define Infidels as "unbelievers" in Islam or other religions.

expatriates, assigned in Egypt, find themselves. The study is, of necessity, limited in scope as the constraints of this thesis demands.

### ***2.1.1. Egypt: Cairo***

*“Cairo is like a cracked vase whose two halves can never be put back together.”<sup>5</sup>*

Six centuries fashioned the foundation of Cairo (Raymond, 2000:5). The city of Fustat was Cairo’s predecessor as the modern capital of Egypt and later became one of the largest capitals of the Arab world. Fustat was founded at the beginning of the year 642, but was, since inception, referred to as Misr (Raymond, 2000:11). The exact history of Fustat, however, remains uncertain. What remains undisputed, however, is the significance of Fustat in shaping the history of Cairo. “...The foundation of the Fatimid city al-Qahira opened a new chapter ... thereafter Cairo would evolve steadily until modernisation began in the mid-nineteenth century” (Raymond, 2000:31).

The period between 1863 and 1936 saw the westernisation of Cairo under their leader Isma’il Pasha. The city urbanised as housing structures, water infrastructure, roads and public gas lighting were transformed (Raymond, 2000:308-311). Pasha aspired to create a Cairo equal to European capitals: “Over the past thirty years Europe’s influence has transformed Cairo. Now ... we are civilized” (Raymond, 2000:312). It was Pasha’s dream to create a European capital south of the Mediterranean. However, his successes were limited, as insolvency threatened the Egyptian government and its sovereignty. In 1879, British troops entered Cairo and only left in 1954. During this time, Cairo’s population was estimated at 374,000 of which 19,000 were foreigners. The period of colonialisation between 1882 and 1936 was characterised by the modernisation of Cairo which included introducing municipal water and public street-lighting. Consequently, the city’s expansion was tremendous and as Raymond (2002:317-318) describes, it grew in two distinct directions:

Henceforth there would be two Cairos side by side ... Cairo’s old city had undergone great transformations ... while ... a new city ... organized along European lines and marked by a massive foreign presence, had sprung to life on the west.

During British rule, urbanisation increased but it also hindered agricultural activities. The population of Egypt grew and substantially resulted in an overcrowded and overflowing

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<sup>5</sup> Raymond, 2000:318

Cairo. Industrialisation was steady, but slow. The presence of foreigners, due to colonial rule, became even more significant. In 1927, there were 76,173 foreigners in Cairo the majority of who were Greeks and Italians (Raymond, 2000:321). During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the Muslim population lived in close proximity to these foreign colonists who directed economic, commercial and service enterprises. These minorities included Jewish, Greek, Armenian, Italian and French communities (Vatikiotis, 1990:8). Raymond (2000:333; 338) encapsulates the reality of this foreign presence in Egypt:

Before 1882, the dividing line separated a 'traditional' sector from a 'modern' one, but after Egypt's colonialisation the line marked a boundary between different nationalities, a harsher and more intolerable division. One could now speak of a 'native' city and a 'European' one...

Furthermore:

This city reflected a divided society, a colonized nation. Wherever one looked there was evidence of the primacy of foreigners – ensconced in their business districts from where they controlled the country's economy, sheltered in their residential neighbourhoods where the Egyptian elite also lived. The dilemma facing Egyptians was clear: either to resign themselves to the slow asphyxiation of the old quarters or to accept assimilation into a way of life brought to them from outside...

1952 marked, *de facto*, Egypt's independence from British rule. The period between 1936 and 1992, however, was eclipsed by "galloping population growth" (Raymond, 2000:341). This explosion of Cairo's population was a direct result of increased rural-to-urban migration and inter-city urban migration. Push factors included strong demographic growth resulting in dwindling resources and unemployment while pull factors constituted the attraction of the capital, the expectation of better living conditions and Nasser's active policy of industrialisation and job creation (Raymond, 2000:342).

#### **2.1.1.1. Present-day**

Present-day Cairo is one the largest and most densely populated cities in the world with a population of 6,758,581 people living in the city itself ([www.censusinfo.capmas.gov.eg](http://www.censusinfo.capmas.gov.eg); 2006). European style villas have now been replaced with incomplete apartment blocks "decorated" with air-conditioners and satellite dishes while the rooftops have become the asylums of the homeless and impoverished. Street gutters are filled with rubble, garbage and stray cats and a layer of dust and smog floats above all the comings and goings of Cairo. Noise pollution is the norm in a city where hooting and honking is ubiquitous.

Unemployment, poverty and dwindling infrastructure are obvious on the streets while the political climate of present-day Egypt ensures a military officer on every street corner.

Egypt has the second largest economy in the Arab world, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) *per capita* of US \$6200 (2010) per year (Central Intelligence Agency: Egypt, Economy). The three main sources of income contributing to Egypt's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are tourism; revenue from the Suez Canal; and cash remittances for Egyptians abroad. Egypt has a very large population which is estimated at just less than 70 million. More than 90% of the population is situated in urban areas such as Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said and Suez (Zoubir, 2000:330). During Egypt's financial year of 2007 tourism accounted for 6,5% of their GDP grossing \$8,2 billion.

Remittances from labour migrants abroad contribute largely to Egypt's GDP. "Migration generally leads to important gains for the sending country, primarily through remittances. Because international wage differences are so large, the amounts remitted are often a multiple of what the migrants could have earned at home" (World Development Programme 1995; McCormick & Wahba, 2000:509). Remittances usually include cash monies which are transferred from one place to another by individual migrant workers to their families or friends back home. In 1992, Egypt received the largest amount of workers' remittances in a single year; grossing \$6,1billion (Zohry & Harrell-Bond, 2003:43). During the financial year of 2001/02, Egypt ranked fifth among developing countries in remittances, receiving the most remittances firstly from the United States (\$956 million); followed by Saudi Arabia; United Arab Emirates and Kuwait<sup>6</sup> (Zohry & Harrell-Bond, 2003:45). Between 1980 and 1993, the Middle East and North Africa as a region demonstrated the steepest decline in GNP *per*

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<sup>6</sup> Remittances of Egyptians Working Abroad by Country in US\$ (millions); Egypt 2001/02 (Zohry & Harrell-Bond, 2003:46)

	Million US\$	Per cent
United States of America	955.9	34.5
Saudi Arabia	612.4	22.1
United Arab Emirates	312.7	11.3
Kuwait	246.0	8.9
Switzerland	119.9	4.3
United Kingdom	116.0	4.2
Germany	89.1	3.2
Bahrain	54.2	2.0
France	47.3	1.7
Qatar	42.2	1.5
Italy	32.4	1.2
Netherlands	12.0	0.4
Oman	11.3	0.4
Other Countries	85.6	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2773.4</b>	<b>100</b>

*capita* in the world and presently, none of the 46 member states of the Islamic Conference Organisation fully qualify as democratic states (Nafissi, 1998:99).

Primary exports are petroleum, petroleum products and cotton (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010). Oil and natural gas constitute one of Egypt's most important natural resources while about one third of their population is employed in agriculture (Zoubir, 2000:330). Agriculture generates between 15% and 20% of Egypt's GDP with cotton remaining their largest export (Zoubir, 2000:331). The United States also supports Egypt with financial aid ranging between US \$1,5 billion and \$2 billion annually. This situates Egypt as a key and strategic ally of the USA in the Middle East and such a partnership places responsibility on the Egyptian government to ensure and promote peace between Israel and their Arab neighbours, aiding to the general stability of the area and the protection of resources in the Persian Gulf (Bannerman *et al.*, 2000:51). These authors also (2000:53) explain modern Egypt's historical positioning between the East and West:

Egypt ... is the fulcrum of the Arab world, the only country in the region that can stand on its own without referring to anybody else ... Twice since the Second World War, there has been a fundamental shift in the balance of power in the regions, both times because Egypt made a decision. In the 1950's it turned away from the West and toward the East, where it stayed for twenty years. Then, when Sadat decided to turn back to the West, the region tipped back in our [USA] favour. Egypt has a role that is uniquely Egypt's. There is no other country that can match it, which is why people come to Egypt. Egypt is not looking for a position or a role. Egypt fills a role that is its own.

Egypt has been in an emergency (military) state for the past three decades under the leadership of Hosni Mubarak. John Bradley, in his book *Inside Egypt: The Land of the Pharaohs on the Brink of a Revolution* (2008:3) provides us with the gloomy reality that "this is a country from which almost all the young people long to escape, their last hope for a better future to leave their loved ones and travel in search of work and dignity". Alaa Al Aswany (2004: xix) in his book *The Yacoubian Building* reiterates Bradley's perspective of modern day Egypt:

[Downtown<sup>7</sup>] represents a whole epoch, an epoch during which Egypt was characterized by tolerance and an amazing capacity to absorb people of different

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<sup>7</sup> "Downtown Cairo has been the urban centre of Cairo since the late 19th century, when the district was designed and built. It was once home to the prosperous elite of late 19th and early 20th century Cairo. It is a relic of a bygone era. Yet decades of neglect by the neighbourhood's landlords and tenants, precipitated by the exodus of the expatriate community after the 1952 Revolution led by

nationalities, cultures and religions. Muslims, Christians and Jews, Armenians, Greeks, and Italians – all of them lived in Egypt for long centuries and considered it their true home. Downtown was tantamount to an embodiment of Egypt's great capacity to absorb different cultures and melt them in a single human crucible. Downtown was also, in my opinion, an example of Egypt's project of modernisation, which extended from the Muhammad Ali years up to the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970 ... The culture of coexistence came to an end and, beginning with the eighties, Egypt fell into the grip of Wahhabite-Salafite thinking, in the face of which Egypt's open, moderate, reading of Islam retreated ... Downtown, in my opinion, represents everything that Egypt has lost – modernisation, the national project, coexistence, tolerance and an open reading of religion.

The realities of living in Cairo are captured in an urban ethnography of Egyptian taxi drivers in Al Khamissi's book, *Taxi* (2007). The book is a collection of vignettes as told by taxi drivers roaming the streets of Cairo picking up clients and sharing their opinions on the state of affairs in modern Egypt. A selection of these quotes sketches the reality of Egyptians' experiences and provides the context in which an Egyptian work ethic might be understood:

*“Zamalek was like Egypt, he said, we all have to stand by it so that it stops falling behind”* (Al Khamissi, 2007:57); *“What are you talking about? Are there no morals? Is there no law? Is there no constitution? You think we live in a jungle? Where do you think we live? A jungle would be a relief compared with where we are. You know where we live? In Hell...”* (Al Khamissi, 2007:86).

Max Weber described Ancient Egypt as one of the most advanced and developed societies of ancient time. A reality, which is almost in complete opposite from the Egypt we know today, baffles many a theorist who attempts to understand modern-day Egypt. Amin (2004:123) describes present-day Egypt and explains some of the events which influenced Egypt's decline over the past 50 years:

A sudden and indiscriminating opening up to Western economic and cultural influences; a high rate of migration to the oil-rich Gulf states; steep rises in the inflation rate; a wide expansion in education concomitant with a noticeable decline in its quality; a rapid growth of the middle class combined with a widening disparity between income earned and the effort expended in securing it, along with the rapid accumulation of wealth by new segments of society with less sophisticated tastes and

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Gamal Abdel Nasser, and the ensuing departure of the upper classes, have left the ornate splendour of its ornate edifices mired in decay.”

little or no education; the increased penetration by foreign companies into Egyptian economic life ... [are significant factors which] have worked together to produce the prevailing cultural climate in Egypt.

On arrival in Cairo, one senses a sadness, fear and discontent among the people... Widespread corruption and police brutality are silent, yet brutally real. Unemployment and poverty fill the dusty and filthy streets of Garbage City<sup>8</sup> and The City of the Dead<sup>9</sup>. When looking at Egypt and Islam today, one cannot help but wonder: What went wrong? Ahmed's (2002:556) description of Egypt draws on Ibn Khaldûn's concept of *Assabiya*. He states that *Assabiya* refers to a breakdown in the Muslim world due to:

... massive urbanisation, dramatic demographic changes, a population explosion, large-scale migrations to the West, the gap between rich and poor which is growing ominously wide, the widespread corruption and mismanagement of rulers, the rampant materialism coupled with the low premium on scholarship, the crisis of identity and, perhaps most significantly, new and often alien ideas and images, at once seductive and repellent, instantly communicated from the West, which challenge traditional values and customs.

In addition, he says this breakdown is particularly relevant when a large percentage of the population is young, illiterate, unemployed and susceptible to radical change. This breakdown is also exacerbated by poor leadership: "The collapse of leadership is a symptom of the breakdown of society and is also a cause of the breakdown" (Ahmed, 2002:555). Ahmed (2002:25) describes this breakdown as a "global anomie" which threatens Muslim societies.

In February 2011, the world witnessed as Egyptian society engaged in unprecedented and uncharacteristic behaviour in Freedom Square when they called for the then President, Hosni Mubarak, to step down as leader of the Egyptian republic. These events forced the world to

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<sup>8</sup> Manshiyat naser, also known as Garbage City, is a slum settlement at the base of Mokattam Hill on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt. Its economy revolves around the collection and recycling of the city's garbage. Although the area has streets, shops, and apartments as other areas of the city, it lacks infrastructure and often has no running water, sewage, or electricity (Hamza, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> The City of the Dead, or Cairo Necropolis (*Qarafa, el-Arafa*), is an Arabic necropolis and cemetery below the Mokattam Hills in southeastern Cairo, Egypt. Some reside here to be near ancestors, of recent to ancient lineage. Some live here after being forced from central Cairo due to urban renewal demolitions and urbanisation pressures that increased from the Nasser era in the 1950s onwards. Other residents migrated from the agricultural countryside, looking for work. The poorest live in the City of the Dead slum, and Manshiyat naser, also known as Garbage City (Hamza, 2001).

take notice of the Egyptian people as they proclaimed their dissatisfaction and frustration with a corrupt, unaccountable and disengaged leadership. The removal of Mubarak from power made many undemocratic leaders in Africa and the Middle-East somewhat uncomfortable. It seems, therefore, that for once in the Middle East the Western notion of democracy and accountability came from within an unsatisfied civil society rather than from American political agendas. During the Egyptian revolution, the Egyptian Muslims might have revived some of their warrior ethic which seems to have been forgotten.

The following four quotes from *Taxi* provide some insight into the average Egyptian's attitude towards their (now overthrown) government:

*"We live a lie and we believe it. The government's only role is to check that we believe the lie"* (Al Khamissi, 2007:39);

*"I don't understand what they [the police and the government] want from us. There are no jobs, then they tell us to do any job that's going but they're waiting in ambush for us whatever job we do. They plunder and steal and ask for bribes and where it all leads, I don't know... Well in the end we'll all give up and push off like everyone else does. It's clear that's the government's real plan, to make us all push off abroad. But I don't understand who the government will rob if we all push off. There won't be anyone left to rob"* (Al Khamissi, 2007:128);

*"What do I care that this used to be our [the people's] country? Now it's their [the government's] country and they do what they like with it"* (Al Khamissi, 2007:136); *"Do you know what I say human beings are like in the eyes of the government? Human beings in Egypt are like dust in a cracked cup. The cup can easily break and the dust will blow away in the wind. We cannot gather it together again and in fact there's no need to gather it together, because it's just a little dust that's flown away. Human beings in this country are flying dust, with no value..."* (Al Khamissi, 2007:170).

It is within the context of the above quotes that one can understand that the lacklustre approach to work and business in Egypt is partly fashioned by Islam and Egyptian culture, but clearly, it is also greatly influenced by the political realities facing Egyptians prior to February 2011.

### 2.1.1.2. Maadi

*“The outside world was never meant to impinge, and Maadi, the only planned green suburb of Cairo, sits smugly apart from the boisterous sprawling metropolis of the city proper.”<sup>10</sup>*

Maadi, as a suburb of Cairo, is home to thousands of expatriates. Originally envisaged as an English-style garden town, it was built along British colonial lines in 1907 as the project of the primarily British-owned railway company, the Delta Land and Investment Company which owned most of the land. What distinguishes it from the rest of Cairo is the presence of leafy trees, gardens and small parks. As a suburb it was attentively planned and administered by the company’s engineers and landscapers (Rafaat, 1994:25). Rafaat describes Maadi’s uniqueness:

Maadi was unique because it was the only planned green suburb of Africa’s largest city. Maadi was the product of careful and detailed planning carried out by experts and visionaries who had definite targets and objectives. It was the offspring of intelligent people whose far-sightedness transcended their own generation and that of their grandchildren ... The fact that Maadi was itself an enclave of long-term residents from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds – where Egyptians themselves were but a large minority – rendered it extremely susceptible to the slightest political or economic changes.

The preponderance of British residents among Maadi’s inhabitants included only a select few of Egypt’s *crème de la crème* who could afford property in Maadi. Today, Maadi is still occupied largely by foreigners and particularly expatriates. Many international schools are situated within Maadi which are filled with the children of foreigners and affluent Egyptians. Undercover policemen fill the streets in order to protect foreigners and pubs, expatriate clubs and restaurants serving liquor distinguish this suburb from others. Maadi, today, is still very much an enclave – the trees and shrubbery which seem to protect foreigners from the “real” Egypt.

### 2.1.2 Foreigners and Infidels

The role of foreigners in Egypt’s history is central to our understanding of present-day Egypt as the most successful and memorable leaders of modern Egypt were foreigners; Ibn Tulun, al-Ikhshid, Jawhar and al-Aziz to only mention a few (Vatikiotis, 1990:17). Between 1805

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<sup>10</sup> Rafaat, 1994

and 1961, local foreign minorities significantly influenced the socio-economic fibre of Egyptian society (Deeb, 1978:11). These minorities included the Greeks, Armenians, Italians, Syrians and Jews. Those of European descent, who immigrated to Egypt during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, retained their language and culture without assimilating into Egyptian culture. Such minorities, therefore, embodied cultural “islands” within Egyptian institutions (Deeb, 1978:11) and they significantly affected economic activities and consequently the development of indigenous social classes in Egypt. As Deeb (1978:11) argues:

It is my contention that these local foreign minorities can be regarded as a major agent of change affecting the internal development of Egypt's social and economic history. We are not asserting the platitudinous fact that they were agents of modernization but rather that they, collectively and unwittingly, transformed the socioeconomic structure of Egyptian society.

In 1854, however, under the rule of ‘Abbās, many foreigners – the Greeks in particular – were expelled from Egypt. It was during the reigns of Sa‘īd (1854-1863) and ‘Ismā‘il (1863-1897), however, that Egypt’s integration in the world market began to accelerate. This process included a large influx of foreigners and foreign capital as well as the establishment of banks by foreigners which were responsible for financing trade with Europe. Sa‘īd opened various public works projects which lured foreigners to invest in these economic opportunities and which increased their numbers in Egypt from 10,000 under Abbās’s rule to almost 90,000 by 1864 (Deeb, 1978:15). The cotton boom during 1861-1866 served to beckon even more and larger numbers of foreigners. “The official figure of the number of foreigners in 1882 was given as 91,000 – a low estimate indeed, and probably the figure of 130,000 would be closer to the actual number of foreigners and members of local foreign minorities who had acquired foreign nationalities” (Deeb, 1978:16). It was during this period that foreign dominance in Egypt – *vis-à-vis* finance, banking and trade – became evident. Today, the presence of foreigners in Egypt remains significant in bringing expertise from around the world to stagnant industries.

### ***2.1.3. Capitalism, Islam and Calvinism***

In this section I will introduce Calvinism to the argument of the thesis. Max Weber’s central contention in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* has been linked to the history of Afrikaners in South Africa, by scholars such as Begg, Loubser and Stokes. Not only was Calvinism influential in the religious fabric of Afrikaners, but it also affected the political

fabric of South Africa in the early 1900s. I discuss this in more detail in subsequent sections, but it is important to state here that this influence in South Africa invariably shaped many Afrikaans-speaking South Africans' work ethic. The role of Christianity – the majority faith of South African expatriates – was mentioned by many respondents and therefore demands some focus. Calvinism (both as a set of religious tenets and its significance to the Protestant ethic) will therefore serve as an ideal type similar to that of Islam, or Muslim Egyptians, in our understanding of the spirit of capitalism and a work ethic.

A general consensus among South African respondents was that they regard themselves as Westerners notwithstanding the fact that South Africa is a developing country located on the African continent (Pillay, 2011). The cultural affiliation of South Africans (particularly whites) with the Euro-American values aligns them with Western social and capitalistic rationale. Pillay (2011) argues that the origins of this cultural affiliation arise from South Africa's British colonialisation. It is, however, worth asking what separates the South African and Egyptian "mindset" if both countries were colonised by the British? Capitalism in South Africa has a very peculiar history and there remains a strong link between a South African (or perhaps) Afrikaner work ethic and Calvinist principles. It is also worth noting that the majority of South African expatriates in Egypt have spent a number of years in Europe before relocating to Egypt. It is therefore plausible that their worldview has been strongly influenced by Euro-American ideologies and principles.

Weber defines modern rational capital as "the pursuit of profit, and forever renewed profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise". To Weber, the term "rational", means that this type of capitalism is methodical and systematic in nature (Swedberg, 2010:22). Weber is of the opinion that Islamic societies historically lacked the pre-requisites for the emergence of a thriving capitalist society: "The lack of capitalist spirit among Muslims can be explained in terms of the obstacles that the feudal system of the Muslim world placed on the development of the capitalist spirit" (Alatas, 2007:512).

The role played by wealth accruing from spoils of war and from political aggrandizement in Islam is diametrically opposed to the role played by wealth in the Puritan tradition. The Muslim tradition depicts with pleasure the luxurious raiment, perfume and meticulous beard-coiffure of the pious.

(Weber, 1993:263)

The triangular relationship between Capitalism (a work ethic), the Protestant ethic (Calvinism) and Islam, and ultimately the reciprocal relationship and dialogue between South African and Egyptian colleagues, serves as the crux of this thesis. This will be explored thoroughly. Mindful that Weber places Islam as the polar opposite of Puritanism (Calvinism), it may be important to present a brief history of Islam in Egypt and note the centrality of Islam in Egypt today.

### **2.1.3.1. Islamic Egypt**

*“To Islam...the Egyptians looked for relief.”<sup>11</sup>*

Egypt has not always been Islamic. Pharaonic Egypt was polytheistic, except during the leadership of particular rulers (Akhenaton). Weber acknowledges the triumphs of Ancient Egypt, but ultimately attributes Egypt's lack of advancement to Islam. This thesis therefore sets out to try and gauge the significance of Islam in the Egyptians' work ethic, which Weber argues invariably influences a country's economic achievements.

The Arab conquest of 641 C.E., led by Amr Ibn al-As, introduced for the first time, Islam as a new faith to a Christian Egypt. The conquest also introduced the Arabic as a new language. “The natives relinquished Coptic and Greek in favour of Arabic, and abandoned Christianity for the faith of Allah” (Vatikiotis, 1990:10). This ready acceptance of a new religion stemmed from repressive rule and political instability of the Byzantine ruling forces. Their relentless strategies towards religious conformity rendered Egyptians oppressed, disloyal and seeking freedom. It is therefore not surprising that Egypt was so easily conquered by the Arabs bringing with them political freedom and a new religion independent of oppression. This event was reminiscent of the acceptance of Christianity under Alexander the Great, a thousand years earlier: “The ready acceptance of Christianity under Roman rule, for example, as an integral part of Egyptian deliverance from Ptolemaic and early Roman persecutions, was now turned into an even readier acceptance of Islam as a protest against Christian misrule” (Vatikiotis, 1990:13). Regardless of the success with which the Arabs conquered Egypt and their relative tolerant view of religion, in 725 C.E almost 98% of the Egyptian population still held on to their Christian beliefs. It was only after 850 C.E. when Turkish rulers initiated taxation and religious discrimination towards Christians, that the diffusion of Islam in Egypt accelerated (Vatikiotis, 1990:14).

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<sup>11</sup> Vatikiotis, 1990:13

The next period, up to 1300 – under the rule of Turkish, Kurdish and Circassian rulers – saw Egypt becoming the strongest centre of Islamic power and civilisation. It was the Fatimid era, between 969 C.E. and 1171, which “represents a brilliant period of Islamic civilisation, which not only speeded up and completed the influence of Islam in Egypt, but rendered the country the most prosperous and illustrious centre of Islamic culture” (Vatikiotis, 1990:16). During the period of the Mamluks, Egypt became an Islamic force to be reckoned with. Mamluk sultans, however, demonstrated no animosity towards Christians and Copts. The latter were also increasingly employed in state and administration offices and were allegedly preferred over Muslim subjects due to their proclivity for business matters (Vatikiotis, 1990:21).

Islam today, however, faces a multitude of problems. As a religion, Islam is very often obliterated with Islamism, the political ideology. It is important to separate the two and reiterate that Islam as a religion is not at fault, but rather its application by political leaders and groups. Problems associated with Islam and Muslim youths today are explained along the lines of Euro-American, Western-style entertainment and media which has resulted in the corruption of “true” and “pure” Islam whilst “further advancing the very infidel societies that usurp Islam’s rightful place at the head of the global order” (Belt, 2006:43). Islam’s problems, however, cannot be blamed solely on the Euro-American West as Amin (2004:180) explains below:

The reason for Muslim weakness (corruption in government) is that men of religions take the side of and endorse corrupt governments by fostering in the hearts of the people a resigned acceptance of fate and comfort in the afterlife, while denying them any comfort in this life.

Islamism as a political ideology is hijacking any positive inclinations about Islam and replacing it with a fundamentalist and radical perspective. The Muslim Brotherhood, particularly in Egypt, has attempted to take control of as many key cultural institutions within Islam and used them to “advance beliefs and conspiracy theories” (Belt, 2006:50) “Today, far too many young Muslims are taught that the West’s presence in their world and the western-led new global civilisation is not for interdependent partnership but rather designed to steal their God-given resources” (Belt, 2006:50).

The general concern among Western and Muslim scholars regarding the Muslim world’s development (or lack thereof) has been ascribed to Islam’s nature as “inherently irrational, much too politicized, legalistic and unable to evolve and adapt to changing conditions” (Alatas, 2007:509). It has also been said that an absence of a reformation (similar to that of

Christianity) has hindered Islam to become the religion of highly prosperous states. “They believe that the Muslim world is partially stuck within its own middle ages and must reform its religion in order for it to live comfortably in the modern world” (Alatas, 2007:509).

In the following pages I shall endeavour to explore a modern Egyptian and Muslim work ethic. This will be used in to order examine Egyptian society’s relationship with 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalism and the (Euro-American) corporate world. The historical overviews presented in this chapter aim to unveil the trajectories that constitute Egypt today as it is in these histories that one can situate and make sense of the data collected. A comprehensive engagement with the data gathered in the following chapters is an attempt to understand or debunk the contemporary realities of South African expatriates in Egypt within historical truths.

## **2.2. Ethics**

With the advent of globalisation, Western values have diffused worldwide and eroded many cultural barriers. The way of doing business – transnationally – has therefore, necessarily, converted to those practices and values promulgated by the Western core. These practices are esteemed as value-free (by the West) but are, in actual fact, representative of Western values and ideologies. Value-free economics and business are therefore nothing but an instrumental delusion (Rice, 1999:346) to ensure the conformation of non-Western societies’ corporate practices towards those of the ‘global North’. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that business ethics vary across cultures and religions and an investigation of these differences gives one insight into the workings of transnational corporations. In the following section I will identify what is meant by work and business ethics.

A particular “business ethic” and its history are unique to each country and region. “Business ethics is understood in a comprehensive sense that includes issues at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels of decision making and acting in business and economic life” (Enderle, 1997:1476). Business ethics are further defined by Rossouw (1997:1540):

As far as definitions of business ethics go, mainly three trends are apparent ... The first trend defines Business ethics in terms of personal values and virtues that should be applied to business practices; the second, in terms of the application of societal or religious norms/ rules/standards/values to business practices; and the third as a reflection on economic and business practices and decision-making that will ensure that business activities are beneficial to individuals and society alike within the framework of a competitive market-driven economy.

Hamilton-Attwell (1998:79) defines a work ethic as “the basic belief that a person should do work that has some basic moral worth and that every person should do his or her very best, irrespective of reward”. Conversely, one can define a work ethic as a set of beliefs or perceptions about work. A work ethic, or business ethic, has been the focal point of many historical scholars such as Weber. It was in fact the publication of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* which placed work ethics central to a significant body of scholarship (Ali & Al-Owaihian, 2008:6). Enderle (1997:1476) ascribes the emergence of business ethics as a scholarly topic to two primary assumptions (amongst others): Firstly, that good ethics will lead to good business: “Ethical conduct lies in the self-enlightened interest of the companies and is seen as an important motivational and unifying force to compete in the global marketplace,” and secondly, the idea that economic thinking has penetrated all domains of life as the “economisation of society”. When considering this concept historically, one can identify key changes and ideologies which led to the globalised and Western notion of modern work practices. Ali & Al-Owaihian (2008:6) states:

[W]ork ethic as a concept was the product of an era of scarcity and deprivation when workers either worked or starved. He viewed work ethic as an ideology propagated by the middle classes for the working classes with enough ‘plausibility and truth to make it credible’ ... [T]he existence of work ethic is a phenomenon that is linked to and associated with the emergence of industrial revolution and the rise of contemporary capitalism.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century religious and social norms appeared as rather hostile of work *per se*. Adam Smith, in his most famous text *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), described businessmen as “an order of men, whose interest is never the same with that of the public, who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public and who accordingly have, upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed it”. Ali & Al-Owaihian (2008:6) add some comment on this when they argue: “This negative view of work may induce researchers in the West to attribute the evolving positive view of work to the emergence of Protestantism in Christian Europe and the corresponding rise of the industrial revolution” (Ali & Al-Owaihian, 2008:6).

When looking at the concept of work ethic historically, five different views can be identified. The *Classical* view respects the planning of wars, large-scale commerce, arts, architecture, literature and philosophy during the Greek and Roman civilisations as noble work. “But work, hard labour and subordination to a master’s orders were inherently degrading. In fact it

was something that only a slave should do. And slaves could only be motivated to do this work for fear of the master's whip and starvation" (Hamilton-Atwell, 1998:80). Work, however, as viewed by the Hebrew doctrine, was none other than a curse and punishment by God as noted in God's treatment of Adam and Eve as written in the book of Genesis. The second view, that of the *Traditionalist* work ethic, was perceived as the ultimate outlook one should have regarding one's work. It is Weber's writing on the Protestant ethic that describes the traditional view of work. This includes maxims written by Benjamin Franklin in *Advice to Young Tradesmen*; the most important of which are:

*Time is money; Credit is money; Money can beget money; The good paymaster is Lord of another man's purse; Keep an exact account for some time of both your expenses and your incomes; Waste neither time nor money, but make the best use of both; If you would be wealthy, think of saving as well as of getting; Rather go to bed supperless than rise in debt* (Hamilton-Atwell, 1998:81).

The accumulation of wealth without displaying it or buying influence whilst saving for the future and reinvesting in new ventures, in addition to many of Benjamin Franklin's maxims, have become fundamental to business in the Euro-American West. The fourth view, the *Rationalist* view, elucidated manners in which production could be stimulated through actions of the entrepreneur. Freedom, self-interest and individualism were core themes underlying this view. No interference from government or any other group was to be allowed in economic affairs and "the work domain had no social or cultural value" (Hamilton-Atwell, 1998:82). The fourth historical trend in the development of business ethics was that of the *Japanese* view which differed significantly from the Protestant ethic. The foundation of this view was religious, particularly Confucian, which highlighted the importance of trust in employment practices and "a sense of fulfilment from work to attain a common purpose" (Hamilton-Atwell, 1998:82). The fifth and final view of business ethics is that of the *Post-Industrial* view. This view supposes that the modern employee is more enlightened and has the following five characteristics: self-actualisation; hedonism; entitlementalism; anti-productivism; and anti-authoritarianism (Hamilton-Atwell, 1998:83).

Work and business ethics have, in recent decades, come to the fore in academic scholarship as there is an increased awareness that differing work and business ethics ought to be studied as it has significant influences in the corporate climate of transnational corporations which

employ both nationals and expatriates from around the globe. It is, however, also noteworthy to discover who these transnational workers are and how one can go about studying them.

### **2.3. A typology of expatriates and migration theory**

It is important to consider a typology of expatriates before I move forward. Each categorisation provides a set of characteristics which gives us an indication of that migrant's inclination towards acculturation. We can therefore determine, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on which 'type' of migrant, their willingness to embrace their host culture.

Migration theory offers us four classifications of migrants. These include the migrant as sojourner, settler, *homo economicus* and labourer. The classifications are relevant to the cultural experiences of South African expatriates in the workplace in Cairo. One of the secondary objectives of my study is discerning to which ideal type South African expatriates relate in order to understand the context in which their perceptions and attitudes are constructed.

Let us consider the first categorisation; the expatriate as sojourner. The sojourner is typically a temporary resident in a foreign country as Siu (1952: 34, 37-38) explains.

The 'sojourner' is treated as a deviant type of the sociological form of the 'stranger,' one who clings to the cultural heritage of his own ethnic group and tends to live in isolation, hindering his assimilation to the society in which he resides, often for many years. The sojourn is conceived by the sojourner as a 'job' which is to be finished in the shortest possible time. As an alternative to that end he travels back to his homeland every few years. He is comparable to the 'marginal man'. On the basis of common interests and cultural heritage the sojourner tends to associate with people of his own ethnic group. He and his countrymen, if there are enough of them, very likely live together in a racial colony or cultural area. The desire to live together becomes not only a social need, but also a natural thing. His best friends are people of his ethnic group and they entertain one another at their homes ... Homeland tongues, art, sentiments and primary-group attitudes fortify the sojourner in his effort to maintain homeland culture.

Robert Park (1928) first introduced us to the concept of the "marginal man"<sup>12</sup> or cultural hybrid. The "marginal man" lives and shares "intimately in the cultural life of two distinct peoples" (Green, 1947:167). This period of crisis, characterised by transition and conflict,

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<sup>12</sup> The term "marginal man" does not allude to any gender discrimination. This term refers to both men and women. For the purpose of this thesis, however, the term as introduced by Robert Park will be used, but should be understood as referring to both sexes.

becomes permanent for the “marginal man” (Park, 1928). It is important to note, however, that there exists a distinct difference between the sojourner and the marginal man. The marginal man finds himself in a conflicted space between cultures (bicultural complex), whereas the sojourner retains his original cultural heritage and identity: “The sojourner is *par excellence* an ethnocentrist” (Siu, 1952:34).

Central to the sojourning experience are feelings of homelessness. The experience of being in a “median state” (Said, 1994), belonging neither here nor there, are characteristic of the sojourner. Theodor Adorno calls this state of not being at home as inhabiting the marginal space of “distanced nearness” (Mariotti, 2008:458). Adorno deliberately withdrew himself from mainstream American culture and remained on the margins as a social critic. In the case of such purposeful retreat from mainstream society and culture among expatriates, clear characteristics of the expatriate as a sojourner is displayed. Said (1994:116) explains:

The [expatriate] therefore exists in the median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half involvements and half detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another.

The second classification is that of the expatriate as “settler” (Castles, 2002; Esman, 2009). The settler becomes a permanent inhabitant of the foreign country. The settler is also an ethnocentrist and brings with him a sense of cultural superiority. The question then arises whether settlers necessarily become diaspora communities? Esman argues that they do not: “only those involving the formation of separate communities that result in boundaries between themselves and their host societies and between themselves and other diasporas” (Esman, 2009:14). A diaspora is constructed through transnational migration which maintains material or sentimental bonds with their homeland. William Safran (Tambiah, 2000:169) defines a diaspora as “expatriate minority communities, dispersed from an original ‘centre’ to at least two ‘peripheral’ places. They maintain a memory ... about their original homeland; they believe they are not, and perhaps cannot, be fully accepted by their host country”. The homeland is therefore their utopia and place of eventual return. This brings forth the question of the settler’s identity as either the marginal or “multicultural man” (Sparrow, 2000). This bifurcation of the self into two (often) distinct cultural entities can be the cause of great inner turmoil or, conversely, it can be an opportunity for self-enrichment.

The notion of transnationalism is worth introducing here. Settlers or expatriates become bi-local in a sense that they experience attachments to two geographical spaces: their homeland and their host country. Castles (2002:1158) terms these transnational identities. The term transnational also refers to loyalties which extend beyond national borders. Central to the experiences of the settler is “acculturation” (Berry, 1990) and social assimilation into the host society and culture. These are the two stages of adaptation into the host culture by immigrants or diaspora communities. It involves accepting and adopting the local language and lifestyle, such as entertainment, cuisine and dress codes (Esman, 2009:103). Acculturation strategies have been conceptualised by John Berry (1990; 2005). The “acculturation” (Berry, 1990) of expatriates, settlers or immigrants into their host culture results in dual- or bi-national identities. A cultural exchange inevitably takes place, but very often “foreigners” find themselves on the margins and on the receiving end of victimisation.

Social assimilation, conversely, pertains to the acceptance within the mainstream society and purveying feelings of social belonging. This stage, however, depends directly on the local opportunity structures of the host country. This is where a dissection of Cairo’s historical trajectory becomes very relevant. Cairo has a very unique character as a cosmopolitan city. Historically, Egypt has been on the receiving, rather than the dispatching end, in terms of foreigners (Zohry, 2005). “If the group is one that has had frequent and varied contacts with outsiders, its social organization will have become adjusted to such intercourse and the arrival of the stranger will not create a new problem” (McLemore, 1970:87). It is thus very important to consider Egyptian history and nationalism in ascertaining how local Egyptians’ ideologies towards non-nationals are shaped. It is also critical to examine the broader international political, economic and socio-cultural contexts in which integration takes place.

The third and fourth classifications will be discussed together as they share many similarities. The expatriate as “*homo economicus*” or the “entrepreneurial” kind of migrant (Esman, 2009:15) is a skilled and professional person who goes abroad temporarily for monetary or vocational reasons: “Traditional neo-classical economics views international migration as a simple sum of individual cost-benefit decisions undertaken to maximize expected income through international movement” (Massey *et al.*, 1994:701). These migrants are often in pursuit of professional opportunities which were unavailable to them in their home country. In the event of discrimination “they innovate professional roles or discover and exploit niches or high-risk opportunities in the local economy that enable them to practice or further develop their entrepreneurial talents” (Esman, 2009:17). Conversely, “labour” expatriates “are mainly

undereducated, unskilled individuals of peasant or urban proletariat backgrounds ... who have migrated from their homeland in search of improved livelihoods and better opportunities for their children” (Esman, 2009:16). These migrants often fill low-rank employment niches and are very often victims of discrimination. Expatriates of this type often view their cultural maintenance a right while experiencing hostility from the host culture. The choice to migrate or expatriate stems primarily from a rationalisation process.

Labour and entrepreneurial expatriates’ experiences resonate with Georg Simmel’s concept of “Der Fremde.”

The stranger is thus being discussed here, not in the sense often touched upon in the past, as the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. He is, so to speak, the potential wanderer; although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going.

(McLemore, 1970:86)

The stranger may therefore share a geographical or physical space with others, but not necessarily the social space: “One who occupies such a position in a group is both near and far, familiar and foreign; and because of this special combination of characteristics, the ‘stranger’” (McLemore, 1970:86). S/he is then the “other” kept at a distanced nearness: One who is physically here, but socially there. An important question to consider is when introduced to a new environment the stranger’s identity is only as relevant as his associations with a reference group (Driedger & Peters, 1977:160). The nexus between an association with a reference group and an individual identity is perhaps a very important question to be asked when contemplating South African expatriates’ cultural experiences in Cairo.

Central to the willingness or unwillingness to culturally adjust is the notion of perceived cultural distance (Deller, 2006). There exists an assumption that the more similar the culture of the expatriate to the host culture, the more willing the expatriate would seem to adjust culturally. However, central to the acculturation process, and especially in Egypt, is language. Coffman (1995) argues that Arabic is more than a language and describes it as “the language of Islam, the language chosen by God to speak to mankind [which] influences how a person perceives the world and expresses reality”. The language barrier between nationals and expatriates would therefore serve as an inevitable divide to communication and understanding.

International migration theory offers a few explanations as to why migrants choose to take to the road. These include the push-pull theory, neo-classical theory of economics, dual labour

theory and world systems theory as macro theories, to name but a few (Massey *et al.*, 1993:432). The rationale for migrating, however, does not determine or explain the functions that expatriates fulfil in their host societies. The typology used to classify expatriates is designed according to their central and original tendency to perform certain functions.

Considering the typology discussed above, it is perhaps difficult to place the South African expatriates interviewed in one specific category. I argue that the respondents demonstrated characteristics of each typology and that these characteristics invariably guided the way in which they perceive Egyptian society and its inner workings. It may seem that the expatriate as *homo economicus* is the most appropriate ideal type to use when considering South African expatriates in Cairo. Certainly, the majority of South African expatriates placed in Cairo as professionals seek to maximise their monetary returns. Many respondents therefore viewed their placements as temporary. None of the respondents were proficient in speaking Arabic, although some could understand single sentences. Due to the fact that many respondents were assigned to Cairo and did not move there out of 'choice', very few respondents displayed a willingness to integrate themselves culturally. Those who displayed these efforts however, were hindered by language barriers, religious barriers and general hostility from nationals. All these characteristics support the perceived (by the observer) unwillingness to embrace Egyptian culture as consistent with the classification of *homo economicus*. However, many respondents displayed some characteristics associated with the expatriate as sojourner which placed them on the "cultural margins" of Egypt which to a great extent hinders cross-cultural interaction and dialogue.

#### **2.4. An Islamic Work Ethic (IWE)**

Business in Islamic societies is underscored by religious principles: "In Islam, it is ethics that dominates economics, and not the other way around" (Rice, 1999:346). There are however, some disparities between how Islamic business ought to be done (according to religious ethics) and what the case is, *de facto*. It is, therefore, also worth discovering possible reasons for these discrepancies. Unique to Islam is a particular set of perspectives on work and conceptualisations of work ethic. Both the former and latter are contingent on religious tenets and cultural realities. Ibn Khaldûn and Abd al-Rahman (Ali & Al-Owaihian, 2008:6) were of the opinion that "engaging in business serves four objectives: facilitating cooperation and mutual understanding among people, satisfying the needs of people, increasing wealth and influence and spurring the growth of cities". The Ikhwan-us-Safa (Brothers of Purity) argue, in turn, that business activities alleviate poverty, motivate people to be persistent and engage

creatively in appropriate professions; complement the human soul with verified knowledge, good manners, useful ideas and responsible deeds whilst reaching salvation. They were also of the opinion that any type of work should be esteemed as an honourable task “and the perfection of work as the most blessed action by God” (Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008:7). The same authors (2008:7-10) also explain the Quran’s sayings on work:

From the beginning, Islam has viewed commercial activities not only as a divine calling but also a necessary aspect of human life, a source of social gratification and psychological pleasure. The Quran instructs Muslims to persistently work whenever and wherever it is available: ‘disperse through the land and seek of the bounty of God’ (Quran, 62:10) and ‘God hath permitted trade and forbidden usury’ (2:275). The Prophet Mohammed preached that merchants should perform tasks that were not only morally required, but that were essential for the survival and flourishing of a society. He declared, ‘I commend the merchants to you, for they are the couriers of the horizons and God’s trusted servants on earth’ and ‘the honest, truthful Muslim merchant will stand with the martyrs on the Day of Judgment’.

Furthermore:

The Quran instructs Muslims to persistently pursue whatever work is available whenever it is available. To that end, the Quran states, ‘He [God] has also made subservient to you all that is in the heavens and the earth’ (Quran, 45:13). Interestingly, the Quran (2:268), with foresight, views poverty as the promise of the Devil, and prosperity as the promise of God, ‘The Devil threatens you with poverty ... God promised you His forgiveness and bounties’. The Prophet Mohammed not only preached that hard work caused sins to be absolved and that ‘no one eats better food than that which he eats out of his work’ but also asserted that ‘work is a worship’. Furthermore, he preached that perfection of work is a religious duty, stating, ‘God bless the worker who learns and perfects his profession’ (quoted in Ikhwan-us- Safa, 1999, p. 290). Similarly, Imam Ali, the fourth successor of Prophet Mohammed, (AD 598-661, p. 483) stated, ‘Persist in your action with a noble end in mind ... Failure to perfect your work while you are sure of the reward is injustice to yourself’ adding, ‘poverty almost amounts to impiety.

Islam, as an early religion, emphasised the importance of trade and thus served as a leading force in the promotion of economic growth and development. The Islamic notion of trade and work sprung from “a deep understanding of the necessary social and economic conditions that were considered crucial in strengthening the foundation of the new faith and state. Trade was viewed, in early Islamic thinking, as an instrument for realizing religious, political, social and economic goals” (Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008:8). The necessity of economic activities, therefore, was more than that of a divine calling (as is the argument for the

Protestant ethic), but was fundamental in sustaining a “thriving and healthy community” (Ali & Al-Owaihian, 2008:8).

Gillian Rice (1999) completed a study on Islamic ethics and its implications for business. She states that Muslims’ ethical system emerged from the teachings of the Quran and *Sunnah* (sayings of the Prophet Mohammad): “They are based on Islamic concepts of human well-being and a good life which stress brotherhood/sisterhood and socio-economic justice and require a balanced satisfaction of both the material and spiritual needs of all humans” (Rice, 1999:346). It is Rice’s contention that the guiding principles of Islam are often ignored in the conducting of business. The Islamic ethical system is founded on particular guidelines by which one achieves the “moral filter” necessary to conduct business. These principles derive from the concepts of unity, justice, trusteeship and the need for balance (Rice, 1999:347). Rice (1999:347) states further that:

The key business philosophy of Islam lies in a person’s relationship with god, His universe, His people. [U]nity [*tawhid*] is a coin with two faces: one implies that God is the sole creator of the universe and the other implies that people are equal partners or that each person is a brother or sister to the other. As far as business is concerned, this means cooperation and equality of effort and opportunity.

The second principle to guide Islamic business ethics is that of Justice (*adalah*). Quranic teachings are very clear on the fact that society should be rid of all forms of inequity, injustice, exploitation and oppression. The notion of society and social collaboration is highly esteemed (Rice, 1999:348).

In their acquisition of wealth, however, people should not lie or cheat; they must uphold promises and fulfil contracts. Usurious dealings are prohibited. Islam teaches that all wealth should be productive and people may not stop the circulation of wealth after they have acquired it, nor reduce the momentum of circulation.

Trusteeship (*khilafah*), as the third principle, puts people as trustees of the earth on behalf of God. This guiding principle is also prominent in both Jewish and Christian faiths. Rice (1999:348) clarifies this further:

There is a very wide margin in a person's personal and social existence. People may be ascetics or, after paying the wealth tax, may enjoy fully their remaining wealth. Yet, resources are for the benefit of all and not just a few and everyone must acquire resources rightfully. Although material prosperity is desirable, it is not a goal in itself. What is crucial is the motivation, the "ends" of economic activity. Given the right motivation, all economic activity assumes the character of worship. Indulgence

in luxurious living and the desire to show-off is condemned. Islam does not tolerate conspicuous consumption.

The fourth and final commanding principle for doing business along Islamic lines is that of a need for balance. Muslims are requested to go about their affairs moderately and ensure that their endeavours are done in a fair manner to ensure social well-being and the development of human potential (Rice, 1999:348):

Islam recognizes what Marxism sought to deny: the contribution of individual self-interest through profit and private property to individual initiative, drive, efficiency and enterprise. At the same time, Islam condemns the evils of greed, unscrupulousness and disregard for the rights and needs of others, which the secularist, short-term, this-worldly perspective of capitalism sometimes encourages. The individual profit motive is not the chief propelling force in Islam. Social good should guide entrepreneurs in their decisions, besides profit. A relevant saying of Muhammad is "work for your worldly life as if you were going to live forever, but works for the life to come as if you were going to die tomorrow."

In addition to these four guiding principles, the Prophet Muhammad, through his sayings (*Sunnah*), added eleven concepts for work, which should underlie all economic trade or activity. These include: *pursuing legitimate business; wealth must be earned; quality of work should be high ("God blesses a person who perfects his craft")*; *payment of wages should be timely, fair and adequate; reliance on self ("No earnings are better than that of one's own effort")*; *monopoly is considered a great fault that produces suffering; bribery is strongly condemned; transparency; greed is considered a threat to social and economic justice and generosity is a virtue* (Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008:12). Deeds and intentions, however, are significant pillars in Islam which differentiates IWE from other religious' work ethics in that it is the "intention rather than the result [that] is the criterion upon which work is evaluated in terms of benefit to community" (Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008:12).

Duties, in Islam, trump rights. Society, rather than the state, is the primary institution. Business activities are considered to be a "socially useful function" above anything else (Rice, 1999:349). Islamic societies esteem their people as their real wealth. The endless striving towards material wealth can neglect and obscure the enriching of human lives – considered the ultimate objective of Islamic societies. Rice (1999:349) states the centrality of humans in all behaviour:

Humans are thus the ends as well as the means. Unless humans are motivated to pursue their self-interest within the constraints of economic well-being (the application of the ‘moral filter’), neither the ‘invisible hand’ of the market nor the ‘visible hand’ of central planning can succeed in achieving socio economic goals.

Key ethical principles relating to how business should be done “Islamically” overlap with those of Judaism and Christianity. Many of these Christian values, however, are applicable to all facets of life and do not specifically speak to business practices. Parboteeah *et al.*, (2009:122) claim that the Protestant ethic not only applies to Protestantism specifically. They argue that Islam (similar to Protestantism) displays a strong and positive relationship to work. Both religious ethics condemn laziness whilst the Quran proclaims “hard work and dedication towards work as a virtue and a means to absolve one’s sins” (Parboteeah *et al.*, 2009:122). Numerous scholars, therefore, find many parallels between an Islamic work ethic and the Protestant work ethic. “For instance, both IWE and PWE place considerable emphasis on hard work, commitment, and dedication to work, work creativity, avoidance of unethical methods of wealth accumulation, cooperation and competitiveness at the workplace” (Rokhman, 2010:22).

While acknowledging the similarities between the two religious ethics *vis-à-vis* work, the application of an IWE is not always the case when studying Islamic societies and their behaviours. The IWE is an orientation that shapes and influences the involvement and participation of believers in the workplace. It implies that work is a virtue in light of a person’s needs, and is a necessity for establishing equilibrium in one’s individual and social life. “It stands not for life denial, but for life fulfilment and holds business motives in the highest regard. IWE views work as a means to further self-interest economically, socially and psychologically, to sustain social prestige, to advance societal welfare and reaffirm faith” (Ali & Al-Owaihian, 2008:10). It is crucial to consider that there may be significant differences between Islamic workers and those from the West, as Haque (1992:1068-1069) points out:

The ideal ‘Muslim man’, according to the Quran, is a God-fearing, devout, morally righteous, selfless, humble, truthful, just, good, sincere and altruistic human being who, in his submission to the Divine Will, bargains material things of this ephemeral world for the Paradise, for the Hereafter, for the higher values and principles for which he struggles throughout his earthy life. On the contrary, the concept of *homo economicus*, or ‘economic man’ of modern (neo-classical) economies, is the product of the movement of the Enlightenment. He is a maximiser of advantages, satisfactions, gains and profits. This abstract ‘economic man’ is a ‘bargain-hunter’, motivated by self-interest. He is actually an ideal type who possesses rationally

ordered preferences and perfect information. This 'economic man' is an economic agent in the instrumental sense; that is, he allocates scarce economic resources for multiple ends in a rational way in order to realise his material gains. To maximise gains and satisfactions is a normal rational behaviour calculation.

Egyptians are increasingly becoming conscious of the fact that "many Islamic cultural traits are being superseded by western values, institutions and practices" (Rice, 1999:352). Institutions falling under the umbrella term of neo-liberalism (liberal democracy, capitalism and socialism) are increasingly regarded with an air of hostility and scapegoated for the deterioration of the quality of Islamic life and the decline of the Muslim world. This "Egyptianity", however, has its origins in many historical events as Rice (1999:352) states:

The emphasis on conspicuous consumption and changes in lifestyles which followed Sadat's "infatih" (open-door) economic policy and move to a free market economy in the seventies and eighties aggravated inflation and unemployment in Egypt, sharpened social disparities and enlarged the class of dispossessed and disaffected. The economic liberalization policy concentrated on trade, the importance of consumer items and expansion of services such as tourism and hotel management, rather than on industrial projects. Privatization efforts continue, although rather slowly because of the government's philosophy of control. A "new class" has arisen as a result of the open-door policy.

The influx of multinational corporations into the region also contributed to cultural and social alienation (Rice, 1999:353). The author argues further that three primary features of Egyptian culture enable Egyptians to handle difficulties with which they are confronted in their daily lives. These features include indecision, procrastination and indifference. These three features of Egyptian culture lay the groundwork for the IBM philosophy: *Inshallah* (God willing), *Bokra* (tomorrow) and *Ma'alesh* (it doesn't matter). These concepts will be explained in detail in the following section. The IBM philosophy, to a significant extent, describes an Egyptian work ethic which stands in almost complete contrast to the IWE as prescribed by the Quran.

Many of the important facets, essential to Islam, have increasingly become confronted with (arguably opposing) ideas resulting from modernisation and influence from the West. "Because western influence is so extensive, Muslims are bound to be concerned with the question whether Islam can take so much from the West without being 'swamped' and losing its distinctive character" (Watt, 1909:193). Islam, as is the case with any religion, differs vastly in application as per cultural *habitus*: "The evils of Muslim societies stem from the gap between principle and practice" (Khan, 1996:91). It is a product of a shared existence of

actions and reactions in the interplay between the societal consciousness and individuals (Durkheim, 1895:56). “The text [*Quran*] therefore is seen through glasses, which are coloured by one’s own cultural background” (Akhtar, 2007: 97).

The chasm between orthodoxy (what the *Quran* states and what Muslims ought to follow) and orthopraxy (the application of the *Quran* and *Sunnah*), however, is not unique to Islam as it stretches across all religions and across time. It is therefore important to understand how Islamic business philosophy influences, yet does not dictate, business activity in practice: Rice (1999:352) argues:

Because of a number of historical factors, the dominant ideology in Muslim countries is not Islam but rather secularism along with a mixture of feudalism, capitalism and socialism. Islam is conspicuous by its absence, particularly in the political and economic fields. In the Muslim countries, unjust and oppressive political and socio-economic systems have been the cause of the Islamic resurgence.

Alaa Al Aswany (2011:89; 90; 104) terms this disconnect between belief and conduct ‘flawed religiosity’:

...Religion for (many) is purely a matter of formal ritual requiring specific procedures ... This flawed religiosity, which separates belief from conduct, is spreading like a plague in our country ... Unfortunately in Egypt we have become more scrupulous about the externals of religion and yet less religious ... But their flawed religiosity prevents them from making an objective analysis of phenomenon, because in their opinion poverty is either a punishment of God’s choice and they can never see it as the natural result of corruption or despotism ... because the religion they have been taught does not include defending general human values, such as freedom, equality and justice ... Egyptians are the most devout people on the face of the Earth. Yet at the same time Egypt leads the way in corruption, bribery, sexual harassment, fraud and forgery. One has to wonder how we could be the most pious and the most delinquent at the same time.

Religion structures the social field of the Muslim, and therefore produces the Islamic individual’s habitus (Bourdieu, 1977:72). These structures, which include Islamic schools, religious classes, mosques and community leaders, generate practices and representations that are the objective of the individual. Consistent with the writings of Pierre Bourdieu, these cognitive and motivating practices enable agents to cope with ever-changing situations. Religious and cultural practices, in the case of Islam, intersect with the former constituting the latter. But holy doctrines, however, are unalterable and do not shift with the advent of

modern epochs. In this case, therefore, practices of religious habitus seem incompatible with the ever-changing.

The habitus is subconscious to the individual. Just as the total social fact becomes conscious in the face of an adversary, so is the habitus ignorant of that which has shaped and created it, until it is challenged. Religious principles are acquired through the scriptures of the Quran, but the genesis of its social and collective interpretations are of no interest to today's wo/man. Without the questioning of its habitus then, each individual finds him/herself unwittingly the producer and reproducer of objective and consensual meaning (Bourdieu, 1997:79). The habitus is homogenised and taken for granted as natural (Bourdieu, 1977:80). Hennis (Uygun, 2007: 181) has a very particular interpretation of Weber's Protestant ethic and Capitalist spirit linking it with Bourdieu:

...every social order requires a certain kind of individual. Consequently, Hennis claims that Weber's investigation centres around, not a 'spirit' at all, but a 'habitus'. Habitus is a complex concept 'referring primarily to the non-discursive aspects of culture that bind individuals to larger groups', particularly manner of leading one's life (*Lebensführung*) within the social orders of life, such as family, community and economic activities in life.

The Islamic work ethic, as is described above, serves as an ideal type prescribed by the Quran. The *de facto* application, or the habitus, however, is somewhat different as Lewis (2006:11) describes it:

This is the ideal. The reality is probably closer to what Abbas Ali (2005, p172) calls a 'sheikocracy': hierarchical authority, rules and regulations contingent on the personality and power of the individuals who make them, subordination of efficiency to personal relations and personal connections, indecisiveness in decision-making, informality among lower level managers and a generally patriarchal approach. Nepotism is often evident in selecting the upper-level managers. Tradition plays a significant role in the life of individuals and groups. Extended families, friendships and personal relationships reinforce group orientation and duties. Class origin and kinship is significant.

Furthermore:

The Arab executive lives in a society where family and friendship remain important and prevalent factors even in the functioning of formal institutions and groups. Consequently ... the Arab executive relies upon family and friendship ties for getting things done within his organization and society (Muna, 1980, p12). Such divergences between theory and practice have resulted in two responses (at least) among Muslims. One is a fatalistic acceptance of the *status quo*. Ali considers that Muslims and Arabs in particular, hold two sets of identity. One is immediate, social and

spatially particular. The other is historical, cultural and global (Ahmad, 1984). Violation of particular principles, cherished in the early days of Islam, is common because the basic aspects of the reality of Arab politics and organizations are the personalized nature of authority, tribalism, and fluidity and alternating fission and fusion of group coalitions and alliances.

It is therefore of importance to acknowledge the difference between a prescribed IWE and that which has been constructed and is now manifested as an Egyptian work ethic and the possible reasons for the occurrence of these disparities. The following section will describe an Egyptian work ethic as identified through the literature on the accounts of many elements investigated in business studies.

## **2.5. An Egyptian Work Ethic**

*“Conservatism, isolation and a long-established traditional social structure comprise what one might call Egypt’s permanent ‘Egyptianity’.”<sup>13</sup>*

The purpose of this study is to delineate an Egyptian work ethic as is perceived and experienced by South African expatriates living and working in Egypt. The most poignant description of an Egyptian work ethic can be summarised as the IBM philosophy. This philosophy or approach towards work is very peculiar to the Arab Middle East and seems to stand in contradiction with the attitude towards work as prescribed by the IWE.

### **2.5.1. IBM Philosophy**

The IBM philosophy, as previously mentioned, consists out of three concepts: *Inshallah*, *Bokra* and *Ma’alesh*. Notwithstanding the importance of the latter two concepts, the former will be explored in greater detail as literature on IBM provides little information on the latter. The most debated concept of the three is that of *Inshallah*. In the empirical data gathered (as will be described in Chapter 5) there is emphasis on the significance of the IBM philosophy in the tensions experienced by the South African respondents and their Egyptian colleagues. In addition, there is also the notion of cross-cultural language and meaning structures. Roeber and Harvey (2011:2) comment on the importance of cross-cultural communication:

A gesture, ritual, uttered phrase, or physical site nearly always conveys ‘meaning’ not so much on the level of what seems ‘obvious at first glance’, but perhaps more importantly, in one, or even multiple, unarticulated ways. The difficulty in assessing

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<sup>13</sup> Vatikiotis, 1990:9

‘meaning’ therefore, for an “outside observer” whether anthropologist, sociologist, or student of religion, lies in attempting to understand what specific persons or groups may find ‘implicit’ rather than ‘obvious’ in a given situation.

Often with the interaction of people from different cultures, communication poses difficulties. Intercultural communication is, more often than not, clouded by political and nationalistic ethnocentricities. Central to my argument is this notion of intercultural miscommunication and possible tensions which may henceforth arise. “There exists a strong unconscious tendency to draw conclusions about another culture based on one’s cultural frame of reference: The individual’s cultural frame of reference serves as a standard against which other cultures are compared and evaluated” (Masliyah, 1999:97). These ethnocentricities are very palpable in linguistic and religious contexts. A clear consensus exists across the literature reviewed, that the phrase *Inshallah* is widely misunderstood and misconstrued by many of non-Islamic origin.

#### **2.5.1.1. Inshallah**

The Arabic language is saturated with a rich variety of expressions invoking Allah explicitly or implicitly and ... the name Allah permeates both spoken and written Arabic to the point where we can speak of the omnipresence of Allah in the Arabic language. As a result, an Arabic speaker could scarcely conceive of a conversation where the name of God would not appear.

(Clift & Helani, 2010:358)

The Arabic expression *Inshallah* means, “If God wills, as God pleases” (Masliyah, 1999:98). The phrase has an extremely rich history and the use of this expression is full of cultural meaning. Arab children are unconsciously conditioned and socialised to use this expression when referring to something that is still to happen, as Masliyah (1999:99) explains:

When speaking of the future, a powerful incumbency from deep in the psyche is called upon which forces the Arabs to use this expression. The use of this expression is a mechanism of social interaction. It is neither a simple means of shirking responsibilities nor a belief in fatalism.

Muslims also use the term when referring to an event which will undoubtedly take place in the future. The phrase is not limited to a religious framework, but is also used in many secular contexts. In a non-religious context, it expresses a wish or a hope that a certain action will occur in the future (Masliyah, 1999:100). The Quran urges Muslims never to say that they will do something without adding the term *Inshallah*. The usage of the phrase in the

workplace, however, is quite problematic as non-Arabs miscomprehend the meaning and utilisation of the term; as Masliyah (1999:98) explains:

Some Americans and other Westerners often interpret it literally and pejoratively, thinking the Arabs abuse the expression to justify missing an appointment, or evading a practical undertaking, and avoiding a responsibility. They believe this reliance on the inscrutable will of God has a profound influence on the mentality of the Arabs and is perhaps one of the key barriers the Arabs must overcome in their outlook on life. They maintain that such reliance on God may deter the desire of the Arabs to lead, destroy their appreciation of the need for planning, impede their spirit of inquiry, perpetuate an unbalanced attention to the spirit of other worldliness, and obstruct their appreciation of the value of time.

The widely accepted notion, therefore, on the part of non-Muslims is that *Inshallah* absolves the individual from any responsibility: If something is to go wrong, a Muslim would consider this to be the will of God. “This may be viewed as ‘predestination in reverse’. Yet there is no concept of predestination in terms of the future as humans have free will and must make their own conscious life (and business) decisions” (Rice, 1999:353). Westerners, therefore, in business, find the use of the term extremely frustrating as Muslims colleagues do not appear transparent or earnest in making promises. Rice (1999:353) explains:

With respect to ‘Insha’Allah,’ there appears to be a tension between the Qur’an’s teaching and what sometimes occurs in practice ... in practice, the deference to a higher authority may be understood to mean ‘if the boss wills it’. If no-one will make decisions, then no-one will bear responsibility. Individual initiative is therefore reduced, as all decisions are centralized, as a way of avoiding responsibility and blame. Based on this author's experiences in Egyptian society, the term ‘Insha’Allah’ is also often used as a way of meaning ‘no’ without actually saying ‘no’. It is difficult to obtain firm commitment from business partners and to plan accordingly.

Feghali (1997:366) states the problem further:

The term *inshallah* (‘if God wills it’ or ‘God willing’) introduced earlier is very frequently used by Arabic speakers and reflects a present-orientedness in society. While claims have been forwarded that such a worldview is fatalistic and has negative consequences for business and national development, others state more mundane roots of these problems ... the ‘belief that God has direct and ultimate control of all that happens’ has been overemphasized by Westerners and is far more prevalent among traditional, uneducated people in the region. *Inshallah* is used in a variety of ways to regulate social interaction by alluding to the possibilities that an action may or may not take place. More specifically, *inshallah* may mean: ‘yes’ at some unspecified future time; ‘no’, in terms of ‘a refusal to make a serious commitment, to take personal responsibility, or even attempt to deflect the blame for

failure for promised action to take place'; or simply 'never'. Stereotypes do exist within the region about people of certain nationalities who use the term when they do not intend to fulfil their promises.

An aspect crucial to that of conducting business is time. For many Westerners, the use of *Inshallah* is particularly worrisome within the field of time management and planning.

### ***2.5.2. Attitude towards time***

Feghali (1997:366-368) claims that Arab societies are classified as polychronic in their approach to time. This implies that: "social interaction emphasises relational development and maintenance rather than adherence to schedules, clocks or calendars" (Feghali, 1997:366). The author claims that modernisation has influenced approach to time within the Arab region, whilst the problem regarding punctuality and long-term planning still remain lacking in the eyes of westerners. Decision-making is often done in an un-timely manner as "concerns over pride, results in postponement of important decisions when fears exist that a decision might be wrong. As a result, decisions are delayed until options have disappeared". It is important to note that bureaucracies in Mediterranean countries (such as Egypt) are found unusually cumbersome and unresponsive: "In polychronic cultures, one has to be an insider or have a 'friend' who can make things happen" (Feghali, 1997:367). This process of using one's influence within one's interpersonal favours "to make things happen" is termed *wasta*. Feghali (1997:368) elaborates on the centrality of *wasta* within Arab-Islamic states and its significance to business:

*Wasta* suffocates opportunities based on competence, improvement of weaknesses, and development of confidence and self-esteem. It benefits current power holders in society, leaving those at the lower social strata in less fortunate positions. On the other hand, the *wasta* paradox includes a psychic haven amidst the chaos of social change, providing individuals a sense of belonging to a social entity that provides unconditional acceptance, and assistance to the novice in solving problems that are more commonplace to someone more experienced.

The use of *Inshallah* therefore is often understood by Westerners as an absolving of any responsibility or accountability and is a central theme when talking about time-management in Arab societies. Not only is this concept important with regards to time, but it also seems to hinder the building of trust between westerners and their Arab colleagues.

### 2.5.3. Trust and Accountability

A primary concern arising from the data gathered (and this will be discussed in more detail in the findings chapter) is that of trust. This may be due to miscommunication or communication barriers between the locals and nationals, but there is also a lack of social activities among nationals and expatriates. Rice (1999:354) elaborates:

Egyptians prefer to do business with people they know and like and who they consider as friends. They are extremely hospitable and generous and exchange gifts often. As business relationships are often with friends or family, these relationships are characterized by informality which is subsequently reflected in the treatment of time, weights and measures, and quality control of goods and services.

These issues of trust may also be due to cultural differences. Egyptians (in addition to the issues of *Inshallah* as described above) are known for the importance of negotiation in trading. Bureaucratic incompetency, nepotism and red-tape also bring forth the normalisation and systematisation of *baksheesh*<sup>14</sup> which is a great concern for Western expatriates.

Following the discussion of the use of the term, *Inshallah*, is that of accountability. There is an agreement amongst westerners that the use of the term acquits the Muslim worker or service provider from any responsibility. This, however, is not the case. Lewis (2006:7) argues that all work activities should be done in the name of Allah: “The ultimate ends of business and economics, indeed any human activity, are to Allah, and the means employed should not deviate in any way from the holy law of Islam, the *Shar’ia*” (Lewis, 2006:7). Muslims are therefore directly accountable to Allah in all their dealings (economic or not). “In this sense, every Muslim has an ‘account’ with *Allah*, in which is ‘recorded’ all good and all bad actions, an account which will continue until death, for *Allah* shows all people their accounts on their judgement day” (Lewis, 2006:2). All the resources available to Muslims are done so in the manner of trust and Muslims (similar to Christians) are therefore only trustees of their assets. Lewis (2006:3) states:

Similarly, in a business enterprise, both management and the providers of capital are accountable for their actions both within and outside their firm. Accountability in this context means accountability to the community (*umma*) or society at large. Muslims cannot, in good faith, compartmentalise their behaviour into religious and secular

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<sup>14</sup> Baksheesh is a term used to describe tipping, charitable giving, and certain forms of political corruption and bribery in the Middle East.

dimensions, and their actions are always bound by the *Shar'ia*. Islamic law thus embodies an encompassing set of duties and practices including worship, prayer, manners and morals, along with commercial transactions and business practices.

A lack of trust and a lack of communication very often lead to conflict in the workplace and both the literature and the data collected indicate the presence and resolution of conflict to be of significant value to the experiences of expatriates.

#### **2.5.4. Conflict resolution**

Another key theme identified in the data collected is the affectations displayed by Egyptian colleagues. The manner in which conflict is resolved is also a source of tension for South African expatriates. Fundamental towards understanding conflict resolution issues is the concept of the *dowshah* in Egyptian culture. Desmond Stewart (Atiya, 2006: xvi) describes *dowshah* as the “folk ballet of violence”. The *dowshah* is a cultural and societal institution which in essence is an emotional outburst (or brawl between two persons) in an attempt to relieve tension. Atiya (2006: xvi) explains:

Violence of emotion cannot be abolished by law. It can be sublimated in a ritual pantomime. The vile words fly, the fierce fists are raised. But when a great number of people come flocking about them, the contestants will, with a great show of reluctance, with fists held back as though against bands of steel, allow themselves to be parted, so that till the next disturbance, the street is calm.

This “ritual pantomime” is merely a farce and the “gestures of violence are shams and not intended to inflict severe damage” (Atiya, 2006: xvi). This emotional eruption or “fight” is peculiar due to the role of a voluntary third-party mediator who steps forward from the audience and guides the two parties in conflict to reach an agreement. The willingness from both parties to accept this agreement and to make large concessions from their part also adds to the distinctive nature of this cultural performance. “The *dowshah* and its resolution follow the prescribed form allowing all participants to play their parts, to know what parts to play and to know when the problem is finally resolved” (Atiya, 2006: xvi). Also important to note is that the performance of a *dowshah* is not only limited in its function towards releasing built up tension, but that this pantomime serves as a social occasion. “People gather around, social cleavages surface that under normal conditions remain hidden, and individuals have their chance to assume the respected role of mediator” (Atiya, 2006: xvi). Another crucial element worthy of explanation (particularly to non-Egyptians) is that the *dowshah* is not considered to be a “lack of control” but regards anger as an “outside affliction” and the community looks

sympathetically at the combatants whilst aiding them in the resolution thereof. This pantomime is a theatrical display which is driven by the emotional character of Egyptians. Western workers tend to condemn the high levels of emotion in the workplace. The presence of this “emotionality” within the workplace is a great source of frustration for many respondents and will be explored further in the results chapter.

Islam views conflict as a characteristic of an unhealthy situation and as a threat to the cohesiveness and conformity of the group. Conflict, however, (and this relates well with the concept of *dowshah*) “is necessary for group benefit and that differences in ideas should be respected. Conflict can thus become a foundation for positive change, and can lead to the voicing of concerns to increase awareness which is important to avoid stagnation” (Randeree & Faramawy, 2011:28). Whilst acknowledging the Islamic perspective on conflict, Egyptian workers manage conflict in a very particular manner in the workplace and would be dealt with in greater detail in the fifth chapter.

## **2.6. A South African (Protestant) Work Ethic**

A broad overview of an Islamic and Egyptian work ethic, as provided by the literature, has been discussed and it is necessary to give a brief description of a particular South African Protestant work ethic and how it has been influenced by the Protestant work ethic. As mentioned in the first chapter, the significant influence of Western thinking exists among (particularly white) South Africans. The researcher did not control for the variable of religion in her selection of participants as the research questions only came to light in the field. Many of the respondents indicated, however, that they were Christians. The majority of Christians in South Africa are Protestant. Although I cannot account for the religious beliefs of every respondent, I argue that Protestant values were instilled by the undemocratic South African government. In 1960, a time when most of the respondents were growing up in South Africa and were influenced by the political and cultural climate, 73,4% of all South Africans were Christians out of which 94,2% were white (Higgins, 1971:145). Nearly 56% of those white Christians belonged to Afrikaans churches whereas only 16,3% of white Christians did not belong to Protestant churches (Higgins, 1971:147). The centrality of Protestantism and Calvinism throughout the capitalistic history of South Africa, therefore, ensures the presence

of Christian values amongst South Africans<sup>15</sup>. As Rossouw (1994:562) states: “Adhering to a Christian ethic is not the same as adhering to a set of Christian moral values”. Uyger (179) also considers the Protestant work ethic to have become secularised and claims that one can consider it a work ethic in itself without its religious aspects. One can therefore argue that the preponderance of respondents have been raised with a Christian (Protestant) ethic *vis-à-vis* work without themselves necessarily claiming to be Christians.

The history of capitalism in South Africa has arguably been greatly influenced by Calvinism. Calvin accepted and proclaimed the idea that personal wealth was no longer a sin, “but rather a sign of God’s election and of being chosen by God as one of the stewards of his creation” (Rossouw, 1994:559). Calvinism came to South Africa with the earliest settlers in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century and still remains the dominant religion of the Afrikaner population (Stokes, 1975:62). Calvinist doctrines encouraged Christians to believe that they were among the “Elect” and that “work was regarded as the best means to combat doubt” (Stokes, 1975:64). God’s men therefore would prosper in this world and the next. Stokes (1975:64) explains:

Calvinism constituted an economically innovative, and even revolutionary, force in Western Europe. Although work was the central duty of the Calvinist, there were no external criteria which could determine whether his duty had been fulfilled. The absolute degree of achievement was meaningless, since the ultimate measure of achievement was always relative to one’s talents. An individual who had the capability for great achievement but did not fulfil his potential failed in his spiritual obligations, even though his absolute degree of achievement might exceed that of less talented persons who had utilized God’s gifts to the fullest. The importance of work was in the doing of it rather than in its products. Only by being the vigilant shepherd of God’s gifts and resources on a constant basis could the Calvinist fulfil his pre-eminent duty to God.

As mentioned, many (white) South Africans view themselves as Westerners – and I argue that it is their exposure to Western companies and their work ethic have also shaped their (expatriates) work ethic. Personal conversations during my fieldwork revealed many people to believe that South Africans have a very good work ethic. A study conducted by Furnham *et al*, (2001) measures the Protestant work ethic in 13 countries across the United States, Asia, Australia, Europe and Africa. Through the use of various scales (Protestant Ethic Scale, Protestant Work Ethic Scale, Spirit of Capitalism Scale, Work Ethic Scale etc.) they ranked

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<sup>15</sup> Many of the respondents referred to themselves as Christians and there were many references to their own religion in comparison to Islam. The Christian Church is also a prominent institution within Maadi.

both Ciskei (as a region in South Africa resident to Black South Africans) and South Africa as a whole, respectively, 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> (PE scale) and 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> (PWE scale). This therefore shows that beliefs and values associated with the Protestant work ethic measure strongly amongst South Africans while a country like Germany ranked last on the PWE scale (Furnham *et al.*, 2001:192).

A brief overview of the influence of Calvinist thinking in shaping a PWE among South Africans has been provided. We can, say with a measure of certainty that modern capitalism and the Calvinist influence significantly shapes the approach towards work of white South Africans – particularly Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. It is therefore to the Protestant ethic that we now turn to further look for Weberian elements necessary in building an effective modern society and economic system.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3. Theoretical framework and assumptions

*Man is an economic animal. His end is production. He can be defined in terms of production: 'Man is distinguished from the other living beings by ... [his] efforts to make a living and his concern with the various ways of obtaining and acquiring the means [of life]'. On the other hand, the main factor of production is human labour: 'Profit [production] is the main value realized from human labour'. '[Man] obtains [production] through no efforts of his own as, for instance, through rain that makes the fields thrive, and similar things. However, these things are only contributory. His own efforts must be combined with them'. 'Human labour is necessary for every profit and capital accumulation. When [the source of production] is work as such, as for instance [the exercise of] a craft, this is obvious. When the source of gain is animals, plants or minerals, human labour is still necessary, as one can see. Without [human labour], no gain will be obtained, and there will be no useful [result]'. Consequently, man has to produce in order to fulfil himself, and production results from his labour. To produce is also vital for man. If he wants to live and subsist, man is obliged to eat. And he must produce his food. Only his labour will allow him to eat: 'Everything comes from God. But human labour is necessary for ... [man's livelihood]'. However, man cannot produce enough food to live by himself. If he wants to subsist, he is obliged to organize his labour. Through capital or through skill, the most simple operation of production requires the collaboration of many men and the technical background of an entire civilization: 'The power of the individual human being is not sufficient for him to obtain [the food] he needs, and does not provide him with as much food as he requires to live'.*

(Ibn Khaldûn in Boulakia, 1971:1106-1107)

Social theory provides the framework through which one approaches research intellectually while drawing on certain assumptions and rejecting others. The main body of theory, on which my research is grounded, stems from the pen of Max Weber. Not only was he one of the greatest sociological thinkers of the past century, but his interest in the relationship between religion and economics lay the groundwork on which this project is constructed. Weber's sociological theory therefore provides the scaffolding for this research project and will be discussed in further detail in this chapter.

Ezzamel (2004:504), in his research on Ancient Egypt, discusses the position of work and the values and ideas surrounding one's *beruf* (vocation) in that time:

This emphasis upon understanding work as something embodied in 'the temporal, spatial and cultural conditions in existence' of a particular society is crucial, for it rejects the notion that work can be defined through a set of seemingly objective criteria that are invariant over time and space. Rather, the meaning of work is constructed through a discourse that is a symbolic representation of social interests: 'the meanings of work do not inhere within the practices of participants but are created, challenged, altered and sustained through the contending discourses: if particular forms of activity are represented through discourse as valued or valueless then the activities themselves take on such characteristics for those appropriating such a discourse'.

My purpose will be to unearth the "temporal, spatial and cultural" conditions of an Egyptian work ethic with the assistance of social theory so that one may draw accurate and relevant conclusions. The first part of the chapter will engage with Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930). The Protestant ethic and its influences on South African expatriates' approach towards work will be discussed in addition to the characteristics that make up this ideal type. One should take care not to homogenise Islam as a religion and consequently Islamic societies. Although 99% of Egypt's Islamic society is Sunni, they also draw from Sufi mysticism in their beliefs. Consequently, Weber's arguments and ideas apropos Islamic society and their relationship to capitalism will be discussed with respect to Sufism as an "orientation" in Islam.

It is important to note that for Weber the "Spirit of Capitalism" refers to a modern, industrial form of capitalism. It is therefore crucial that we examine the concepts of modernity and the necessary elements that Weber identified as essential for the establishment of modern capitalism which include the processes of rationalisation, bureaucratisation and

secularisation. The role of these concepts will be identified both from an Islamic and Weberian point of view in the following discussion.

### **3.1. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism**

The body of scholarship surrounding Max Weber's writings is vast and complex. The following interpretation of Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is a result of an engagement with many Weberian scholars. Given the fact that Weber's works on Islam were incomplete at the time of his death, many scholars believe his interpretation of Islam and the centrality of religion in the establishment of modern capitalism was credulous, but in need of some maturation. My application and interpretation of Weber is thus an attempt to comprehend an intricate social phenomenon, and it may be at odds with the more enlightened reader's interpretations. However, both neo-Weberians and critics of Weber are acknowledged in my theoretical overview in an attempt to do justice to these scholarly groups.

Max Weber identified the Protestant work ethic as that practised by the ideal type of person who shows an aptitude for the pursuit of profit through rationalised and systematised means. He identified a set of characteristics within individuals of Protestant beliefs, which were conducive to the acquisition of wealth. Many scholars have studied and debated the PWE and have highlighted the attributes in Protestants which enabled them to reach economic success. These include, among others, frugality, punctuality and a strong sense of duty. Hamilton-Attwell (1998:82) also identifies the following to be present: feelings of guilt; beliefs that injustice in the community resides in people rather than in social institutions; ambition; church attendance; authoritarianism; external focus of control; pay satisfaction; and a willingness to do repetitive work. It should be understood in this context that Protestantism proclaimed work to be a form of prayer and the consequent acquisition of material possessions to be a sign of grace (Andreski, 1964:8). Parboteeah, Hoegl and Cullen (2009:122) state:

Weber's Protestant work ethic, proposed that a work ethic derived from Protestant beliefs, and in particular, Calvinism, lay at the root of the development of capitalism and industrial work organizations. His main argument was that Protestantism encouraged their adherents to value their social and economic environment, particularly emphasizing the value of work in their daily lives and 'the disciplined and austere pursuit of gain, and the attitude appropriate to the growth of capitalism'.

Protestants, imbued with such attitudes, would be driven to conduct economic activities with diligence. Furthermore, Protestantism was also seen as encouraging adherents to use the fruits of their hard work with special care. Spending these material blessings on personal enjoyment was seen as the path to sinfulness and Protestants thus wisely reinvested their profits in their economic activities.

Weber states that Protestants went about their economic activities rationally and frugally. This rationality includes long-term calculation and the depersonalisation of economic activities. The Protestant does not seek power and recognition and “avoided ostentation, unnecessary expenditure, the conscious enjoyment of power, and outward signs of social recognition” (Arslan, 2001:322). Arslan (2001:322) substantiates this by stating:

The PWE believer gets nothing out of his or her wealth except the religious sense of having done his or her job well according to puritan ethic. It is this belief that no doubt seemed to pre-capitalistic man so incomprehensible and mysterious, and so unworldly. The man who has the spirit of capitalism is reliable, honest, rational, courageous and work-oriented.

Max Weber identified the characteristics of Protestants (particularly of the Calvinist groups) to be the most conducive in acquiring wealth and being economically successful. One can argue, therefore, that given white (Afrikaans) South Africans’ religious historical trajectory, the majority of white, middle-aged South Africans were raised according to a PWE and therefore display the characteristics that lead to economic prosperity. This does not necessarily mean that all the respondents were Christians. Weber argued, however, that other conditions, in addition to Protestant’s particular work ethic, also contributed to the establishment of modern capitalism in its rationalised and systematised manner.

Uyger (2007:186) states that Weber did not claim that Calvinism, *per se*, led to the “Spirit of Capitalism,” but rather that the coexistence of Calvinist ideas and a capitalistic spirit led to the establishment of modern industrial capitalist ideas. On a technical note, Swedberg (1999:575) further adds that Weber preferred one to speak of “modes of capitalistic orientation of profit-making” rather than of “capitalism”. He continues to say that “capitalism, as Weber saw it does not so much constitute a fixed structure as a constellation of social economic action which is constantly being done and undone” (Swedberg, 1999:575). Weber, in his mind, did therefore not merely refer to one fixed type of capitalism that one can identify through the use of objective criteria, but rather as modes of capitalistic

action swayed by cultural and religious specifics which proved more or less successful given the society.

To Weber, these modes of capitalistic action proved the most fruitful in Protestant societies guided by Calvinist ideas and values. Randal Collins (1980:926), however, claims that Weber (in his later years and close to his death) revised his introduction to the Protestant ethic whilst presenting more mature arguments on the topic. In the model which Weber presents in his *General Economic History*, he does not mention the doctrine of predestination in Calvinism as central to his thesis (Collins, 1980:926; 934):

But his claims for its importance in the overall scheme of things were not large, and the well-rounded model which he presents in *General Economic History* does not even mention the doctrine of predestination. Instead, what we find is a predominantly institutional theory, in which religious organization plays a key role in the rise of modern capitalism but especially in conjunction with particular forms of political organization ... But in the mature Weber, the thesis is greatly transformed. Protestantism is only the last intensification of one of the chains of factors leading to rational capitalism. Moreover, its effect now is conceived to be largely negative, in the sense that it removes one of the last institutional obstacles diverting the motivational impetus of Christianity away from economic rationalization.

Weber argued, in contrast, that neither these conditions nor these religious attributes were present in Islamic societies and this impeded the development of their modern capitalistic nations. It is, however, important to note that the characteristics of the PWE elucidated by the abovementioned scholars do not differ significantly from the Quran's specifications on a Muslim's approach towards work. Fundamental to Weber's thesis is what he terms "worldly asceticism". "The religious ideals of work, thrift and enrichment without enjoyment and by means of work only, constitute what Weber calls 'worldly asceticism'" (Andreski, 1964:8). The notion of asceticism is important in our exploration of work ethics. Some respondents commented on the pleasure their colleagues derived from "drinking tea and playing games" rather than working. Work as a means to an end versus work as an end in itself points to the variant value systems of both cultural groups.

One of the hurdles in achieving a capitalistic spirit in Islamic societies, as identified by Weber, is the underlying fatalistic assumptions of Sufism. However, on closer inspection, this is contradicted by the notion central to early Sufism of "aestheticism and simplicity of life"

(Michel, 2005:341). It is for this reason I have to take a moment and discuss Weber's position on Islam, with particular reference to Sufism.

### 3.2. Islam and Weber

Weber, in his limited studies on Islam, did not argue that a non-Protestant society is unable to produce "the spirit of capitalism," but that the conducive elements towards the acquisition of such a spirit was absent in Islam's history. Historically, Islamic societies were unsuccessful in the establishment of the spirit of capitalism. Arslan (2001:321) clarifies this further: "According to Weber, Islamic societies were not able to produce 'the spirit of capitalism,' because of the warrior ethic, other-worldly Sufism and oriental despotism". Spengler (1964:274-275), however, argues that in early Islam, the Quran and *Sunnah* were crucial in the establishment of manuals delineating the economic activities of early Muslims. He points out that early Muslims were extremely active, economically, which led to great successes.

Weber in his original (and incomplete) writings does not acknowledge this economic spirit in early Islam. According to Salvatore (1996:465), a possible reason for this omission and an explanation for Weber's (essentialist) selective characterisation of Islam, is due to "Weber's concern for explaining the undeniable success of early Islam coupled with Islam's alleged historical failure to develop rational capitalism". The author goes on to argue that Weber's account of Islam should be read within the context as a "sociological reformulation of the traditional Orientalist<sup>16</sup> scheme of success-and-failure as rise-and-fall in civilisational terms".

When considering Weber's principal argument for the absence of rational, modern capitalism within Islamic societies, one should discuss the three obstacles identified in his historical encounter with Islam. The first hindrance in Islamic societies was that of the warrior ethic. The "warrior ethic or the spirit of conquest is regarded to be antithesis of the productive capitalist spirit because war is closely related with a destruction and assassination" (Rokhman, 2010:22). The second barrier, historically, was the despotic nature of Islamic societies. Weber claimed this to be a barrier to a capitalistic spirit, as it restricted property rights and the accumulation of capital which inadvertently created a spirit of laziness among

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<sup>16</sup> The position of Weber within German Orientalism will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter.

the members of these societies. The third and final impediment in Islamic societies was that of Sufism. “Sufism is viewed as an otherworldly character because of its avoidance of worldly materialistic affairs” (Rokhman, 2010:22). The encouragement of a “fatalistic way of life”, according to Weber, greatly encumbered the development of a capitalistic spirit. Michel (2005:341) states:

For many early Sufis,<sup>17</sup> it was *asceticism* and simplicity of life that were the key to a true following of Islam. Others have emphasized *love* as the central idea and understand the Sufi path as one leading to a union of love with God, the Beloved. For others, Sufism is a voluntarist path by which the believer, by concentrating on virtue and moral behavior, comes into a union of *Will* with God, a state in which the mystic no longer has an independent will of his or her own, but seeks only to do the will of God. Many mystics see the Path as one of *knowledge*, of becoming aware of the eternal Truth, the perennial wisdom of the heart that is the only sure font of true insight. Still others affirm the *oneness of all existence*, so that the mystical path becomes primarily a *psychological* movement toward awareness that one is simply a transient manifestation of the one eternal Being, present in the cosmos and at the depths of one’s own personality. Some Sufis emphasize extraordinary mystical *experience*, expressed in states of ecstasy, inspired utterances, visions, and dreams, while for others the path is a contemplative *pilgrimage* to God residing in the silent cave of the heart.

It is therefore important to explain the centrality of asceticism in both Calvinism and in Islam and how the presence of this approach towards worldly matters led to such divergent outcomes. Calvinism highlights asceticism as a spiritual need with no regard to the material

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<sup>17</sup> “Trying to define Sufism is thus like the parable of the elephant in the dark room related by Mevlana, Jalal al-Din Rumi, in the *Mathnavi* (Michel, 2005:342)”.

An elephant was in a dark building.

Some people from India had brought it for exhibition.

Many people kept going into that dark place in order to see it.

Each one was stroking it with his hands in the dark,  
since seeing it with the eyes was not possible.

In the case of one person,

whose hand landed on the trunk,

he said, ‘This being is like a drain pipe.’

For another, whose hand reached its ear,

to him it seemed like a kind of fan.

As for another person,

whose hand was upon its leg,

he said, ‘I perceive the shape of the elephant to be like a pillar.’

In the case of another one, who placed his hand upon its back,

he said, ‘Indeed, this elephant is like a throne.’

In the same way as this, anyone who reached a part of the elephant used his understanding in regard to any particular place he perceived

wealth gained or social status acquired from work. Sufism, conversely, claims aestheticism and simplicity of life to be a withdrawal from worldly matters and affairs. Uygur (2007: 185) however, argues that Sufism is not necessarily against worldly activities.

The concept of '*dunya*' (worldliness) is a key notion in Sufi literature. In many Sufi sayings and poems we can see that a negative meaning is applied to the concept, in terms of leaving everything in the world. In general meaning, Sufis define the concept of 'world' as everything in the world except the love of God. He proposes that the meaning of '*dunya*' should be sought within individuals' intention, rather than within the material dimensions of the world. As Uygur explains, Sufis consider the '*dunya*' as nothing else than forgetting of devotion to God. In this respect, Sufis claim that none of the usual suspects such as women, money, or business career, are the '*dunya*'. Uygur makes his argument stronger by citing some sayings of the prophet: 'The world is something that keeps you busy from remembrance of God'; 'Work for this world as if you will never die; and work for the other world as if you will die tomorrow'. Therefore, it can be said that the crucial thing for Sufism is not the worldly activity itself, but the intention of the individual. Engaged in work overall, Uygur's studies show his optimism regarding a regaining of the power of Sufi ideas in an economic sense.

It can therefore be argued that Sufi asceticism does not prohibit the Sufi from working but rather, through the sayings of the Prophet, encourages the Sufi towards hard work. Weber argued, however, that Islamic asceticism was obstructed firstly by the warrior group as the main social carrier of Islam, and secondly the Sufi brotherhoods who developed a mystical religiosity (Turner, 1974:234). Calvinist asceticism, on the other hand, encourages the Protestant not to lavishly spend and flaunt their material gains from their economic endeavours. Such asceticism also implies that the Protestant should not see work as an end towards gaining material affluence, but should rather see work as an end in itself and as a spiritual offering to God which serves as a religious demarcation. Little (1974:36) claims that Sufi mysticism supersedes its asceticism as he claims that "the way to practical rationality is more natural for asceticism than it is in mysticism, because the focus is more consistently on the importance of action as an essential part of the religious message".

Bracke and Fadil (2008:4), however, argue that Islamic realities are much more diffuse than what one would like to imagine. It is therefore important not to homogenise Islamic societies. The authors argue that due to a "relative absence of institutionalised religious authority" the realm of practice in Islam, as well as on the level of religious authority, seem much more divergent than is prescribed by the Holy Scriptures. Gellner (2000:7), drawing on the works

of Ibn Khaldûn, explains the absence of a capitalistic spirit in Islamic for their lack of success in the economic sphere. Gellner (2000:7) states:

On the Weberian theory, Protestantism in Europe made its adherents loyal to the norms of their *calling*, irrespective of advantage. (They did not think other-worldly advantage could be bought, and did not wish to buy advantage in this world.) This made them *individually* and *unconditionally* trustworthy and thus, according to the theory, they made the modern world possible. In the traditional world, 'rational' economic accumulation was not rational at all: the state would deprive you of what you had 'rationally' accumulated. But the puritans, on this theory, were irrationally rational. They accumulated *anyway*, to prove their spiritual status to themselves, whether or not it was going to pay off economically. And behold, for once it *did* pay off. Because there were enough of them, their mutual, spiritually motivated trustworthiness benefited them all collectively; and for once the state could not, or would not, despoilate them, or at least it did not do so everywhere. And where it failed to do so, modern capitalism was born. Islamic universalism has not engendered any such individual and unconditional trustworthiness; or if it has, political conditions have not allowed it to bear full fruit. It has, however, acted as a kind of fortifying agent to the collective trustworthiness of clan cohesion. It thus transmutes tribal *Asabiyya* into an agency of state formation. But it does not seem capable of preventing that state from being patronage ridden, and inhibiting the emergence of capitalism proper; nor does it stop its atomized burghers from being politically supine.

It is relevant to recognise the limitations of Weber's theory on Islam. Many critics label Weber to be an Orientalist which essentialises Islam. "We can say that the extent to which Weber's handling of Islam was predetermined by his own concern for reconstructing the reasons for western uniqueness was well beyond the Eurocentric constraints already embedded in the Orientalist paradigm" (Salvatore, 1996:463). Salvatore (1996:465) continues by stating that Weber's selective characterisation of Islam is due to "his concern for explaining the undeniable 'success' of early Islam coupled with Islam's alleged historical failure to develop rational capitalism. This explanation was a sociological reformulation of the traditional Orientalist scheme of success-and-failure as rise-and-fall in 'civilisational' terms". It is also worth acknowledging Weber's stance in German national politics and how this German concern might have influenced his work presenting an outcome which was "a dynamic essentialism, combining understanding and explanation, internal (subjective) and external (objective) variables, *Geist* and Form, with an undeniable primacy of the first component" (Salvatore, 1996:470). It is perhaps here that Marxism intersects with Weberianism as both their arguments elucidate what they term an "institutional deficit" when

Weber claims the absence of a bourgeois culture, autonomous cities and a rational bureaucracy to be the main obstacles of Islamic societies (Salvatore, 1996:481).

Uygur (2007: 184) claims – conversely to Weber – that Islamic values and capitalism are not completely incompatible. He affirms the presence of economic values in early Islamic societies, but suggests that one should investigate the reasons for Muslim countries’ underdevelopment internally rather than externally: “By saying internal reasons we understand the different perceptions and interpretations of the religion” (Uygur, 2007:184). I believe, in addition, that one should be wary of homogenising Islamic societies and looking at Muslim countries in their individual capacities rather than as Islamic societies as a whole. Michel (2005:343), however, claims that Sufism fundamentally stands in contradiction to modernity. Many authors have considered this issue of incompatibility as Michel (2005:343) explains:

Bringing together the concepts of Sufism and modernity, therefore, means bringing into discussion the set of values enshrined, on the one hand, in the concepts of asceticism or simplicity of life, love for God, striving to do God’s will, searching for a kind of knowledge (*ma’rifah*) unattainable by the methods of scientific positivism, and an awareness of the inner presence of the Divine and, on the other, an approach to life that exalts the rights of the individual, the duty of every person to achieve self-fulfilment, a faith in science as the solution of many of life’s problems, a sceptical attitude toward the claims of religion, and a commitment to the exclusion of religious convictions from the autonomous realms of politics and economy. When the above-mentioned sets of beliefs are conceived as in conflict or incompatible, the result is a *clash* of civilizational values.

This stance motivates a consideration of modernity (as the concepts of bureaucratisation, rationalisation and secularisation are arguably offshoots of modernity) both from an Islamic and Weberian vantage point to identify Islamic societies, but particularly Egypt’s position, in the global modern world.

### **3.3. Modernity**

*“Civilization is not, as it is unfortunately understood by blind imitators of the West, a garment to buy from some shop and put on, but rather a final destination reached along a rational way going through time and*

*circumstances.*<sup>18</sup>

Modernity is a much debated topic among academic scholars. Bruce Lawrence (as cited in Michel 2005:342) defines modernity as “a new index of human life shaped, above all, by increasing bureaucratization and rationalization as well as technical capacities and global exchange unthinkable in the pre-modern era”. Bracke & Fadil (2008:16), however, request sociologists and sociological scholarship to move beyond a point of seeking a unifying definition of modernity and rather “describe, explore, define and identify the different manifestations and articulations of modernity”. Regrettably, modernity, has recently (particularly within the Muslim world) become synonymous with westernisation, which invariably, has become notorious in itself. Western civilisation rests on the principles of “individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, rule of law, democracy, free markets, separation of church and state” (Michel, 2005:342). Those convinced of these principles often see themselves as having a mission to bring an enlightened understanding of life to those still trapped in backwardness, superstition, and obscurantism (Michel, 2005:342). The “orientalisation”, particularly of the Islamic Orient, has been central in the definition of a Western trajectory of modernity (Salvatore, 1996:458).

Nakano (1992:160) states that within Western intellectual development, ambiguity and contradiction (which is very often found within Islamic societies resulting from the divergencies in Islamic tenets and practice) are regarded as “wrong, emphasising the importance of clear-cut categorisation which was the basis of logic, mathematics and science”. He adds that tradition and modernity are not necessarily in contrast to one another, but rather that some of the social and cultural characteristics of pre-modern societies remain entrenched even after that society has modernised. His argument, therefore, is a rejection of the traditional and modern dichotomy (Nakano, 1992:160).

Ahmed (2002:27), however, states that despite Muslims’ apparent discomfort with globalisation or westernisation, this idea is not in the least foreign to Muslim history. He states that “Islam’s vision of the world is by definition global. There is neither [an] East nor West for God”. The author argues that within Islamic history, there were long periods in which “societies [lived] within different ethnic, geographic and political boundaries, speaking

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<sup>18</sup> Michel, 2005:352

a language understood throughout, enjoying a common cultural sensibility and recognizing the same overarching ethos in the world-view". Notwithstanding the relevance of Nakano's argument, many scholars do indeed proclaim that Islam and Modernity are irreconcilable as Bracke and Fadil (2008:2) suggest:

... [I]t is precisely because of where Islam, as an object of study in modern social theory, is conceptually located: on the intersection of these two binary oppositions that shape hegemonic narratives of secular modernity. Islam is situated as a 'constitutive outside' to modernity not only as a religious formation, but also as a phenomenon located outside of the West. Thus Islam as an object of social theory provides a discursive terrain where questions of belonging or entitlement to modernity gain a particular intensity. Debates on whether or not Islam and secular modernity are compatible, and whether or not it is possible to modernise Islam, illustrate the point.

Eickelman (2000:120) reiterates the point by presenting Islam as an example "of the diminishing or obstructive role of religion and of religious thinkers in achieving a modern society in which individuals negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options not necessarily congruent with collective religious sentiments". He continues by saying that a modernisation theory pushes religion back into the private sphere. Modernisation as the "enlargement of human freedom" and the "enhancement of range or choices" is hampered by the role of religion as the authority of religious leaders and the importance of traditional religious institutions necessarily prevents people from taking charge of themselves. "Religion can retain its influence only by conforming to such norms as 'rationality' and relativism, accepting secularisation, and making compromises with science, economic concerns and the state" (Eickelman, 2000:121). Gellner (2000:8) however argues that the Muslim society, under the impact of modernity, faces many challenges:

In the traditional situation, rural political relationships are often symmetrical and participatory. There is a great deal of diffusion of power. Tribal leaders are just leaders; they are not really very distinct from their fellow members. Personal political power, when it emerges, is fragile and temporary. The social units are ... republics of cousins; but at the same time, the spatial and temporal markers of the society are provided by inegalitarian patronage networks. Shrines and their saintly guardians mark out the boundaries of units by their own location and settlement, and orchestrate the rhythm of social time by the festivals over which they preside. The saints come in hierarchies, in organizations with great inequality of status, and with an ideology – theoretically though not in fact – of total submission and authority. Thus there are unsymmetrical, dyadic religious relationships, and symmetrical participatory political ones. Religion employs an idiom of unequal patronage; politics

speaks a language of participatory brotherly or cousinly equality. Modernity turns the system upside down. It completely changes the balance of power.

For Weber, modernity and bureaucratisation is tantamount. It is therefore important to consider the latter thoroughly.

### ***3.3.1. Rationalised bureaucratisation***

For Max Weber, the “Capitalistic Spirit” walks hand in hand with modernisation, bureaucratisation, systematisation and rationalisation. He argues these concepts to be indisputable if modern, industrial economic prosperity is to be accomplished. Few would argue with him. The theorist positions a rational bureaucracy central to the ideal type successful in the acquisition of modern capitalism. Critique against Weber, particularly on the topic of a rational bureaucracy as an ideal type, claims that Weber treats “ideal types as substantive conclusions rather than methodological tools. In this sense, his specifications for the ‘rational bureaucracy’ represent not so much a system of analytical categories as they do an attempt to capture the ‘spirit’ of contemporary administration” (Udy Jr., 1959:791).

Turner (1974:151) argues that Weber claimed the success of the West (particularly in Europe) could be ascribed to rationality and rationalisation, which was “manifested in the growing calculability and systematic control over all aspects of human life on the basis of general rules and precepts which ruled out appeals to traditional norms of charismatic enthusiasm”. Turner adds that this rationality is displayed in the authority ascribed to bureaucracy in industrial and political activities which precludes dependence on individual initiatives or traditional loyalties. Nakano (1992:158) explains rationalisation in terms of modernisation:

For Weber, the process of rationalisation corresponds to the passage from pre-modern to modern society in Western Europe. This thread runs through all the spheres of human activities from bureaucracy to music. Of course, modern social sciences, which are the product of this ‘Geist’ of the time, are, inherently ‘rational’ in the sense that they presuppose that i) man, as subject as observer, is endowed with (absolutely free) reason, that ii) this reason enables man to understand unequivocally the order or laws of nature (including man himself), and that iii) ‘reality’ is only to be grasped through reason; denying other human capacities of knowing such as intuition sympathy etc. ... The core logic is always rigorously Cartesian which misses, wittingly or unwittingly, the ‘non-rational’ and the ‘super-rational’.

Uygur, (2007:181) cites Weber's acknowledgement that rationalism, (as well as capitalism) despite its presence and absence in various societies, is not limited to the West. He says that according to Weber's writings, rationalisation has been present in "all civilisations in very different forms and very divergent viewpoints". Weber merely attempts, he argues, to discover the historical trajectories of rationalisation in various societies: "In this respect he tries to explain the historical origin of the western rationalism by indicating who rationalises which spheres of life in what directions and what historical kinds of social order result therefrom" (Uygur, 2007:181).

The concept of rationality/rationalisation is fundamental to our discussion of bureaucracy. Many would argue that the presence of an effective rational bureaucracy is the pinnacle of a modern society. It is, consequently, awe-inspiring to note the presence of such a bureaucracy in an ancient civilisation ruling five millennia ago. Max Weber claims Ancient Egypt had one of the most specialised and effective bureaucracies unknown in its epoch. Morris (2001:117) affirms this: "Although Egypt paralleled other early civilizations in many fundamental ways, it also had distinctive, almost contradictory cultural characteristics: Egypt was one of the most centralized early political systems and possessed an extraordinarily complex bureaucracy". Turner (2006) defines bureaucratic organisation as "the application of rational means for the achievement of specific ends". Weber went on to conceptualise bureaucracy into the following 15 characteristics:

1. Power belongs to an office and not the officeholder
2. Authority is specified by the rules of the organisation
3. Organisational action is impersonal, involving the execution of official policies
4. Disciplinary systems of knowledge frame organisational action
5. Rules are formally codified
6. Precedent and abstract rule serve as standards for organisational action
7. There is a tendency towards specialisation
8. A sharp boundary between bureaucratic and particularistic action defines the limits of legitimacy
9. The functional separation of tasks is accompanied by a formal authority structure
10. Powers are precisely delegated in a hierarchy
11. The delegation of powers is expressed in terms of duties, rights, obligations, and responsibilities, specified in contracts
12. Qualities required for organisational positions are increasingly measured in terms of formal credentials
13. There is a career structure with promotion by either seniority or merit
14. Different positions in the hierarchy are differentially paid and otherwise stratified

## 15. Communication, coordination, and control are centralised in the organisation.

Authority is central to the functioning of bureaucratic organisations: “People should obey not the person but the officeholder” (‘Bureaucracy’, Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology; Turner, 2006). “Precision, speed and unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction, and of material and personal cost ... are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration”. The underlying “rational” foundations of a bureaucracy include a free labour force; the appropriation and concentration of the physical means of production as disposable private property; the representation of share rights in organisations and property ownership and the rationalisation of various institutional areas such as the market, technology and the law (‘Bureaucracy’, Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology; Turner, 2006). Clearly then, what is central to the success of a bureaucracy is the depersonalisation of activities and the renunciation of a brotherliness or solidarity which Bellah (1999:297) further defines as:

Money is the most abstract and ‘impersonal’ element that exists in human life. The more the world of the modern capitalist economy follows its own immanent laws, the less accessible it is to any imaginable relationship with a religious ethic of brotherliness. The more rational, and thus impersonal, capitalism becomes, the more this is the case. In the past it was possible to regulate ethically the personal relations between master and slave precisely, because they were personal relations. But it is not possible to regulate, at least not in the same sense or with the same success, the relations between the shifting holders of mortgages and the shifting debtors of the banks that issue these mortgages: for in this case, no personal bonds of any sort exist.

Seidman and Gruber (1977) ascribe the successes of Christian societies to the notion of individuality rather than brotherliness – a key concept to Muslim societies. They argue that “Christian universality ‘as a religious association of individual believers, not a ritual association of clans’, transformed clan-based communal relations into relations between individuated persons” (Seidman & Gruber, 1977:501). This notion of individuality is, in addition, central to neo-liberalism both within the economic and political spheres. The authors further explain that the Christian reformation contributed tremendously to the depersonalisation and individualisation of economic activities which ultimately led to the prosperity of Christian nations and societies:

There was, as Weber says, ‘an end to the naive piety (of familial relations) and its repression of the economic impulse’. Familial relations, as all things creatural, were devalued and depersonalized. Rational calculation, accountability, in short, the

‘commercial principle’, was brought into kinship relations as with all social relations. The inner-worldly asceticism of the Reformation unique to the Occident succeeded in eliminating all irrational factors which obstructed the rational organization of free labour.

They emphasise, however, that this rational calculation and impersonality of post-reformation religious doctrines only constituted one of many preconditions that led to their economic successes (Seidman & Gruber, 1977:503). For capitalism to be successful, production processes need to be rationalised and mechanised whilst all social relations ought to be rational and organised efficiently. Capitalism ought to be thoroughly rational, calculative, impersonal and predictive: “Formal accountability of person and property (rational accounting) as well as formal authority relations are necessary to ensure the coherence of the social world” (Seidman & Gruber, 1977:505). They explain the consequences of an impersonal market allowed to “follow its own autonomous tendencies” are that its “participants do not look toward the persons of each other, but only to the commodity; there are no obligations of brotherliness or reverence, and none of those spontaneous human relations that are sustained by personal unions” (Seidman & Gruber, 1977:504). Such rationalisation is elaborated on as follows:

Market behavior is influenced by rational purposeful pursuit of interests. The partner to a transaction is expected to behave according to rational legality, and, quite particularly, to respect the formal inviolability of a promise once given. These are the qualities which form the content of market ethics ... The thorough rationalization and regimentation of social and economic relations necessitated by capitalism is extended and intensified in the process of bureaucratisation on[wards]. The development of the state and of capitalist structures provided, as we indicated above, the impulse towards the bureaucratization of social-economic relations. As Weber observes, ‘the decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organization has always been its purely technical superiority over any other form of organization’.

Notwithstanding the individual actor’s agency, the bureaucrat can neither set the rules nor change them. Weber argues, therefore, for the separation of the spheres of life (Schwartz, 1984:1396) and presents the scholar with two types of bureaucracy: the legal-rational and the charismatic bureaucracy. Constat (1958:400) argues that the latter type typically presents itself in authoritarian or totalitarian nations:

A (1) legal-rational staff functioning within a pluralistic power structure (bureaucracy as a means, that is, democratic bureaucracy) and (2) a totalitarian organization resulting from the institutionalization of charisma in a bureaucratic direction (bureaucracy as an end in itself, that is, totalitarian bureaucracy). In the latter case,

bureaucracy has ‘come into its own’ and constitutes a ruling class with a monopoly of power.

These two types of bureaucracy occur in either of two ways: Firstly, the “legal-rational bureaucracy” constituted by a legal-rational order, which includes impersonality, rationality and technical competence, or a “charismatic bureaucracy” which arises from the institutionalisation of charisma. Weber (Constas, 1958:402) claims that, within both bureaucracies, the social order is very different and each stand in almost complete opposition to capitalism:

To the degree that charismatic elements are present, ideological commitment, as well as technical competence, must necessarily figure in bureaucratic recruitment. It may even supersede it. Hence, purges, orthodoxy, and hewing to the party line will inevitably arise at every level in a charismatic bureaucracy and in the most diverse fields of work.

Considering the case of Egypt one can easily classify the public bureaucracy as one constituted by charismatic elements. The nature of Mubarak’s leadership, tainted by corruption, nepotism and mismanagement, surfaced following the February revolution. Despite the Egyptian government’s claims to be a modern democracy, their bureaucracy demonstrates characteristics of tribal societies along Weberian lines. The centrality of kinship, reciprocity and group association, hierarchies characterised by age and sex and the centrality of religion in all social activities are among these characteristics. Tribal societies’ members are also largely oriented to the actualisation of their immediate needs, and therefore work and labour as a means to an end rather than an end in itself as is the case in Calvinist societies.

The presence of patriarchy, patrimonialism as well as traditional bureaucracy in the spheres of economics and law are key features of tribal societies. Patriarchy in Egypt is both culturally and religiously relevant. “The term is therefore about the power of men, a power which extends to the individual jurisdiction of men (or a man) over a family and its members, as well as the more general power of ‘the male’ over the organization of a social group or a society” (Cambridge Dictionary). The eldest men are esteemed the highest and this translates into a *de facto* ‘sheikocracy’ as stated by Lewis (2006:11). Patrimonialism, conversely, is a system of rule that is based upon personal-familial, rather than rational-legal relationships. Central to the notion of patrimonialism is that the leader of the organisation distributes power

and authority according to his or her wishes (Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology). The presence of patriarchy and patrimonialism hinders the consolidation of modernity in Egypt. In addition to these notions, the centrality of religion within Egyptian society, bestow seemingly absolute power on sheikhs.

Religion in the Egyptian society's activities is used to rationalise and justify social poisons such as this-worldly, material poverty, gender inequality and neglect of human rights (Bellah, 1999:280). For Weber, the characteristics of these tribal societies stand in direct opposition to the acquisition of an effective, fruitful and modernised state typified by rationalisation, bureaucratisation, professionalisation and invariably, secularisation. Egyptian society, plagued by a charismatic bureaucracy, patrimonialism and patriarchy, in addition to being a religious society, has been unable to transcend its classification as tribal society. Weber argues that as long as these poisons are present in a society, it will not be able to modernise effectively and without this modernisation, would not be able to achieve the spirit of capitalism. Weber argues that one of the first steps towards modernisation requires the 'disenchantment' of society. This notion of secularisation or disenchantment, and the relevance thereof in Egypt, is important to discuss.

### ***3.3.2. Secularisation and disenchantment***

*"The human being no longer dwells in a great enchanted garden. To find direction, and to win security in this world and the next, the human being no longer needs either to revere or to coerce the spirits; there is no longer need to seek salvation through ritualistic, idolatrous or sacramental procedures."*<sup>19</sup>

Weber claims the concept of disenchantment to be one of the essentials of modernity. Some go so far as to place it as definitive of his concept of modernity (Jenkins, 2000:12). Jenkins (2000:12) defines Weber's notion of disenchantment as the:

historical process by which the natural world and all areas of human experience become experienced and understood as less mysterious; defined, at least in principle, as knowable, predictable and manipulable by humans; conquered by and incorporated into the interpretive schema of science and rational government. In a

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<sup>19</sup> Francis, 1984:2

disenchanted world everything becomes understandable and tameable, even if not, for the moment, understood and tamed. Increasingly the world becomes human-centred and the universe – only apparently paradoxically – more impersonal.

Notwithstanding the relevance of Weber's disenchantment thesis, it is important to state that criticisms against the term are also noted. "It is, for example, questionable whether the 'enchanted world' was ever as unified or homogenous in its cosmology and beliefs as Weber's argument seems to presume" (Jenkins, 2000:16). When looking at the Egyptian population it is presumptuous to assume that a monolith of ideas exist. It seems, however, safe to say that, through the socialisation process, Egyptian culture – in addition to the religious tenets prescribed by the Quran – as a prominent body of cultural and religious ideas exist. Writers such as Elias (1993) present another possibility to Weber's idea of disenchantment with the notion that the world becomes more homogenous throughout the civilisation process. Globalisation has also been attributed as a homogenising force of the modern world (Jenkins, 2000:17). This homogenising process (perhaps even westernisation of the world) diminishes the importance and relevance of society's particular religious ideas and conceptualisations. Jenkins (2000:19) elaborates on secularisation:

Turning to religion in its own right, the secularization of 'Western civilization' seems to be well-advanced and advancing: participation in formal, organized, religion has declined markedly. This cannot, however, simply be taken to mean either that 'supernatural' or 'irrational' beliefs have necessarily declined in importance — there is a welter of evidence that they have not — or that established Christian religion has necessarily been supplanted by other spiritualities. Secularization and disenchantment are not the same things, although they are easily confused.

What is very important to note, however, is that secularisation finds its origins and relevance in the West. The term "secularisation" holds no meaning to Islam as no such word exists within the Arabic language. It is therefore imperative to consider the "secularisation" of the Muslim Orient along the lines of disenchantment rather than as Western secularisation. As Robinson (1984:1) argues, Weber's secularisation has its roots within Western development, or more particularly in ancient Judaism with "its trunk in Protestantism and in the growth of capitalism". The author also states that rationality and rationalisation are its core concepts. It seems then, that Weber's concepts of rationality, bureaucratisation and secularisation are all part of modernity. The centrality of secularisation within the discourse often serves as a criterion in identifying modernised societies. Modernisation, therefore, can be defined as the functional differentiation of a society and its subsystems. Bracke and Fadil (2008:3),

however, emphasise that one should not understand secularisation as an autonomous process, but “rather as a consequence of the process of modernity’s differentiation, as its effect on the religious system”. Authors within modernisation studies have offered other explanations of secularisation. These include concepts such as religious individualisation, compartmentalisation, privatisation, religious decline, religious bricolage and de-institutionalisation, to name but a few (Bracke & Fadil, 2008:4). The authors also contest the notion of using secularisation as an analytical tool with regard to Islam. They explain that the consequences of using non-particular tools of analyses result in unintended error or bias and this alerts one to the danger of using inappropriate theoretical and conceptual tools to explore a society other than one’s own.

The line of argumentation that takes the use of Western analytical tools for observing non-Western phenomena to do injustice to the phenomena observed, emphasises that particular premises on which Western social sciences draw, fail to reflect different epistemologies operating in non-Western societies, and in this case Muslim societies.

The unsuitability of secularisation as an analytical tool *vis-à-vis* Islamic societies means one should rather consider using Weber’s disenchantment thesis as a more appropriate device. Disenchantment, then, has two simultaneous consequences: Firstly a secularisation and a decline in magic, whilst, at the same time “increasing scale, scope and power of the formal means-ends rationalities of science, bureaucracy, the law and policy making” (Jenkins, 2000:12). Through this process, understanding the world through religious and magical lenses is considered as ignorant and backward. Bellah (1999:282), however, states the nature of societies ruled by religious activities and modes of thinking cause “not only an acute but a permanent state of tension in relation to the world and its orders” and he concurs with Weber that a religious society, by definition, stands in opposition to a modern society, because it is here where political, military and intellectual elites “use religion for taming of the masses and for the reinforcement of their own legitimacy” (Bellah, 1999:291).

It may be useful to discuss the notion of Enlightenment while considering disenchantment. The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology (‘Enlightenment’, Turner: 2006) states the following:

In the *Western* (own emphasis added) tradition, Enlightenment (*éclaircissement, aufklärung*) refers to the process of becoming rational in thought and action. It can be individual or society-wide. Either way, reason is figured as a light that illuminates the

understanding and dispels the darkness of ignorance and superstition. Enlightenment thus conceived has two sides. Positively, it entails the empowering discovery of well-founded knowledge; critically, it is a movement of demystification, sceptical towards anything that cannot give an adequate account of itself before the bar of reason or experience.

Consistent with the concept of disenchantment, Enlightenment is a Western process and is therefore of little relevance to our discussion of Islam. The concept of Enlightenment, however, does seem relevant to the thinking of South Africans. The “post-Enlightenment” thinking of South African expatriates therefore includes rational thoughts and action whilst remaining sceptical of any “mystification” which so often comes with religious practices performed by Egyptian colleagues. The researcher, therefore, risks comparing like with unlike even though the process of Enlightenment to the thinking of South African and Egyptian colleagues remains important.

When one considers Muslim societies today, particularly in the Middle-East, the scenario plays out on issues of social security, human rights and gender equality when religious elites manipulate their societies through their interpretation and application of the Quran and the *Sunnah* – particularly in the application of Shari’ah law. In Egypt, the February revolution displayed the society’s dissatisfaction with corrupt and patrimonial elites. However, the question now, as the interim government stands in anticipation of a newly elected leader, is what will the future of Egypt contain? Islamic fundamentalism (Islamism) or, as one might say a re-enchantment of Islamic society, is presenting itself to the people of Egypt as the Muslim brotherhood continues to provide social welfare to the people. As the globe is consolidating modernisation it seems as if the Muslim world is faced with a fork in the road ahead. One route could lead them to a modernised, secular legal-rationalised bureaucracy whereas the other would lead to a religious, Islamist state – in complete contrast to the other.

It is for this reason that I will argue in the following chapters that the realities confronting South African expatriates in relation to their colleagues are primarily fashioned through the political, ideological, religious and economic concepts as explored in the chapters above. I do not contest that a particular cultural Egyptian work ethic may exist outside these realities, as it is rather impossible to separate the cultural sphere from any other, but rather that the Egyptian’s approach towards work is guided and influenced by these four societal realities. The following chapter will present a discussion and analysis of the empirical data collected.

Following which, the primary data will be explored and contextualised with the help of the literature and theory presented in an attempt to draw accurate, relevant and context-specific conclusions.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. Research methodology

The manner in which one approaches any study (both theoretically and methodologically) reflects, to a very high degree, one's personal assumptions and epistemological framework. Notwithstanding social researchers' rigorous application of methodological pre-requisites in attaining objectivity, the "human factor" has to be accommodated. "No science is value-free, for all scientific activity (because it is an activity, a human activity) presupposes some framework of meanings or values in terms of which it is judged meaningful, worthwhile, or useful" (Goddard, 1973:1). This is particularly so when one is involved in cross-cultural research. As a researcher of the social sciences one can aspire towards value-free research, but it is very rare that one's own cultural framework can be superseded. Goddard (1973:12) elaborates on this problem of objectivity:

There is no absolutely 'objective' analysis of culture ... of social phenomena independent of special and 'one-sided' viewpoints according to which – expressly or tacitly, consciously or unconsciously – they are selected, analysed and organized for expository purposes. [Consequently] ... the significance of a configuration of cultural phenomena and the basis of this significance cannot ... be derived and rendered intelligible by a system of analytical laws, however perfect it may be, since the significance of cultural events presupposes a value-orientation to those events. The concept of culture is a value-concept. Empirical reality becomes 'culture' to us because and insofar as we relate it to value ideas. It includes those segments and only those segments of reality which have become significant to us because of this value relevance ... We cannot discover, however, what is meaningful to us by means of a 'presuppositionless' investigation of empirical data. Rather perception of its meaningfulness to us is the presupposition of its becoming an object of investigation.

As such it is imperative to acknowledge these possible cultural biases in attempting to make sense of a cultural (and in this case, religious) framework which is at variance with one's own. I have taken many precautions to avoid cultural bias, but it may be necessary to reflect on possible scenarios where such sources of error may have surfaced.

The following chapter will describe the methodology and methods employed in the completion of the study. Theoretical assumptions and frameworks used, particularly that of Max Weber, will be discussed in some detail with reference to the advantages and limitations present in each. Consequently the operational aspects of the study will follow. Methods

employed in data collection and data analysis will be discussed while concluding on possible sources of error in the execution of the study as well as a methodological reflection. Crucial to the methodological frameworks employed in the study, are the discussions concerning Orientalism and the manner in which studies of the Islamic Orient have been approached (particularly from within the West). I will therefore attempt to situate my own assumptions and position as a researcher within this global debate.

#### **4.1 Theoretical considerations**

The principle strategy of enquiry is qualitative. What guides my epistemological understanding of how expatriates make sense of the cultural experiences is the methodological paradigm in the constructivist and phenomenological philosophical worldview (Crotty, 1998:3-8). Human agency is emphasised in the assumptions captured within these conceptual theories. Answering the research problem requires an understanding of how expatriates view their experiences. I maintain that a constructivist paradigm was thought the most appropriate approach in that it recognises “the important role of the observer and society in constructing the patterns that we study as social scientists” (Moses & Knutsen, 2007:10). As such, the theoretical perspective of interpretivism guides the methodology used by the researcher (Crotty, 1998:3).

A naturalist route would have been unable to address the research questions sufficiently as the “real world” is constructed by the individual experiences and encounters of the individual expatriates. Instead, a philosophical worldview capable of realising this ontological diversity was applied. “Hence, a social actor can in principle select between a range of vocabularies by which he could describe his religious world” (Turner, 1974:52). The assumptions, therefore, gathered within this worldview, call for data collection methods and techniques adept in discerning contexts, idiosyncratic ideas and nuances. The meaning of expatriates’ cultural experiences cannot be discovered as a truth, but are constructed through their “engagement with the realities in their world” (Crotty, 1998:8). Turner (1974:38) emphasises the importance of a phenomenological approach to studying other religious groups:

For phenomenologists, there are no non-Muslim criteria which could be employed to distinguish between different Muslim definitions of reality. Similarly one can expect that Muslims claim different things about Muhammad in different contexts. The data which are produced when Muslims talk to Christians about Islam are presumably different from data which result when Muslims converse with Muslims. While

sociology must take the actor's claims as serious data, it does not have to accept the actor's criteria of truth.

The contextual nature produced by qualitative data is, therefore, suitable in addressing the research objectives. Muller-Doohm (2006) claims the need for philosophical interpretation when following a phenomenological approach:

Adorno had emphasized the idea of 'philosophical interpretation' and rejected the attempt to grasp 'the totality of the real' with the assistance of the sciences or a philosophical system. Instead he proposes an interpretative approach, the point of which is to develop a series of varying models of interpretation and then to integrate these models in 'changing constellations'. The aim of these interpretations, which are to be inspired by 'an exact imagination', is 'to construct keys before which reality springs open'.

Georg Simmel, (as cited in Helle, 2002: 4), was also a constructivist in his methodologies. "To Simmel reality – as all there is to know – is too vast and complex for the human mind to grasp. The only chance humans have, is to create tools for selecting, describing, and placing in context segments of reality that correspond to their interests". Scientific enquiry and scholarship is the creation of these tools. Ideas then, are tools of thought which construct our reality. As the brainchild of men, tools posit ideas. It also gives access to objective truths relating to man. However, Simmel warns that it is naïve to believe that anyone can produce reality without manipulating it in the process (Helle, 2008:15). For Simmel truth or reality, can only be accessed and understood through constructed, heuristic tools (Helle, 2008:6). It is thus my objective to create conceptual tools through which the constructed truths of South African expatriates' cultural experiences can be unlocked. But as Simmel warns, it is through the creation of these tools, that my subjective biases may surface. The conclusion of this chapter will therefore present a reflection on these subjectivities. I will also discuss the possibility of methodological alternatives which might have eliminated such sources of error.

#### ***4.1.1 Max Weber***

According to Max Weber, the social sciences have two primary functions. Firstly, "it seeks to understand the characteristic uniqueness of social reality, the relationships and cultural significance of individual events and phenomena" and secondly, "it seeks to understand the causes of these events 'being historically so and not otherwise,' that is, to explain them" (Goddard, 1973:7). Weber (1992:14) therefore perceives history and the social sciences as two sides of the same coin:

Thus the final and definitive concept cannot stand at the beginning of the investigation, but must come at the end. We must, in other words, work out in the course of the discussion, as its most important result, the best conceptual formulation of what we here understand ... that is the best from the point of view which interests us here. This point of view is further by no means the only possible one from which the historical phenomena we are investigating can be analysed. Other standpoints would, for this as for every historical phenomenon, yield other characteristics as the essential ones. This is a necessary result of the nature of historical concepts which attempt for their methodological purpose not to grasp historical reality in abstract general formulae, but in concrete genetic sets of relations which are inevitably of a specifically unique and individual character.

In the first chapter, as deemed important by Weberian scholars, I presented a brief history of Egypt, its material conditions and Islam. Weber principally used historical trajectories to compare societies' economic development. This enables one to identify the "specifically unique and individual character" of each society's historical reality. As mentioned earlier, following Weber's methodological approach may have been more appropriate in answering the research questions of this thesis. I do, however, remain committed to draw from Weber's additional methodological insights. In this chapter therefore I will continue to three other methodological concepts of Weber: *Verstehen*, Ideal Types and Objectivity.

Max Weber introduced the concept of *Verstehen* which forms the core of the constructivist and phenomenological paradigms. The basic assumption of *Verstehende* sociology places the actor's definition of the situation as a starting point from which all understanding thereafter is based (Turner, 1974:43). *Verstehende* sociology, therefore, does not seek to find truth, but rather the social actor's truth. Critics of Weber have argued that Weber himself often faltered in applying *Verstehende* principles in his own research: "Since Weber fails to hold one consistent position (slipping continuously between interactionism, *Verstehende* sociology and forms of determinism) there can be no authoritative interpretation of Weber which imputes a consistent sociology to Weber" (Turner, 1974:20). Notwithstanding these critiques, the underlying assumptions of Weber's *Verstehen*, remains invaluable to the methodological approaches of phenomenologists. "Three ideas constitute the essence of Weber's contribution to the methodology of the social sciences: firstly, the paradigm of reducibility of sociological concepts to actions of individuals; secondly, the paradigm of ethical neutrality; thirdly, the concept of the ideal type" (Andreski, 1964:2).

Weber's ideal type expresses a theoretical concept through which the researcher can order and analyse knowledge gathered. Farris (2010:279) explains:

Ideal types express Weber's neo-Kantian conception of the relationship between reality and knowledge in which the former is a meaningless infinity in constant change, to which human beings give their own meanings, and the latter is the rigorous, disciplined capacity of the scientist to put some order in this chaos.

Crucial to note when considering ideal types is that they serve as an abstract and conceptual tool in systematising empirical data. It is a tool to "isolate, explain and classify" data (Farris, 2010:272). This means that the idea behind the classification of ideal types is that data "can be analysed solely in terms of the extreme forms of their characteristics, which can never be observed in their purity" (Andreski, 1964:4). I therefore posit South African expatriates as an ideal type displaying a particular work ethic. My respondents, therefore, using their own conceptual tools to express their "truth" conceptualises an Egyptian work ethic as the 'opposing' ideal type. Through *Verstehende* Sociology I therefore capture only my respondents' experiences and accept this as true. Regardless of whether or not their observations are accurate, I attempt to analyse their assumptions underlying these perceptions. My conceptualisation of an Egyptian work ethic as an ideal type is then perhaps false, but I place this impression as an abstraction from which to draw conclusions of South African expatriates.

As previously mentioned, a concern *vis-à-vis* constructivist research is objectivity. This is particularly the case when the researcher is confronted with matters which may "arouse our emotions" (Andreski, 1964:3). The researcher needs to discipline his/her reasoning in order to put forth value-free judgments to produce reliable research so that objectivity (particularly within cross-cultural research) is ensured. Andreski (1964:3) elaborates:

Objectivity, incidentally, can be defined as the freedom of reasoning from the influence of the desires, other than the desire to know the truth. Only in this sense can objectivity be approached, if not attained, for obviously, no reasoning can be independent of the concepts with which it operates, or of the knowledge on the basis of which it proceeds.

Maintaining objectivity, therefore, is hampered with matters which may arouse our emotions, such as religion and normative behaviour. Although I attempted to remain as objective as possible in my analysis, it is very difficult to stand outside one's own cultural schema. My analysis is therefore, unwittingly clouded with ethnocentrism. The concepts on which my

knowledge and reasoning proceed are similar to that of my respondents and I took care to stay objective and independent in my analysis.

Weber's approach in exploring Islamic societies and their material relations would have been a comparative historical study. This, similar to his previous studies, would have been an enormous task with reference to data collection. A primary methodological limitation of Weber's work, as already mentioned, is that Weber very often fails to adhere to his measure of objectivity while forgetting the abstract and theoretical nature of his ideal types.

Notwithstanding the critiques lodged against Weber's theoretical and empirical shortcomings, Blau (1963:305) describes him as one of the founding fathers of sociology owing to his endeavours in the development of social thought as well as his methodological insights *vis-à-vis Verstehende* sociology and objectivity. The author equates Weber's contribution to the discipline with that of authors such as Comte and Spencer due to his attempts to differentiate sociology from the other social sciences. Blau (1963:305) states sociology's significance:

The task he set for sociology is to interpret historical and social occurrences in terms of the prevailing value orientation that give them their meaning without imposing the investigator's value judgment on them. In short, the substantive aim is a value-free study of value complexes in societies. The methodological aim is a generalizing science of historical phenomena and processes.

Although Weber ultimately aimed towards attaining a generalising science, I argue that his historical method does not necessarily permit this. Weber's methodology requires the collection of historical data of specific societies. These facts are therefore very contextual and does not allow for accurate generalisation. The development and trajectories of every society is unique and different and universalising these trends would homogenise and essentialise societies. In the search from the most appropriate methodology it is perhaps worthwhile to ask whether I should consider an "Islamic methodology" and what such a methodology might entail.

#### ***4.1.2. An 'Islamic' methodology***

There is a wide critique among literature of the methodological and epistemological framework used in making sense of the Orient. Some scholars, such as Nakano, argue for a tailored methodology. "The application of a Western model to non-Western societies, without any methodological modification cannot help but lead to the possibility of misunderstanding

and false explanation” (Nakano, 1992:158). Turner (1974:47-48) argues for a phenomenological approach to studying Islamic societies as it reduces the risk of making normative interpretations whilst falling prey to reductionism and essentialism. The question is whether or not a specific approach should be used when studying Islamic societies? To acknowledge that Islamic societies are “different”, and therefore require a particular theoretical approach, is ultimately essentialising Islamic societies. The approach therefore seems two-sided. Any attempt to eradicate possible Eurocentric biases is contradicted by conceding that Islamic societies are so completely divergent from the Western and Euro-American world that using such a theoretical approach would be a significant source of error. Should a tailored methodology be used when studying all religious societies? Does one as a researcher require particular theoretical approaches when studying Jewish or Buddhist societies? Why then a debate singling out Islam? Bracke and Fadil (2008:7) feel that the solution lies in a “universal sociology”:

While Babés acknowledges the Western bias of the social sciences, she rejects a call for a specific approach to Islam. Instead, she insists on the need for scholars to be more self-reflexive, and argues for a critical use of existing concepts and their reformulation and re-articulation in the light of new developments, which could lead to a ‘universal sociology’. Only through comparative work can differences and similarities be distinguished.

The authors argue that regardless of any phenomena observed, if one remains self-reflexive and critical, it might eliminate ‘Western biases’. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said comments on Weber’s inherent Orientalist approach to studying Islam. He says it is “due to historical comparisons between different religions and also to his refinement of the methodological basis of a stereotypical Orientalist discourse by means of the concept of an ideal type” (Farris, 2010:265). Once again Weber is critiqued for forgetting the ‘abstract’ and ‘conceptual’ nature of Islam as an ideal type. Mazrui (2005:70) argues however, that “although he himself was a Christian, Said’s work is often a protest against subsequent Western distortions of Islam”. It seems therefore that critics of Weber seem divided. Farris (2010:269), however, situates Weber’s approach within that of Orientalism:

It has not been remarked, I think, that Weber’s studies of Protestantism, Judaism and Buddhism blew him (perhaps unwittingly) into the very territory originally charted and claimed by the Orientalists. There he found encouragement amongst all those nineteenth-century thinkers who believed that there was a sort of ontological difference between Eastern and Western economic (as well as religious) ‘mentalities’. Although he never thoroughly studied Islam, Weber nevertheless

influenced the field considerably mainly because his notions of type were simply an ‘outside’ confirmation of many of the canonical theses held by Orientalists, whose economic ideas never extended beyond asserting the Oriental’s fundamental incapacity for trade, commerce, and economic rationality.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of the debate between Eastern and Western models of theoretical approaches towards Islam and Islamic societies and the fundamental need towards recognising cultural and societal particularities in cross-cultural research, I find myself in agreement with Babés (Bracke & Fadil, 2008:7) on the importance of a value-free approach towards cross-cultural research. To avoid cultural biases, I argue that the constructivist paradigm in addition to value-free, *Verstehende* Sociology, is the most appropriate.

Although the theoretical paradigms discussed here are vast and much more complex than the extent of this thesis, it is on these theoretical concepts that I would like to measure and weigh my empirical findings. In the case of interpretative research, theoretical assumptions only provide a one-size-fits-all pattern, which should be adjusted and tapered to fit the constructed truths of expatriates’ complex understandings and encounters. As the research problem dictates the choice of design, it is clear that a qualitative study is apt enough to answer the research questions provided. The following section will provide a thorough discussion of all the methods used in the collection of data.

## **4.2. Research Method**

The process of doing social research calls for the acknowledgement of the intricacies of human behaviour and the decision about an appropriate research design cannot be undervalued. There is no single, unsurpassed design, or methodological paradigm, which would safeguard unerring results. Rather the selection of design should be contingent on the research aims and the nature of questions asked as ultimately it is the tools and the correct utilisation of these techniques employed which give rise to valid and plausible results. Bias which “may be thought of as a preference – or a predisposition – to favour a particular conclusion” may creep into every phase of the research process and indubitably influence the outcomes of a study (Jackson, 1995:259).

Techniques of data-gathering associated with qualitative studies are generally known to be interviews, focus groups and direct observation. These methods are consistent with the teachings of symbolic interaction, as it allows for the unearthing of processes and the creation

and construction of social meaning through the direct observation of subjects in their natural contexts (Burgess, 1993:80).

#### ***4.2.1. Data Collection***

The site selected for data collection was Cairo, or more specifically Maadi, a suburb within the greater Cairo. My key informant was my father, who is an expatriate working in Cairo. I spent five weeks in Cairo conducting the fieldwork. A significant number of South African expatriates have settled in Egypt, but since the specific statistics are unknown (as data was unavailable from the South African embassy for probability sampling) snowball sampling was used instead. Another reason for this choice of sampling was that clear social networks exist between expatriates which enabled the selection process. This process compensated for the lack of official data normally used to construct a sampling frame to select a random sample. A key respondent (who ran a website for South African expatriates in Egypt) identified various potential respondents. I therefore interviewed as many South African expatriates who were willing and able to speak to me. I did not particularly select any respondents as I did not look for any particular characteristics.

I frequented “pubs” which were popular amongst non-nationals. I also attended as many social functions which were aimed at expatriates living in Maadi. The majority of my observations were taken at these sites. Important to mention is that I did not solely observe South African expatriates at these sites. Having observed non-South African (primarily American and British) expatriates gave me the opportunity to substantiate my data. Thorough field notes were taken during these observations. These field notes were coded and analysed along with the transcribed interviews. I also took the opportunity at these social gatherings to establish informal ‘focus groups’. Field notes were not taken, but these conversations added depth towards my understanding of an expatriate’s experiences in Cairo. Included in my sample are three Egyptian respondents. As mentioned in previous sections, interviewing Egyptian nationals proved very difficult. The language barrier was significant as well as my position as an ‘outsider’. It was very difficult to establish good rapport with my Egyptian respondents firstly, given the ‘insider’ character of Egyptian culture, and secondly my status as infidel.

During my fieldwork in Cairo (especially through the month of Ramadan) I experienced first-hand some of the frustrations mentioned during the interviews. Many of my respondents

commented on the hampering effect that Ramadan has on Egyptian society during the summer, in that during that time, Egypt almost comes to a complete standstill. This experience significantly influenced my understanding of data collected. The primary source of data collection that I used was comprehensive, semi-structured interviews.

#### **4.2.1.1 Interviewing**

The primary techniques employed in data collection were that of semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one to two hours each. All the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Overall, formal interviews were conducted in addition to personal conversations which added depth and nuances to data. Vital to the process of data collection, through interviewing, is the manner in which interviewees “reconstruct events or aspects of social experience; interpersonal dynamics and cultural meanings of participants in their social worlds as well as how interviewees make their own sense of what has been said” (Heyl, 2001:370-372; Seidman, 1998:3). These personal reconstructions form the groundwork on which their account, and ultimately my representation, of an Egyptian work ethic are built.

All the interviewees were briefed prior to the interview pertaining to the topic of the conversation. Their concerns relating to anonymity, confidentiality and right to refusal were explained. Contrary to structured interviews, as used in survey designs where the researcher controls and manipulates the situation through a list of structured questions, the respondent has to “consider, rephrase, re-order, discuss and analyse” (Burgess, 1984:101). Semi-structured interviews, as a particular form of interviewing, is appropriate when one usually only has a single opportunity available to interviewing, as was the case (Bernard, 1995:209). Interviews which are conversational of nature are of greater worth than those of a structured character concerning the rich and detailed data resulting from such a “conversation with a purpose” (Burgess, 1984:102; Marshall & Rossman, 2006:101). I tried to keep the interviews as conversational and natural as possible. By doing this I attempted to keep the respondents comfortable. This approach arguably eliminated certain sources of error, as will be discussed in the following section.

Ferdinand Zweig considers the researcher a friend and confidant to the respondent, engaged in a conversation typified by interest, understanding and sympathy (Burgess, 1984:103). Zweig emphasises that such an approach to interviewing cannot flourish without an adequate and comprehensive, often theoretical, knowledge and understanding of the issue at hand. Preparation of this nature ensures the formulating of sensible questions encouraging

respondents' participation (Burgess, 1984:103). I tried to acquaint myself thoroughly with matters prior to the data collection stage. This enabled the flow of a reciprocal conversation between me and the respondents.

Holstein and Grubruim (cited in Heyl, 2001:374) argue that it is of vital importance to acquire background knowledge on the topic of research as well as “material, cultural and interpretive circumstances to which the respondent might orient” prior to the interview. Prior to the data collection stage, a well-researched interview guide was drafted. Selected themes used to steer, but not dictate, the conversations. The interview guide serves as an *aide mèmóire* producing the agenda for topics to be covered by the interview. This also ensures that comparable subjects are covered during the interview and ensures consistency across interviews (Burgess, 1984:106). Questions included in the interview schedule are some of the following:

1. Did your company involve you or provide you in any cultural training before expatriation?
2. Did they provide you with any information regarding your host country and host culture prior to your expatriation?
3. Tell me about the organisational culture of your employer?
  - a) culture; b) employees; c) conflict in the workplace
  - b) What is the nationality of your organisation and most of your co-workers?
4. How would you describe the work ethic of your workplace and co-workers?
  - a) Do you ever feel that their work ethic clashes with yours?
5. Do you ever experience communication gaps or language barriers to be a problem in the workplace?

The interview schedule is attached as appendix A.

Generally, all the important themes were covered during the interviews. The length of interviews varied depending on the respondent. I seldom had to steer the conversations back to the topic as most of the respondents engaged very well with the questions and topic at hand. For the most part I obtained information very easily as my respondents really seemed eager to share their experiences and opinions with me. I seldom felt that respondents were hesitant to make opinionated statements. The most difficult interviews were with my Egyptian respondents, firstly due to the language barrier, and secondly, due to the nature of the topic. I had great difficulty introducing the aim of the study to these respondents. Subsequently, the data collected from Egyptian nationals were not included in the analysis.

#### 4.2.1.2. Selection of cases and profile of respondents

Respondents included South Africans working and living in Cairo and they represented both expatriates and consultants bound by annual contracts. The majority of my sample worked in the oil and gas industry as many transnational companies have relocated to Egypt. Teachers also constituted a significant portion of my sample. The gender make-up of my sample was acceptable as approximately half of my respondents were male. The typical profile of a respondent was that of a white, middle-aged male either divorced or remarried. Only one black woman was interviewed as South African blacks are mostly absent from the profile of South African expatriates living in Egypt. In my observations I did not encounter any Indian or Coloured South Africans.

Of respondents interviewed, approximately half were English-speaking and the other half Afrikaans-speaking. It is perhaps worthwhile to acknowledge the language divide in the analysis of results, primarily because of the significant relationship between Afrikaners, the Protestant ethic and Calvinist principles. However, given, the nature of the research method, I was unable to control for such variables, but it nonetheless remains necessary to acknowledge this in the analysis. I did not control for the variable of religion, and therefore only know the religious affiliation of those respondents who volunteered the information. My sample size was not determined before going into the field. Due to my sampling method, I was dependent on the social networks among my respondents to gain informants. Data collection was ceased when I felt that research saturation was reached. I identified this stage when I received very similar information from the majority of my respondents. I determined that a bigger sample size would have provided duplicate results and therefore finalized my sample size of 25. Table 1 provides a breakdown of my sample:

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Profile of Respondents	<u>Sex:</u>		<u>Age (years):</u>		<u>Language:</u>		<u>Race:</u>		<u>Industry</u>	
	Male	12	<19	0	Afrikaans	12	White	24	Oil & Gas	7
	Female	13	19-30	2	English	13	Black	1	Education	5
			31-45	5	Other	0	Coloured	0	Hospitality	2
			45<	18			Indian	0	Other	11
<b><u>Total</u></b>		<b>25</b>		<b>25</b>		<b>25</b>		<b>25</b>		<b>25</b>

The absence of any Black, Indian or Coloured respondents in my sample is significant. I did not have any encounters with non-white South African expatriates during my stay in Cairo. A possible reason for the absence of non-whites in Cairo as expatriates may be the implementation of Black Economic Empowerment in South Africa. The uncertainty in the workplace (for Whites) arguably serves as a push factor in the emigration of white South Africans. The absence of a non-white voice in my data introduces a bias. This becomes clear when respondents display opinions and ideas about an Egyptian work ethic which is very similar to a description of a 'Black' work ethic in South Africa. Descriptions such as "being unable to think out of the box; lack of initiative and inability to plan ahead" seemingly resonate with white South African's perceptions about their Black colleague work ethos.

This similarity might be explained by the following two reasons: Firstly, this similarity may point to a general ethnocentrism among white South Africans. Secondly, it might be plausible that a certain work ethic is associated with class and levels of education. Blacks in South Africa received, pre-1994, Bantu education which was of a lower standard than that given to Whites. Poor education may therefore serve as a possible explanation for such comparable constructions. Thirdly, and this is discussed in the findings chapter (see page 106) a similar (arguably poor) work ethic may be found amongst blue collar workers all around the world due to job dissatisfaction, bad working conditions or insufficient pay. It remains, however, important to state that as possible source of error be attributed to the demographic similarity of my respondents. This may therefore also account for the similarity of responses received across the board.

#### ***4.2.2 Data Analysis***

The following section is a brief description of how the data collected, was analysed. There are a multitude of qualitative data analysis techniques to choose from (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008:587). All the interviews recorded were transcribed. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008:287) propose a typical analysis of qualitative data:

1. Familiarisation and indexing, i.e. the investigator immerses herself in reading and re-reading the transcripts
2. Identifying themes related to the theoretical and conceptual framework, i.e. using her understanding of the theory, the investigator assesses participants' answers to research questions posed as primary, qualitative data
3. Selecting passages, i.e. the investigator excerpts the passages that highlight the themes gleaned from each interview

4. Case write-up, i.e. the investigator drafts a written summary of her conceptualisation that includes passages from the transcript (Henry *et al.*, 2009:4).

I analysed my data, using these recommendations provided above. Important and recurrent themes were therefore selected from the data collected and literature reviewed. The data was subsequently coded using Atlas TI into the various relevant themes selected. As mentioned earlier, data collected from Egyptian nationals were not analysed. The themes selected were: *IBM* philosophy; a description of an Egyptian work ethic; emotion and emotional intelligence; trust and professional relationships; fear; asceticism; status, class and hierarchy; time and money; and education. These themes will therefore guide the discussion of the results in the next chapter.

### **4.3. Ethical considerations and sources of error**

The research topic of this thesis is not particularly sensitive of nature, and I was therefore not confronted with significant ethical considerations. Participation was absolutely voluntary, confidentiality was guaranteed and no “harm” was done to any respondents. There is, however, a chance that data gathered may include negative references to either expatriates’ workplaces or co-workers. All respondents were treated with respect and their integrity was upheld at all times. Formal consent was obtained from participants before fieldwork commenced and all participants were briefed prior to participation regarding the purpose and aims of the study as well as what was expected of them as participants.

I did not foresee problems with respondents’ reactions to content, other than those potential errors associated with interviewing as a data collection technique in general. Confidentiality was maintained at all costs and communicated clearly to all participants. Social desirability bias may, however, surface due to an unwillingness to acculturate (perhaps due to prejudice and stereotyping) especially if participants were reluctant to reveal any prejudices. Respondents might also have been hesitant to reveal the truth (if it was perhaps too negative) at the risk of placing themselves in a negative light. A possible source of error associated with qualitative data analysis is that of interpretive bias. As the researcher I run the risk of highlighting or presenting certain words or phrases to support my argument. I tried to control for such errors through continuous self-reflection and reference to the relevant literature. It is important that I continuously assess and identify my own assumptions and values throughout the research process to ensure all possible objectivity.

Observation as a qualitative technique holds boundless advantages, but there are particular sources of error associated with this method. The researcher as the main instrument in data gathering poses certain challenges. Newman and Benz (1998:57) maintain that subjects may be less willing – from a fear of feeling ashamed – to disclose information of sensitive nature to an interviewer during a conversation. Another threat to validity is that the perceptions of the observer are not always accurate, which could introduce bias (Newman & Benz, 1998:58). As the time of exposure of the researcher to its participants increases, so does the likelihood that the observer “becomes increasingly blinded to the peculiarities he is supposed to observe” (Newman & Benz, 1998:59). As a researcher I took notice of these possible sources of bias and through reflexivity I aimed to control for them. Participants did not come forth as hesitant to be truthful and I do not believe that the above mentioned biases affect the quality of the data collected.

Another weakness of qualitative research is that subjects may alter their behaviour as they are aware of being observed and studied. Significant sources of error can also be introduced through interviews and observations *vis-à-vis* the observer’s expectations and on-stage effects by participants. The researcher’s anticipations may have influenced the questions asked as well as that which was reported and deemed significant i.e. selective perception. Personal characteristics, orientations, the affiliations of and the image of the researcher may also serve as possible effects introducing error (Mouton, 1990:81). Role selection by the participant, i.e. the perception of his or her role in the research setting as well as the level of motivation by the participant will also affect outcomes. Considering my position as an ‘insider’ and given my non-threatening position as a student, I do not believe that my participants reacted in the abovementioned manners. Although it seems improbably that these sources of error were eliminated completely, I maintain that the quality of my data received was not compromised.

The researcher noted that while respondents allowed the use of a tape recorder, the recording of interviews might have prevented many from opening up. This became apparent when the tape recorder was switched off and additional and more frank data was gathered as the conversation continued, “off the record”. It seems therefore, that many respondents were hesitant to reveal their true feelings “on tape” and it should be conceded that this method might have its disadvantages as a possible source of error.

The following section, as a reflection on the research process, will discuss my personal experiences and realisations as well as a deliberation of alternative approaches.

#### 4.4. Methodological reflection

None of the cultural traits inferred from the collected empirical data are objective, but rather subjective. The Egyptian work ethic, as is described in this thesis, is particularly subjective as it is a description of a work ethic as perceived by South African expatriates. These are not cultural facts, but rather subjective ideas. The reason why an Egyptian work ethic is explored from the view of South African expatriates is twofold. Firstly, going into the field, my research question only focused on the cultural experiences of South African expatriates living and working in Egypt. It was, however, later in the interviews that tensions experienced in the workplace became the topic of inquiry of the research study. Secondly, an investigation of how South African expatriates perceive and experience their Egyptian colleagues in the workplace gives us some idea of whether misconceptions and apathy towards understanding their host culture, exists. This might then be placed in the broader discourse on Orientalism and the tensions between the Islamic East and Euro-American West. The empirical evidence given, therefore, is not a true representation of an Egyptian work ethic, but rather one constructed in comparison with an ethic “employed” by South African expatriates.

It is crucial to recognise the Foucauldian notion of knowledge and power when considering the empirical data. “Weber, like Said, does not deny the political nature of knowledge” (Farris, 2010:272). Ultimately, the perceptions by South African expatriates will convey a latent (or manifest) conception of power between themselves and Egyptian society insofar as they would measure Egyptian corporate conduct against their own and that which they find suitable and “normal”. Once again, I succumbed to theoretical and perhaps Orientalist biases inasmuch as South African expatriates were allowed to speak for Egyptians rather than letting Egyptians construct their own work ethic. This approach falls into Said’s trap of having those in the Arab Orient “represented” rather than letting them “represent themselves” (Farris, 2010:274).

It is perhaps also worth describing exactly how the research question came into form. This might also explain, to some extent, why I could not control for Orientalist biases in the data collection stage. Prior to entering the field, I formulated the purpose of the study and the prospective research questions. Originally, I wanted to explore the level of cultural immersion of South African expatriates in Egypt. I was inspired by an article written by Edward Said, on Theodor Adorno and his purposeful retreat to the margins of society. I wanted to explore whether there was a (un)willingness, on the part of South African expatriates, to immerse themselves into their host country and culture or whether they were

content to live on the cultural and societal margins. I wanted to explore what strategies were used and what challenges were met in these processes. I also wanted to establish whether Egyptian society was accepting of foreigners into their society. When I entered the field, however, I realised that most expatriates lived in Maadi, which as a very cosmopolitan society, is far removed from Egyptian culture. Expatriates in Maadi therefore have no need to immerse themselves (like to learn the language) due to the fact that they don't need to. Maadi was built by and for foreigners. I therefore had to change my research question in the field. Through my interactions with South Africans I realised that their experiences in the workplace, and their Egyptian colleagues approach towards work, was of great concern to them. It is for this reason that I continued to study South African expatriates rather than their Egyptian colleagues.

Cultural studies are also an infinite labyrinth in which finding absolute truths are nearly impossible. It is, therefore, fundamental to acknowledge the danger zones when approaching a comprehension of cultural and religious elements. Goddard (1973:10) explains the complexity of cultural data:

Weber thought that since cultural reality was infinite, knowledge (as a system of concepts) could never be exhaustive or aspire to be a copy of reality. A true picture of reality (in the sense of totality) is not possible. The relation of concepts to reality is therefore a selective one. They select from the mass of cultural data those elements that are significant from the standpoint of the problem in hand.

Whilst living in Cairo and throughout the research process, I felt confronted with too many questions and too few answers and it may be relevant to elaborate on this in a methodological reflection. Social theory suggests that one's thinking about culture and religion invariably dupes one. We might think we are acting out of free will, but ultimately our internalisation of cultural, including religious norms, make it impossible to escape these mental and often emotional frameworks. Cultural phenomena coerce us to think in a particular manner without our objective consent, à la Bourdieu. I found the power of culture tremendously strong and it instigated a reflection of my own cultural assumptions. Without it surfacing, I tend to conceptualise my experiences in Egypt along my own cultural frameworks while studying how and why my peers acted in a certain manner. I, therefore, had to continuously reflect on how one can make sense of a cultural society different to one's own.

I experienced Egypt to be a very sad, perhaps despondent, society without the comforts of a society she was used to. It was then that the researcher realised that one made sense of an unfamiliar society along one's own standards and conceptions of a healthy society. In that one often agrees with responses gathered in the interviews only to later realise, upon reflection, that one's objectivity was absent. It was only a few months later at an Afrikaans music festival that I realised the power of objectively looking at one's own culture and the realisations that accompany this activity. Notwithstanding the theoretically and scholarly importance placed on these elements (such as objectivity and cultural relativity), it is only in the field (I argue) and through personal reflection that one comes to realise the importance of these methodological concerns.

Despite the fact that one, as a social scientist, attempts to reach a position of complete objectivity and value-free research, I believe that one's culture is a strong bond of mutual understanding when confronted with an "other", and that pure methodological objectivity might only have been gained if the study had been outside my own cultural group. Perhaps the lesson learnt (and this I claim as my argument) is that one finds it very difficult to empathise with those one does not understand. It is only now, after months of reading and reflecting, that I am closer to an understanding (or what I might assume to be accurate and sufficient) of Egyptian society and Islam as a religion. It is therefore here – as reiterated in the last chapter of this thesis – where cross-cultural dialogue and understanding have to be embraced in order to clear misapprehensions and cultivate understanding (and ultimately empathy) in order to better our global society by blurring cultural and ideological fault lines.

If I consider methodological alternatives, I might consider certain methods and techniques that might have worked just as effectively, if not more. Participant observation research might have been an appropriate research design. As someone working in Egypt it might have been a valuable experience to gain insight and observe expatriates in their working environments. I also might have considered asking participants to keep daily journals, to record accurately the day's triumphs and frustrations. Such an approach would have presented a significant body of data. Following a Weberian approach, I could have considered a comparative historical approach in comparing historical documents and statistical information. Given that this is a Master's thesis and the scope and resources are limited, I believe that such an approach might be more appropriate for a study on a PhD level. Notwithstanding the success that these methods may have yielded, I believe that as a social

researcher I have grown personally and professionally in my endeavours to research the experiences of South African expatriates. I hope that other researchers will take an interest in this topic, learn from my mistakes, and explore the topic further.

The following chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the empirical data collected and deliberates the theoretical, methodological and empirical frameworks outlined in the previous chapters.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5. Results and discussion

This chapter discusses and analyses the empirical data collected. It begins with the presentation of data along selected themes which proved to be most relevant in answering the research questions. These themes include IBM philosophy, emotions in the workplace, religion, status and social distance, trust in the workplace and so forth. Consequently, a discussion and interpretation of these results will be given incorporating the literature and theory previously presented.

#### 5.1. Results

The empirical data will be analysed along the selected themes. This requires a thorough engagement with the transcribed material. These themes, however, are not always mutually exclusive as many elements overlap. Therefore the comments selected do not cover all the respondents interviewed due to the duplication of the material. Discussions, following several of the quotations used, highlight how Egyptian society is constructed as is lived and observed by South African expatriates. The aim is that through these quotes one can ascertain the experiences of South Africans in Egypt and therefore their construction of an Egyptian work ethic.

##### 5.1.1. IBM philosophy

In the literature review, presented in Chapter two, I explored the notion of the *IBM* philosophy. For many scholars, such as Rice, the *IBM* philosophy adequately explains an Arab work ethic. Drawing from cultural, including religious notions, the common sayings cause much frustration for the South African expatriates, primarily because there is a need for certainty in the workplace. *Inshallah*, as a religious term of the *IBM* philosophy, is thought to be a cultural, rather than specifically religious, practice by many respondents. From the literature we learn that Westerners perceive the use of the term *Inshallah* as abdicating responsibility or just telling the employer what he or she wants to hear. The following quotes demonstrate the general “Western” (mis)perspective:

*“Over here; it is Inshallah, Bokra, Malesh, because whenever you ask something, they’re going to say, ‘it’s God-willing ... it is fine’. They’ll tell you, ‘everything will happen*

*tomorrow, ' – that just means, it won't happen today. 'It's bokra, everything will be okay' – but it never is.*" – V

*"Môre is nog 'n dag: as ons nie klaar maak nie, kom ons weer môre. Dit het niks met geloof te doen nie. Dis meer 'n kultuur ding."*<sup>20</sup> – T

Looking at V's quote above, it is clear that he attaches a negative connotation to the use of the *IBM* philosophy. Clearly, pivotal to the understanding of *Inshallah* by expatriates, is that it "excuses" the user from any responsibility. This points to the arguably fatalistic nature of Egyptians' approach towards work and achievement. This fatalism, in the Egyptian work ethic causes great frustration to South African expatriates since the Protestant ethic leaves little to "chance" and values hard work and commitment. What we learn from the literature however, is that the use of *Inshallah* does not necessarily imply fatalism, but that it is a cultural use socialised from a very young age.

*"Their whole thing is that 'if they die they go to a better place'. They bring their religion into their everyday life. And everything they do is God-willing. So they don't have to ... because God wills it so it's a very poor work ethic."* – V

The above statement equates the Egyptian religious view, *vis-à-vis* Allah's responsibility to provide for his followers, to that of having a poor work ethic: Whether this disregards Islamic beliefs or is perhaps a misunderstanding of these beliefs or not, the result is a perception of a lack of willingness to work. Notwithstanding the relevance to *Inshallah* in the workplace, i.e. if something is incomplete it suits the will of Allah, the "fatalistic" nature of Egyptians' beliefs reaches outside the office building. The following three extracts taken from the urban ethnography *Taxi*, highlights this mind-set among Egyptians when three taxi drivers comment:

*"...and set up all the elements for Him to provide me with this money. Because it's not your earnings and the money's not yours – it's all God's. That's the only thing I have learnt in my life"* (Al Khamissi, 2007:17); *"You feel they're [the government] making a big effort to ruin us and our families ... What they don't know is that they won't be able to do it, because Our Lord is the one who provides livelihoods. He is the Provider and there is no Provider other than Him."* (Al Khamissi, 2007:147); *"What I earn comes from our Lord and*

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<sup>20</sup> Tomorrow is another day. If we don't finish today then we'll come again tomorrow. It has nothing to do with religion: it's a cultural thing.

*you [the client] are merely a conduit ... It's God who provides. A driver shouldn't state his price. That way he leaves it to Our Lord."* (Al Khamissi, 2007:156)

The role of Allah as the provider is much emphasised to the frustration of South African expatriates who view work as an end in itself and as an action based on free will.

*"Time is not that important, because everything revolves around God's will. The way that they see it, things happen based on God's will. [There is] no control over your environment. When you say to them, 'I'll see you tomorrow for coffee', they always say, 'Inshallah', because maybe something will come up and they won't make it in time – God's will. And that's how they live their lives. But it also means they don't take responsibility for things. On the one hand it's lovely, when tragedy hits or somebody dies or something happens, they have a wonderful way of coping, God's will, that's how they deal with it. On the other [hand] it's really frustrating, because we don't believe in that [in the workplace where] you can control time [and] be responsible and that's why for them time doesn't matter."* – C

C, in the above statement, considers the effect of *Inshallah* on the notion of time and timeliness. Although she acknowledges the cultural relevance, and perhaps uniqueness, of this uttering, she concedes that it causes much frustration in the workplace. There is a willingness on her side to acknowledge and respect her Egyptian colleagues' beliefs, although she recognises its presence in the workplace as a hindrance to productivity and "getting things done". She also equates leaving things to God's will as "not having control over your environment" rather than giving her colleagues the benefit of the doubt for believing that Allah will provide and choosing to place their trust in Allah. What is important to highlight is the manner in which she distinguishes herself from her colleagues by stating "we don't believe in that". It is, however, uncertain if she refers to expatriates, South African expatriates or Christians, but it is important to emphasise the distance created between herself and her colleagues.

### **5.1.2. Education**

Among the majority of respondents, the importance of education was mentioned when considering Egyptian's approach towards work. Each respondent felt compelled to distinguish between educated Egyptians (particularly those educated outside of Egypt) and those who have received little, or worse, public education. Many respondents blamed the

Egyptian government and its education system for producing the “narrow-mindedness” of an Egyptian’s approach towards work.

*“Education makes a big difference ... The education system here is not that good and you can see the difference in the people, a slight difference, but there is a difference between people who have been educated in the international schools. They are just a little bit better adapted.” – B*

*“These are language schools; they just call themselves international schools and they charge a fortune ... Because education is so important to people ... Because the state education is bad, people will pay and they think they’re getting a good deal, but they’re not really. It’s money-making – all private schools. It’s just a business – not really education. That’s a problem.” – M*

One of the main arguments of this thesis, inasmuch as Egyptian social and political realities influence their approach towards work, is illustrated by many expatriates highlighting the fact that colleagues educated by the Egyptian school system did not have sufficient levels of training for the workplace. What is important to point out, though, is that educated and hardworking Egyptians proved to display an opposite work attitude to the *IBM* philosophy of the “locals” and proved competitive in the workplace. Respondents were thus divided on this issue as some felt that the Egyptian ethic as a whole was very poor, whereas others acknowledged the potential in well-educated Egyptians.

*“It is quite unfortunate, because it is a stereotype, because I have worked with some Egyptians and they were fantastic. It all depends where they get educated. So if they have a university education, fantastic! They’re wonderful, they work like you. They’re efficient; understand the concept of time management. If you work with those who are not well educated, it’s really challenging.” – C*

*“There are, again ... good ones, but I think that there’s a wide scope here. Most of the people are uneducated. That is one of the main problems in all the underdeveloped countries where education is absent. So the few people who are educated, you know like the ones in the office, work ethics is uh... [On the other hand] it’s amazing to see some people being able, being capable of doing nothing for the whole year for many years, to do just nothing. He doesn’t get any jobs, he didn’t ask for any, he just complains. He comes to the office or he doesn’t even come and nobody cares. That’s the exception. There are people who just sit in front of their screen and wait until the day is over.” – A*

It is therefore important to note that there is an acknowledgement on the part of South African expatriates that factors beyond the control of their Egyptian colleagues influence their performance in the workplace.

### 5.1.3 Time and money

Among all respondents, the matter of time was identified as a major source of frustration. Many respondents claimed that Egyptians have no sense of time, whereas others equated timeliness with the availability of money.

*“Tyd bestaan nie...”<sup>21</sup> – I*

*“When I started working here I was very shocked at how the manager ran the company, it was very harsh. Everybody had to be at the office at 9 o’clock. One minute late, money would be taken off your salary. In the beginning it was harsh, no one in South Africa worked like that, but here that is what you have to do. And everybody was on time, so they can do it. When there is money out of your pocket, you can be on time. There has to be an incentive to be on time, you know...” – C*

*“They don’t bother to abide by deadlines.” – M*

*“Sy’s nooit betyds nie, maar sodra jy praat van geld is sy altyd betyds.”<sup>22</sup> – I*

*“Everything is complicated, they complicate everything, just because I think they don’t want to work ... they’re prepared to work overtime, they work hard. If you’re going to pay they’ll work hard ... they’re great! They’re like little ants sometimes that never stop, if the money is there ... Like I said; it’s transactional. I’ve had workers who work 12 hours and the job’s not done, and I say, ‘Okay, I’ll pay you this much if you continue to 16 hours’ and they say, ‘Sure’. No fighting, no nothing...” – B*

Feghali, (1997:366-368) as stated earlier, classify time in the Arab region as polychronic with social interaction guiding behaviour rather than schedules, clocks and calendars. It is clear that this approach towards time management (or lack thereof) causes great frustration on the part of South African expatriates. Money, however, changes the behaviour. This is interesting as it points to a socio-economic reality shaping the lives of Egyptians. The fact that financial remuneration can persuade someone to be on time refers to a need among

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<sup>21</sup> Time doesn’t exist.

<sup>22</sup> She’s never on time, but as soon as you mention money, she’s always on time.

Egyptians to generate more income – either because their income is low and insufficient or because it is an easy manner in which to make more money.

*“The ones that live there are very frustrated because the salaries are very low and the jobs are very bad.” – C*

*“She said she just wants to get out of Egypt, because there are no job opportunities here, [and] her salary is very bad.” – C*

The present state of Egypt has seen its people suffer financially and the local colleagues of most expatriates earn substantially less than they do. The centrality of “money” in these “transactional relationships” is crucial. This may also be the origin of the perception of Egyptians as wheelers and dealers:

*“The taxis will try and rip you off.” – A & B*

*“Despite how nice they are, it’s transactional. They’ll never ask for anything, but they’ll stop doing what they’re doing, and that drives me crazy! If someone is friendly with you, it’s because they want a tip. Like my previous landlord; fantastic, until we told him we are moving out, and then it was like World War Three. And they make up rules as they go along. Our landlord became an asshole.” – A & B*

*“It’s no fun unless you’re negotiating a discount. Egyptians love it; they thrive on a discount. I mean when I used to go to a meeting, I’d sit down and you never discuss business initially, you’d have a chat and then a cup of tea and once you’ve had your tea, then you discuss business and then it’s always a case about, ‘meet me half way’ - ‘If I give you this then you give me that’, you know ...? It’s always about getting a discount. It’s not a malicious thing, and it’s not done to rip you off; it’s the Egyptian way: they do business and it’s always about discounts and negotiations ... and it’s just their culture. It’s a cultural thing.” – C*

*“If they could cheat somebody and get away with it, they would do it immediately.” – G*

*“Everybody is trying to make a quick buck here and there. It’s because they pay people such bad salaries, you know? If you pay people bad salaries, you encourage that sort of thing to happen. That’s why the police are so corrupt; the police in South Africa are the same. You have a workforce that is not properly educated, they’re paid peanuts ... you are going to get corruption. As long as the police force is corrupt, you’re never going to get a crime-free society. It’s a big problem here – corruption.” – C*

The above statements communicate South African expatriates' perception of Egyptians as tricksters trying to "make a quick buck here and there". The presence of corruption within the workplace is another concern for them. The quote by C acknowledges the rationale behind "cheating" and corruption by admitting that many Egyptians live far beyond their means due to low salaries. She admits that the situation is not much different in South Africa, but that it creates frustration in the workplace nonetheless. Acknowledging the relevance of the socio-economic realities of many Egyptians, C also recognises negotiation as a cultural phenomenon with no malicious intent.

#### 5.1.4. Emotion and emotional intelligence

A fascinating and important concept which all respondents underscored was the issue of emotion and the idea of emotional intelligence in the workplace. For many respondents the following idea caused great frustration among expatriates and was seen to be the one distinguishing factor between themselves and their Egyptian colleagues.

*"They get quite embarrassed ... they're very sensitive to being embarrassed; very sensitive..."* – B & A

*"Another thing is the Egyptians are very emotional people to such an extent that it makes them immature. I have such good managers and then the moment there's a problem then they just go berserk. I can't tell you how many times I've had to ... knock on an Egyptian's door and tell them, 'Listen, I'm on the phone and I can't hear over your shouting!' ... they can't control their emotions... and sometimes when they're just talking, you think they're shouting at each other in the streets. They're not; they're just having a conversation. So it's limiting I think, it limits a lot of them..."* – B

*"Emotional intelligence...? There is none."* – A1

*"...her husband has been trying for the last six years to find someone to replace him, because he wants to come back to South Africa, and he just said it's impossible to find someone with ... not the mentality, but the emotional skills."* – R

*"The emotional maturity is very low here. I've discovered that their emotional intelligence is ... because the Egyptians are so protected; you don't leave home until you get married, and that's their general rule. So you're protected by your parents until the day you get married and then once you're married, you're in a relationship. So they never learn to grow-up, to be independent and to think for themselves, and that makes them very young emotionally. Even in relationships they are just very immature, incredibly immature! Somebody in their twenties would have the emotional maturity of an [eighteen-year-old] ... I*

*think it's a big disadvantage that they never get a chance to live by themselves to make their own decisions and think for themselves and constantly ... [being] told by everybody that this is how you should do things."* – C

*"They are extremely confrontational [and] very emotional people, so a lot of the decisions they make are emotionally driven. That's why all over the Arab world you have to be so careful about upsetting them ... they react to things very emotionally, and they are very passionate about things, [and] because of that you have to be very careful about how you deal with them [as] they get very easily hurt; very easily. When you're dealing with them on a work level it's one thing, but on a personal level you can really hurt their feelings. I've seen them cry, I've seen grown men cry, because if you accuse them of being a thief or a bad person, they get very upset. So you have to be very respectful of their feelings ... it's weird ... When it comes to somebody that works for you, not [so much] someone you work for, but someone that works for you, you have to be very sensitive..."* – C

*"Don't hurt their little hearts. They're like children. These adults will go sit in a corner and cry very easily. They're not tough. I mean toughness in a sense of emotional maturity. They just fall apart and they break into little pieces very quickly. I learnt that the hard way."* – G

For many in the workplace, this emotional immaturity is a great concern. Not only does it translate into incompetence in the workplace, but it makes it extremely difficult for foreign managers to know how to cross the cultural divide. C attributes this emotional immaturity to the way in which Egyptians are raised and protected by their families and communities. She states that if Egyptians were raised more independently and socialised “normally” (as one would socialise children in a western context) it would automatically translate into higher emotional intelligence. While I argue that this socio-cultural reality leading to an underdevelopment of emotional maturity within Egyptian culture greatly influences the Egyptian work ethic, it is also important to note that Egyptians are perceived as emotionally immature in comparison to how South African expatriates perceive themselves with the “correct” and “sufficient” levels of emotional intelligence.

It is therefore important to highlight that although extremely relevant to the study, the perception of emotional maturity by South African expatriates is purely subjective regardless of the fact that ideas and perceptions about Egyptian emotional maturity were similar across responses. Also, as explained previously, a display of emotion of Egyptians is not considered to be a “loss of control” as is often the perception among “westerners”. Emotional outbursts therefore, for Egyptians, are therefore not perceived to be inappropriate.

*“When you have two Egyptians having a normal conversation, they scream at each other ... and that’s their normal way ... but they won’t accept it from our culture. If you have arguments and raise your voice, you’re speaking badly to them. It’s not acceptable. They do it amongst themselves.” – V*

*“It’s also very surprising, because they’re so aggressive. They can really shout and scream, but they get so hurt, so easily.” – C*

The abovementioned quotes by V and C illustrate the “ritual pantomime of *dowshah*”. Although this “performance” is central to Egyptian culture, South African expatriates display little knowledge about this cultural phenomenon and perceive it to be a lack of emotional maturity. There is also unwillingness amongst Egyptians to let foreigners take part in their cultural “pantomime” and reserves this ritual for members of their cultural group. V’s statement also highlights the difference between what is acceptable behaviour from Egyptians in contrast to acceptable behaviour from foreigners. This indicates the cultural and social distance created by Egyptians towards accepting foreigners.

#### **5.1.4.1. Fear**

Extremely important in our discussion of an Egyptian work ethic is the concept of fear. Feghali (1997:366-368) states that decision-making is often delayed or extended for fear of making the wrong decision. Responses among South African expatriates reiterate the centrality of fear in Egyptian colleagues’ behaviour in the workplace:

*“They live in fear.” – M*

*“Vrees vir die gevolge; vrees vir die verlies van inkomste, verseker. Ek dink oor die algemeen want hulle salarisse is skokkend en die werk is nie veel nie. So hulle will asseblief nie hul werk verloor nie en daar’s geen wette hier om hulle te beskerm nie. Geen, geen! Jy kan iemand nou in diens neem en dan môre fire. Ek sien hulle doen dit as hulle nie tevrede is met hulle diens nie. Daar’s niks waarskuwing of iets nie.”<sup>23</sup> – P*

*“They are not malicious people. From my experience a lot of what they do, comes from fear. They would tell on each other or knife each other in the back, but they do that because they’re scared of losing their own jobs. That’s kind of how it happens. They won’t protect each other if it means that they will lose their own job. When I came over here the*

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<sup>23</sup> Fear for the consequences; fear for losing a source of income, definitely. I think in general, because their salaries are shocking and there are not a lot of jobs available. So they will do anything not to lose their jobs and there are no laws here to protect them. None, none ...! You can hire someone today and fire them tomorrow. I see them do it if they aren’t satisfied with your service, no warning or nothing.

*people were just fantastic, they were warm, welcoming. Very, very friendly. But put them in a situation where they are threatened, they are not pleasant.” – C*

*“There is a lot of fear in losing their jobs. Unemployment in Egypt is exceptionally high; you’ll find a lot of people highly qualified, working [in menial] jobs. I mean I’ve met them before. One of the security guys is a lawyer; you’ll find taxi drivers with university degrees. They are really well qualified, but they can’t get jobs, so if they do get a job they will hold onto it with both hands. So when they criticise others or they put others down, [it has] a lot to do with self-preservation.” – C*

It is clear from the above statements that fear in the workplace stems from the socio-economic reality of unemployment in Egypt. To most of the respondents, fear of job loss guides the behaviour of their Egyptian colleagues who are terrified of not being able to find alternative employment.

### **5.1.5. Description of a work ethic**

Responses regarding a particular Egyptian-Islamic work ethic as perceived and constructed by South African expatriates were relatively similar. Many respondents constructed an Egyptian work ethic in relation to what they construct as their own (South African) work ethic:

*“Very poor, absolutely very poor...” – V*

*“... but sometimes they also don’t think.” – A*

*“In terms of working hard, I think South Africans work harder than Egyptians. We are proud of our work, we like to submit ... and I’m speaking generally, because everywhere in the world you always get lazy people and sloppy people, but generally we are more attentive to the quality of work that we produce whereas Egyptians aren’t really too worried about that. You see it in a lot of things, the quality isn’t that high. Their standards are here, ours are there.” – A & B*

*“Die Egiptenaar se werksetiek is nie up to standard nie, dis nie kreatief, produktief nie, dis nie kwaliteit nie, dis nie ... nie optyd nie ... Hy werk nie om te gaan uitfigure ... ‘hoe kan ek dit beter maak nie?’ Hy doen dit, want hy word gesê om te doen en dit ... dit wat gesê word om te doen sal hy doen en maybe, nog minder as dit. Hy’s net te bang hy werk harder as die ander. Dit is ons strugle: byvoorbeeld waar ons vandaan kom, as daar ‘n tafel gedra moet word – whether dit Jan is of die direkteur was langs jou staan – en die tafel moet geskuif word, dan tel jy dit op en skuif dit... Hier: glad nie. Ek sal vra vir help. Hy’s net te bang hy werk harder as die ander. Hy gaan soek iemand below hom, en daai ou gaan soek iemand*

*onder hom. Dan sê hy jy moet die tafel skuif. Teen daai tyd het ek klaar die tafel geskuif, verstaan?”<sup>24</sup> – S & L*

*“Of die kwaliteit wat jy gee – dit gaan absoluut oor: ‘kom ek maak klaar, want ek moet klaar maak’. Dis frustrerend!”<sup>25</sup> – S & L*

*“Hulle werksetiek gaan oor shortcuts, maar dit create soveel delays. Hy bribe die ou om nou eers gou sy ding te doen. So nou word die hele proses ge-slow-down vir die ou se argument en bribe en die game wat hulle speel. As hy net in die tou gestaan het sou hy gehelp word en sou hy uitgekóm het waar hy moes uitkom. Hulle probeer soveel shortcuts vat in hul werksplek – whether dis die manier om sy werk te doen so hy probeer so vinnig moontlik te verf so net die skoonmaak [alleen], gaan hom tien keer langer vat as die verf – maar dis vir hom vinnig as hy die mure doen. Hy dink nie vorentoe nie.”<sup>26</sup> – S & L*

*“Die Egiptenare wat produktief is, is ‘n force to be reckoned with ... hulle is regtig!”<sup>27</sup> – S & L*

*“They are disorganised. They have no idea of deadlines and they don’t think. They do nothing for themselves, they don’t really realise what the impact of what they do has on others.” – M*

*“Maar dit is maar moelik: ‘n ou begin kyk na verskillende groepies/klasse ook, maar ek dink as ‘n ou dit onder ‘n groot kombors wil sit, dan dink ek, is daar vir die massa nog ‘n lang pad om te loop as dit kom by werksetiek jy weet? Om werk gedoen te kry, en om nie net afwesig te wees nie...”<sup>28</sup> – R*

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<sup>24</sup> The Egyptian’s work ethic is not up to standard, it’s not creative or productive, it’s not quality. It’s not ... on time ... He doesn’t work to figure out, ‘how can I improve this?’ He does it because he’s told to do so. That which he is told to do, maybe he will do it, maybe even less. He’s just too scared that he works harder than anyone else. This is our struggle: If there is a table that has to be moved – whether Jan or the director is standing next to you – and the table has to be moved, then you pick up the table and move it. Over here, not at all: I will ask you for help, but he’s too scared to do more than the others. He will go look for someone who is in a lower position than him. That guy will then look for someone below him. Then he will tell him to move the table. By that time I have already moved the table myself, understand?

<sup>25</sup> Or the quality that they give – it’s really just ... ‘let me finish because I want to finish’. It’s frustrating!

<sup>26</sup> Their work ethic is about creating shortcuts, but it creates so many delays. He bribes the guy to do his thing so now it slows down the whole process for the sake of the guy’s bribe and the whole game that they play. If he just stood in the queue he would have done what he had come to do. They try and take so many shortcuts in the office. He tries to paint as quickly as possible, although cleaning up would take him 10 times longer than the painting if he had done it properly the first time. But he just wants to finish the walls as soon as possible. He doesn’t think ahead.

<sup>27</sup> Those Egyptians who are productive are a force to be reckoned with. They are really!

<sup>28</sup> But it is difficult. When one looks at different groups/classes as well, but I think if one were to generalise and put it under one big cover, then I think, for the masses there is still a long way to go when it comes to a work ethic, you know? Just to do work, and not to be absent.

*“Working here can be very frustrating, very! Your stress levels are incredibly high, because the way you work here is very different from South Africa. People live very much for today, on average, and don’t think far ahead into the future. There’s no long-term planning, no strategic thinking, there’s no thought to the consequence of your actions. ‘If I do this, how will it impact on that?’ They don’t think about that. And it makes it very hard, from a work perspective.” – C*

South African expatriates therefore construct an Egyptian work ethic as one lacking initiative, creativity and a desire to work hard. Many respondents feel that their Egyptian colleagues experience no pleasure from working and would rather do nothing instead of work. The notion of drawing pleasure from work could arguably be regarded as a Puritan and Calvinist approach where work is an end in itself and one should take pride in one’s endeavours as hard work distinguishes one as being part of the “elect”. Almost all respondents highlighted the fact that Egyptians don’t think further and that they lack long-term planning. A quote overheard in one of the “pubs” frequented by non-nationals exclaimed, “Egyptians can’t even organise a piss in a pub!” There is therefore a consensus among foreigners (both South African and other) that Egyptians lack structure and systematic thinking and planning.

*“[On a blue collar level] I can’t say the work ethic is any different [to that of South Africans], because of the low wages, you get your work by supervising and that’s it.” – A & B*

The above quote by A & B presents another dimension to the discussion. A & B maintain that a particular work ethic is dependent on class. They mention that regardless of nationality or culture, blue collar workers generally display a poor work ethic. She compares Egyptians to South Africans. It is perhaps worth noting that, as A & B stated, that the description of an Egyptian work ethic by respondents seems rather similar to the work ethic ascribed to black South Africans, primarily by Whites.

The following quotes illustrate how South African expatriates’ perceive their own work ethic in relation to Egyptians:

*“And they think differently to us. I can’t explain, they just do ... their logic, their system of logic is very different ... so I struggle a bit...” – B*

*“South Africans are known for being very tough and it’s something you don’t realise [at first when] coming from South Africa, but we are very career-oriented. We’re very driven, competitive.” – C*

*“South African’s are good at that because we are from Africa ... here they prefer South Africans. The Americans and Brits; they don’t get it, because if you’re American you won’t change ... ‘This is the way it’s done and this is the way we’re going to do it’. And when he comes into contact with Egyptians, the clash is total – the rejection is total, and then he doesn’t achieve anything. If he walks away, calling the Egyptian, ‘stupid’, that’s not the way it happened; it’s because he wasn’t prepared to adapt. And it’s not so easy to adapt, because to adapt and simply become like an Egyptian that’s like ... so you have to learn to understand; how to walk on that edge to obtain goals. But, to live on what you have. South Africans do that well.” – G*

*“Aussies are too westernised so they don’t get it. They don’t adapt here very well.” – G*

*“South Africans in general, we don’t like corruption; we don’t like doing underhand business.” – B*

*“The philosophy ... with South Africans ... and their work-ethos is a lot better. They have to earn what they get paid for plus – they don’t have a structure to fall back on – so they have to earn money. When we got here we tried to start the business just with locals ... Egyptians and it didn’t work – and I brought two expat supervisors from South Africa. With South Africans’ work-ethos it really worked well.” – V*

*“[The difference is] like 180 degrees. Firstly, they don’t care what they do. My main conclusion is that they just don’t care. South Africans ... really care and do a good job, deliver what’s expected. They don’t ... If they [Egyptians] don’t do it they’ll go home and switch off – they don’t care. That’s the biggest difference.” – V*

*“By far – there’s a very good reason for it. In Britain, they have strong social systems – South Africans don’t have it. Particularly white South Africans don’t have it. If you’re a young white South African and out of work, nobody’s going help you ... it’s [either] work or don’t eat and that is a good motivator.” – V*

*“Dis interessant. Ek verstaan nie hoe werk hulle koppe nie!”<sup>29</sup> – P*

From the above statements it is clear that South Africans perceive their own work ethic to be very different from what they see as an Egyptian-Islamic work ethic. Many respondents expressed some pride in their South African (in particular) strong work ethic and ability to

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<sup>29</sup> It’s interesting! I don’t understand how their minds work.

adapt to difficult situations. It is also clear that many respondents tried to distance themselves completely from the traits that an Egyptian work ethic displays. Respondents articulated South Africans' strong work ethos, especially when confronted with Egyptians. It is, however, difficult to distinguish between South Africans' high work ethic in *general*, or those South African expatriates (*homo economicus*) in Egypt assigned to fulfil a particular role and are therefore compelled (both professionally and financially) to work hard and diligently.

### 5.1.5.1. Asceticism

The following responses consider the notion of asceticism in Egypt as perceived by respondents:

*“For a lot of the Muslim people it's not about work; it's about living a good life. Being good to the people around you; helping the poor ... their focus is on their religion and being a good person, rather than on being productive...” – C*

*“Hulle werksetiek is swak. Selfs die girls wat saam my werk – hulle lewer fantastiese werk, maar nogsteeds sal hulle 15 minute langer breuk vat as wat hulle moet. As hulle vyf minute kan sit en rook dan sal hulle daardie corners probeer cut. Ek kan met die res van haar werk niks fout vind nie – sy was impeccable, maar as sy kon buite sit en niks doen nie, sou sy. Dit maak my bewus van goed in die land wat kan anders wees as dit 'n collected effort is ... [dit] kom terug na self-disipline ... dis 'n groot kulturele ding. Ons het al gewonder hoe 'n mens dit kan verander want dit sal so 'n fenomenale groot projek wees om dit te verander, want ons leer ons kinders van tel papiere op en gooi dit in die asblik, dan gaan sy in die kar en haar pa gooi McDonalds uit by die venster. Dis daardie kinders wat in die werksomgewing gaan – van kleins af. Die goeters wat ons hulle leer word by die huis afgeleer. En dis daardie kinders wat in die werksomgewing gaan.”<sup>30</sup> – S & L*

*“I think culturally they're quite lazy.” – M*

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<sup>30</sup> Their work ethic is poor. Even the girls in my office do fantastic work, but they will still take 15 minutes longer break than they're supposed to. If they can sit for an additional 5 minutes and smoke, they would cut that corner. I cannot find fault with the rest of her work, she's impeccable, but if she could sit outside doing nothing, she would. It makes me conscious of many things in this country that could be different if it was a collected effort ... it comes back to self-discipline, it's a great cultural thing. We have wondered how we could change it, but it would be such a phenomenal project to change it, because we teach our children to pick up the papers and throw it in the dustbin, then her father picks her up from school and he throws his McDonalds wrapper out the window. It is those children who will enter the working environment – from a young age. The things that we teach them are forgotten at home. And it is those children who enter the workplace.

*“Hy dink hoe vinniger hy dit klaarkry – hoe vinniger kan hy tee drink en speletjies speel”<sup>31</sup> - S.*

The above quote by S talks almost derogatively about Egyptian recreational activities. Many respondents commented on the fact that Egyptians like to sit and do nothing, or drink tea and play games. This so-called “waste of time” seems unacceptable to those interviewed. Asceticism in Islam is a renunciation of worldly goods, but not pleasures (as in sexual activity). There is also no correlation with Protestant asceticism: in Islam there is no emphasis on savings etcetera. It is for this reason that they regard pleasure and enjoyment to be an end in itself. South African expatriates regard this as being lazy. Those with a Protestant ethic believe they gain status in hard work whereas Egyptians gain status from being able to enjoy pleasurable things without having to work for it. To the latter, it is something of a status symbol if one can enjoy a happy life without having to work.

Al Aswany (2011:105) however contradicts this notion:

There’s a well-known story about the time when an ascetic who devoted himself to worship day and night and the Prophet asked him, “Who provides for you?” The man answered, “My brother works and provides for me.” Then the Prophet said, “Your brother worships more than you do.” The meaning here is decisive and important: That someone who works and provides for his family is more virtuous in God’s eyes than the ascetic who spends all his time worshipping but does not work.

This (mis)understanding of religious tenets, however, points to ‘flawed religiosity’ in Egypt and how an Egyptian work ethic stands in contrast to the prescribed IWE. This also points to the development of a “cultural habitus” which has developed outside the Quran’s regulations.

### **5.1.6. Status, class and hierarchy**

A theme highlighted by many respondents was that of status. The respondents’ comments on the importance of status to Egyptians related particularly to the workplace:

*“Die Egiptenare; jy kan hulle nie bestuur in ‘n matrix nie ... Jy kan nie doen wat ek gedoen het toe ek gewerk het in Suid-Afrika nie. Daar is geen harmonious ... ‘n cooperative system hier werk nie. Dit – dit moet ‘n rigide hiërargie wees. Party mense sal minder salaris verkies as hulle ‘n goeie tittle kan kry. En hulle raak totaal emosioneel daarvoor. Hulle sal helfde van die salaris verkies, so arm soos hulle daar is, as hulle ‘n beter sounding titel kan*

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<sup>31</sup> He thinks the sooner he finishes – the sooner can he drink tea and play games.

*kry, want die titel is vir hulle verskriklik belangrik as hulle huis toe gaan. As hulle nou in hulle gemeenskap is en een ou sê vir die ander: 'Oh, what do you do?' 'Oh, I'm a senior manager', whatever. Ek weet net dis verskriklik belangrik: Status. Dit is vir hulle die 'ultimate' ... status. Dis ongelooflik!*"<sup>32</sup> – G

*"Status is belangrik."*<sup>33</sup> – S & L

*"Toe kom hulle, toe sê hulle dit was nou 'n groot vernedering, want die onnies het gesien hulle dra die boeke en die werkers het vir hulle gelag en hulle het hulle 'dignity' verloor."*<sup>34</sup> – R

*"Maar jy weet dit is ook kultuur, want soos die een supervisor vir my gister gesê het: 'But Mr. Kleinhans, you don't understand, it's in our culture. If they see we're carrying books then we lost our dignity, because we're not supposed to do it'. Toe sê ek: 'Hey, man jou boudel! Ons moet werk doen. Ek kan nie wag tot julle besluit werkers is nou môre beskikbaar om ons te help nie. Julle is mos hierso, kom ons dra die boeke'."*<sup>35</sup> – R

*"Status is incredibly important. Who you know, in an Egyptian community, is more important than how much money you got. It's all about connections and networks. Your family name is incredibly important, because your reputation and status is tied to your family name. They are very class conscious, extremely class conscious. Racist as well, which surprised me. In general they don't like black people; they don't like the darker Egyptians, the upper Egyptians. They discriminate against people with darker skin and there is a really defined class structure."* – C

In the above quote by G, he states the importance of status both in the workplace and in the community. His last statement: "dis ongelooflik!" communicates in his opinion the incredulousness of the importance of status by Egyptians who would prefer a lower salary if their title made up for it. He struggles to understand this cultural phenomenon. One senses the disbelief at this perceived "irrational" behaviour from a Protestant standpoint.

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<sup>32</sup> The Egyptians, you can't manage them in a matrix. You can't do what I did when I worked in South Africa. There is no harmony ... a cooperative system doesn't work here ... it must be a rigid hierarchy. Some people would prefer a lower salary if they can get a good title. They become totally emotional about it. They will prefer even half their salary, as poor as they are, if they can get a better title, because the title is extremely important when they go back home. When they talk in their community and the one person asks, 'Oh, what do you do?' 'I'm a senior manager' or whatever. I just know status is extremely important. For them it is the ultimate; status. It's incredible!

<sup>33</sup> Status is important.

<sup>34</sup> Then they came and told me that it was very humiliating because the teachers had to carry the books and the workers laughed at them and told them they lost their dignity.

<sup>35</sup> But you know it's also culture, because as the one supervisor told me yesterday, 'But Mr Kleinhans, you don't understand, it's in our culture. If they see us carrying books then we've lost our dignity, because we're not supposed to do it'. Then I told him, 'Hey, bollocks! We have work to do. I can't wait until you decide that workers are available tomorrow to help us. You are here now, so let's carry the books'.

In C's quote, she says: "Who you know, in an Egyptian community is more important than how much money you have." This quote singles out the process of *Wasta* as introduced by Feghali (1997: 366-368). This approach of using one's influence to make things happen undermines the concept of a rational bureaucracy and draws attention to the presence of patriarchy and patrimonialism in what has been termed a "sheikocracy". Along with status, is the importance of hierarchy in the work place. This hierarchy is very often culturally established and undermines bureaucracy in that power belongs to the officeholder and not the office.

*"[Jy] kan dit weer terug bring na hiëragie toe. Hulle't ... Alles is based op hiëragie, hoe meer outokraat en muslik jy is, hoe meer vinnig word dinge gedoen, dis in hul gene, dit ... Kindness is 'n weakness; hoe leliker jy met hulle praat ... en ons sien dit... Hoe die ouens met 'n ou praat; elke dag. Die ou is net te dankbaar dat hy werk kry."*<sup>36</sup> – S & L

The above quote by S & L sees the respondent as referring to a cultural trait as "being in their genes". Culture is therefore reified as being genetic. For them, therefore, one cannot separate the individual from his/her culture. This internalisation of culture therefore appears completely inseparable and therefore communicates a sense of "hopelessness" amongst respondents that Egyptians will never change – which in itself communicates the notion by respondents that Egyptians ought to change their culture to behave more "acceptably" (along western standards). A quote heard in one of the focus groups reads: "How do you start to change a mindset of people?" There is a definitive sense of 'superiority' amongst expatriates in Cairo in that Egyptian thinking is erroneous and ineffective. Many respondents also commented on the rigid attitudes of their Egyptian colleagues in that they very seldom step outside their job prescription and merely do that which is ascribed to them:

*"They won't do anything they feel does not form part of their job description, which drives me crazy! With us we'll do whatever it takes to get the job done, for them it's not like that. If your job is a sweeper, you will only sweep, you will not clean, because you are a sweeper, and that is what you are employed to do. It's incredibly frustrating. Because they are very rigid, in terms of, 'that is my job and that is not my job, get someone else to do that'. Especially when it comes to things that they consider are beneath them, they won't do it. So if*

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<sup>36</sup> You can bring it back to hierarchy ... Everything is based on hierarchy, the more autocratic and rude you are, the quicker things get done, it is in their genes ... kindness is a weakness ... the more you treat someone with disrespect, and we've seen it here ... How they speak to one another, and we see it every day. The guy is just too thankful to have a job.

*for example if you walk into a factory and there is some litter and you say to them you must pick that up ... 'No, no, no that's not my job!' It doesn't matter if it makes the factory look better. It's beneath them and they won't do it."* – C

*"There are certain delineations between what they do and don't do; if that's not in their job description they won't do it. They are well aware of what they ought to do and no more and no less."* – J

*"Hy's net te bang – dit is my framewrok of job description. Ek sal vir 'hell' nie uit dit uitgaan nie."*<sup>37</sup> – S & L

*"Ek gaan dit nie doen nie, want die is óf benede my óf te veel werk óf hy's net te bang ek doen dit nou, dan moet ek dit altyd doen. By ons, hoe meer skills jy attain hoe meer equip jy jouself vir daardie possible werksgenot of promotion. Ek dink nie die ouens geniet werk nie. Hulle werk van tea time to lunch-time en daar's baie van hulle wat net reg moet gemanage word. Hy's regtig te bang dan doen hy rerig goeie werk – maar mense kom laat vir meetings, mense kom laat vir werk, baie sal hulle werk doen net om dit gedoen te kry. Dis waarom die geboue lyk soos wat hulle lyk – splinternuwe geboue, want hy dink hoe vinniger hy dit klaarkry – hoe vinniger kan hy tee drink en speletjies speel. So mense sal 'n huis verf – Erin het [haar] woonstel laat verf – die verf was op die vloere, die dak. Dit gaan nie oor die mense se huis mooi maak nie."*<sup>38</sup> – S & L

*"...Whereas in a western situation, to go above someone's head is a negative thing. But here, unless you find someone with power who can actually do something about it, don't bother."* – M

The first quote by C states very clearly: "with us... with them". This clear distinction between herself (South African) and her Egyptian colleagues indicates her attempt to create social distance between herself and Egyptians. The last quote presented by M demonstrates the inefficacy of Egyptian bureaucracy in the office in that someone with authority must be approached to achieve the desired effect. What is important, is that respondents noted their Egyptian colleagues to stay within the delineated prescriptions of their employment contract

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<sup>37</sup> He's just too scared – 'that is my framework and my job description, and for Hell, I will not go outside that'.

<sup>38</sup> I don't want to do it, because it is beneath me or too much work, or he's just scared that if he does it now he has to always do it. Amongst South Africans, the more skills you attain the better you equip yourself for that job satisfaction or promotion. I don't think the guys enjoy work. They work from tea-time to lunch time and there are some of them that have to be managed correctly. He's really just too scared to do a good job. People are late for meetings, people are late for work. A lot of them will finish the work just to do it and to get it over and done with. That's why the buildings look so bad, they are brand new buildings. Because they think the sooner they finish the sooner they can drink tea and play games. So people will paint a house – Erin had her apartment painted – the paint was on the floors, on the ceiling – they don't care about making people's houses look better.

which is a characteristic of a strong bureaucracy. Rules, however, presents a weakness in Egyptian bureaucracy, highlighted by respondents. Weber states that in an effective, rational bureaucracy, rules are formally codified. However, the codification of rules in Egyptian society seems to be culturally enforced and subject to personal whims and fancies:

*“Here it’s very hard to fire someone – instead, you force them to resign. I don’t really like it, but it’s such a mission to get someone fired. And in terms of the disciplinary code, it’s implemented as you like, so if you don’t like someone you can discipline them harsher than someone that you like. If you come late for work, I’ll deduct two days from your salary, but if you [someone else] come late for work, maybe only one day. And I don’t like it; I don’t know this grey area so well. I’ve just stepped down, just send all the disciplinary hearings to the HR manager, I’m not interested. I miss that from South Africa, I miss that black and white at the workplace, and the disciplinary code and the company policies applied to everyone, whereas here you kind of have a code and policies for your blue collar workers and a separate set of ethics for your white collar workers. I can’t work that way...” – B*

*“Jy kan nooit sê: ‘Nou’t ons dit uit ge-figure nie. Nou weet ons hoe dit werk nie’, want môre kom ons daar, dan het dit weer verander. Want nou het een of ander Jannie besluit dit gaan nou weer so werk!”<sup>39</sup> – S & L*

*“And they make up rules as they go along!” – A & B*

The inconsistency of rules and regulations within Egyptian offices, are illustrated in the last quote given by S & L, and it also highlights the frustration experienced among South African expatriates in the workplace. The absence of a codification of rules, and the consistent implementation thereof is a source of great frustration and uncertainty. It is especially in a foreign cultural milieu, that the “sojourner” seeks certainty to establish a sense of understanding and stability. This inconsistency in Egyptian society (including religious and behavioural dissonance) causes respondents to display low levels of trust and respect for their host culture.

Respondents also commented on communication channels in respect of the hierarchy and cultural authority in the workplace:

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<sup>39</sup> You can never say, ‘Now, we have it figured out, now we know how it works’, because tomorrow when we come back, it has changed again, because now some other bloke decided it has to work like this!

*“But you’ve also got to be careful; if you open up the lines too much, they start asking for too much. They kind of abuse any benefit they get. They’re not used to having an open line of communication so they don’t know how to use it. They’ve never had that socialisation at work before ... so they do push the boundaries, whereas in South Africa, there is open communication [through] your employee representatives, so there’s always a voice. You can see the same trend in the male and female relationships here where they don’t know how to socialise with the opposite sex... again, because they don’t know. That line of communication doesn’t exist from when they are young. They are treated differently, they get sent to different schools; they are kept separate the whole time ...” – B & A*

While some problems in the office are ascribed by B & A to the lack of socialisation in the playground and beyond, C (below) also suggests that the inability to sense and respect boundaries stems from an underdeveloped emotional maturity.

*“It’s very dictatorial. They run their organisation very autocratically. You have one big boss at the top, and I’m generalising here how many of the organizations are run, and he issues the rules and everybody follows them and you don’t question it. You do what you are taught to do. There is no such thing as having meetings to discuss things, or having a viewpoint, or questioning a manager’s decision ... nothing like that. You don’t do that; as an employee you’re only there to follow instructions.” – C*

*“To me they don’t have any initiative, because they always get told what to do. They’re always ... not allowed to make decisions.” – M*

*“He just does what he’s told. No wonder he hasn’t got any initiative, because he hasn’t been allowed to have any. Very hierarchical. It’s the same with the government. Unless you talk to the right person you’re wasting your time.” – M*

*“Don’t speak up to the boss, because then you will be excluded.” – A<sup>2</sup>*

These cultural realities and lack of open lines of communication within the Egyptian office culture seem to prevent aspirant Egyptian colleagues from achieving any success. The “system” hinders clear communication, initiative and creativity as it seldom reaches the top levels where decisions are made. These realities therefore encourage apathy and hopelessness among talented and hard-working Egyptians.

Along with status in the workplace is that of social class:

*“But in Egypt there’s a definite: ‘You’re a class lower than me and I’ll treat you like that’. We’ll pray together, but when we’re at work ... the class discrimination in Egypt is terrible, terrible! That’s why, as foreigners, we’ve done well because we’ve been able to treat*

*blue-collar workers well. We pay attention to them; we've implemented silly things, like employer of the month. We've had staff meetings which they've never had before and as South Africans we see to it that blue collar workers are motivated with a good working environment, with communication between the two. Whereas here Egyptians don't care. They don't care and they always try and get as much money from the blue collar workers as possible. I've had so many fights with Human Resources: they want to deduct for this and this: left, right and centre, and they only earn such a small amount of money and you're still deducting for petty things, so... ja, it's sad..." – A & B*

This above quote by A & B points to an interesting dimension of Egyptian society. Many respondents commented (and this is explained in greater detail on page 120) on the dissonance between Egyptian religious beliefs and behaviour. The fact that Egyptians (regardless of class) will pray together and overlook issues of status and class stops at the doors of the mosque. This inconsistency between religion and application bothered many respondents. There is a common saying in (and about Egypt) which states: "If hypocrites could fly, this place would be an airport". There gap between beliefs and action is a significant aspect of Egyptian society. The quote by A & B below, reiterates this problem of "religious differences" as a stratification tool.

*"Egyptian society is no good, because it is, let's say ... there is too much of a gap between poor and rich. And the rich don't give a damn for the poor." – A<sup>2</sup>*

*"We have racial differences in South Africa; they have social and religious differences here." – A & B*

*"They all want to marry foreigners, for one thing; it's a status symbol ... to marry a foreigner is seen as a status symbol. The second thing is to get a passport. Lots of Egyptians want to get out of Egypt. They are desperately unhappy there, they want the foreign passport and that's the only way they can get out of the country." – C*

*"Dis die grootste probleem – dit gaan oor klassisme. Die mense word grootgemaak met klassisme. Dit beïnvloed die werksetiese – wat is die punt as ek goeie werk doen as 'n cleaner as ek nooit 'n promosie gaan kry nie? As my pa 'n supervisor was, sal ek ook net een bly.<sup>40</sup>" – S & L*

*"Ek dink ons word grootgemaak met die idee dat die sky is the limit; hierso, that's your ceiling. You'll never get above that ceiling – except if you cheat your way through."<sup>41</sup> – S & L*

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<sup>40</sup> That's the biggest problem. It's all about class. People are raised with class. That influences the work ethic. What's the point of doing a good job as a cleaner if I'll never get a promotion? If my father was a supervisor, then I'll never be more than that.

<sup>41</sup> I think that we were raised with the idea that the sky is the limit; here that is your ceiling; you'll never get above that ceiling, except if you cheat your way through.

*“Groot problem wat ons hier het, of wat seker die hele problem in Egipte, is klasse.”<sup>42</sup> – G<sup>2</sup>*

The importance of the class structure in Egyptian society and how this translates into problems in the work place is highlighted by respondents as a significant problem. These statements also echo Al Aswany’s (2006) novel in which he underlines the detrimental effect of class on the work ethic and the success of young Egyptians. The next responses show how the political and cultural climate of Egypt also greatly influences the work ethic of the youth:

*“Maar ek dink hulle hele outokrasie kom terug na hulle militêre geskiedenis, want hulle hele wese is gebou om die weermag.”<sup>43</sup> – S*

*“Because the government controls everything ... I mean, they’re so controlling!” – M*

*“They live in fear. It’s a police state; they can get arrested at any time. They have no recourse to any rights, if they do, they probably can’t afford a lawyer. Egyptians living in Egypt ... it’s hard for them. Some of them are so poor. They live in fear. I just think it’s not a very ... you know ... not a very nice life. They’re held back [and] not given opportunities [in] the poor education system [where it is] just parrot learning and [not] the way we teach now. It’s so far removed from ... you know ... completely the other extreme [rather than using] initiative and independent thinking and creativity, and all of that. The state education system here, it doesn’t do that; I mean they are just [getting] rote learning, chalk and talk. Look around you, I mean there’s filth. Social education, things like environment – look how they treat their [ancient heritage... the] pyramids are falling apart and they just do nothing about it. [There is] litter everywhere and I don’t think it’s the fault of the people. I think that it’s not a poor country as such. [There is] lots of wealth: mineral wealth. They’ve got oil ‘gold’. Tourism is huge, [but] the money just gets held by a powerful minority at the top. They don’t share. They don’t ... let anything filter down – that’s sad. People generally don’t know [any] different, [because] government controls the press.” – M*

*“I think it’s a very true reflection on Egyptian society and that’s sad about it: that you are surrounded by people who have no ... no motivation, or anything. So why bother? I mean they’re not ... they don’t have initiative, because they’re not allowed to make decisions. So why bother? I can understand that, because I think I’d probably be the same.” – M*

This quote by M is really important as this is one of the first examples of empathy towards Egyptians as she concedes that given the same circumstances, she would probably have behaved the same, regardless of her upbringing or her arguably intrinsic work ethic. This

<sup>42</sup> The biggest problem that we have here, or probably the problem in the whole of Egypt, is that of classes.

<sup>43</sup> But I think their whole autocracy goes back to their military history, because their whole being is built around the army.

statement therefore strongly supports the argument of this thesis that the attitude and approach of Egyptians towards work is significantly affected by their social and cultural surroundings rather than their personal and religious convictions only.

*“It’s easy to govern people that are less educated, because they just do what they’re told. You tell the Imam and the mosque tells the congregation ... you know ... and in that way they just get people to do ... How they want them to be, I don’t think it’s by accident ... Then it all comes down to money and power.” – M*

*“The religious side fits in well with the oppression; it’s allowed to happen, because it works. I think that it’s a very narrow religion. Even the way they view women for example and Islam doesn’t encourage free thinking and it’s very ... you’ve got to follow the law. That’s it. It fits in well with the oppression. It suits the government. I think that’s why the people are religious. That’s the way it is; it works together. It’s also convenient for the government not to improve the education system because if they did, then people would start to question things – hold government more accountable. And they don’t want to be. They want the wealth for themselves; they want the power for themselves.” – M*

*“It’s a politically confused nation that’s interwoven [with] religion – day-to-day, whatever they do; wat so gekompliseerd is dat in five years I don’t get it. I’ll be here 20 years and I still won’t get it. Dit maak hulle interessant, maar dis ‘n problem – corruption is entrenched. Corruption is not seen ... [it is] regarded as something that’s normally part of the process.” – G*

These comments support the idea that the political climate influences Egyptians’ approach towards work and motivation for success. Many respondents equate the political system with religion and blame the Egyptian government for the state of Egypt’s morale. The respondents therefore only see Islam as a source of oppression. They view religion, in Egyptian society, primarily as a tool to “indoctrinate” the masses and keep the status quo. The power ascribed to the Imams support the idea of a “sheikocracy”. I argue that the quotes are a clear illustration of how the Egyptian political, social and cultural fabric influences an Egyptian work ethic as described by South African expatriates. However, regardless of the centrality of social and political factors in shaping an Egyptian work ethic it is also imperative to delve into the role of religion in the Egyptian workplace.

### **5.1.7 Religion**

The following responses from South African expatriates concern the relevance of religion in the workplace:

*“What I quite enjoy about working here is that you are allowed to be religious at work, so you can talk about God if you want, whereas in South Africa, it’s not politically correct, you don’t talk about politics, religion or sexual orientation. [This means], if you want to, you can excuse yourself from meetings to go and pray and it’s acceptable. They often use words like Inshallah (God willing), but if someone gave you an assignment in South Africa and said, ‘Listen, tomorrow I need this on my desk’, and I say, ‘God willing’, [the reply would no doubt be], ‘No, no! Screw God, have it done!’ So here I like that you can be religious at work, and it’s accepted, even if you are Christian. I worked for a Christian company, which makes a difference, it does make a big difference...” – B & A*

*“I think also, that because Muslims pray five times a day, it really disrupts work and it’s used as an excuse also to get off doing work. I’d say, ‘I need you to do this now’, and they’d say they need to go and pray, but they’ll just be ten minutes, only to rock up half an hour later wandering back from prayers. I mean, and again I’m generalising, because some people go for their ten-fifteen minutes and they come back, but a lot of them use it as an excuse to not produce.” – C*

*“Hulle is so wonderlik, en dit is nou Allah, en dis net Allah, maar hulle kan maklik onder die tafel dit doen en dit is in die besigheidswêreld definitief so.”<sup>44</sup> – A<sup>3</sup>*

*“No. I believe personally that business is second. I’m a strong Christian. I do not believe that religion should be brought into the workplace. You have to look at the purpose of a company. A company is there to make money, to create wealth. And I believe that you can do that honestly and sincerely. That you should do it without lying, that you should always be honest with your clients ... [This is] very difficult to teach Egyptians, but also it is why I believe this company is doing so well. Because I don’t allow them, to ... if I may use the word ... screw up. I don’t allow them. To me that’s ethics. Being professional and being ethical. That’s not religion. Business, if you’re a good Christian or Muslim, a good Hindu or whatever you are. You should be ethical. I’m okay if that’s the motivation why you become ethical.” – G*

*“I don’t think there’s a place in the workplace for fanatical religion.” – V*

*“I don’t believe religion should be brought in the workplace. But I believe your upbringing is part of how you deliver yourself and your company and ... [theirs is] a barbaric religion ... they use religion as an excuse for everything – that’s my opinion.” – R*

From the above quotes regarding South African expatriates’ opinions about religion in the workplace, it is clear that the most would prefer a workplace without religion. It is, however,

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<sup>44</sup> They are amazing, and everything is Allah this and Allah that, but they very easily do things underhandedly, and especially in the corporate world.

worth asking whether they would prefer a workplace without religion – or without Islam. The following quotes by respondents give some of their ideas regarding Islam:

*“It’s convenient, and as I said ... that the whole fasting thing ... It’s ridiculous. It’s a way of indoctrinating people, because if you fast your mind is weak. In Ramadan you’re supposed to read the Quran all the time ... They eat at night. In the day they’re fasting. They are easy to manipulate.” – M*

This statement by M relates to a fundamental Islamic ritual with an accusation of political indoctrination by Islamic leaders. Although she has sympathy for Egyptian society there is a clear unwillingness to recognise the centrality of Ramadan to the religious lives of Muslims. She puts a completely rational argument forward with little acknowledgement of the mystification of Islamic rituals. Islam is described as a “barbaric” religion. This indicates that there is a clear aversion towards Islam as a religion. It is, however, difficult to distinguish whether firstly, there is an antipathy towards Islam because of its inconsistent application and the effects that it has on society – namely the “indoctrination” of religious leaders to support their political agendas. The following quotes describe the “hypocrisy” perceived by South African expatriates:

*“There are a lot of contradictions in religion.” – B & A*

*“Hulle kultuur het alles te doen met die Koran.”<sup>45</sup> – I*

*“...the idea of Egyptians going to mosque ... they don’t actually believe [and] they don’t fully understand Islam. They just do it because they’re told to do it. [They are] not actually a religious people.” – M*

*“I don’t think they’re driven by pure religion, they’re driven by the Imams or the State’s interpretation of religion. I don’t think they necessarily sometimes want to pray, they simply do it because everyone else is doing it.” – A<sup>2</sup>*

*“Islam ... irritates me, [in that it’s] so sexist. It doesn’t affect me directly at all, other than if I ask someone to do something ... [it is] very patriarchal... very. It’s terrible! Backward in that sense ja... What you’re saying is true perhaps [it’s] my Western sense where I’m quite easy to judge and say, ‘you’re backward’. But they revert. That backwardness entails inversion back to the family that’s not [always] a negative thing.” – M*

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<sup>45</sup> Their culture has everything to do with the Quran.

*“Om hier te sit en Bybel te lees, Maar as jy nou hier uitklim, die oues ook, in pleks van eet en maaltye maak, die vroue sit en Bybel lees. Ek dink hulle’s ge-brainwash dat jy dit moet doen. O, en jy kry blykbaar ekstra punte, as jy dit, dat en dit doen. Iemand anders het gesê as jy so en so doen dan kry jy punte. Ek’s nie bekend met die puntestelsel nie.”<sup>46</sup> – P*

Many of the above quotes refer to Islam within Egypt. The respondents have very clear ideas about Islam and appear rather sceptical of Islamic rituals and beliefs. These “perceptions” may have a threefold origin: Firstly, the discrepancies between belief and application of Islam may evoke scepticisms among expatriates, or secondly, these perceptions about Islam may result from miscomprehensions about Islam. Thirdly, these perceptions may stem from a disavowment of another religion in respect of the respondents’ religious beliefs. Whatever the origin of these perceptions, however, South African expatriates experience tensions in their contact with Islam in Egypt.

Many respondents compared the work ethic of Islamic Egyptians and Christian Egyptians:

*“If you compare businesses that are run by Copts versus businesses that are run by Muslims; they’re streets apart. The Copt-run organisations are often incredibly efficient, well-ran, they’re on time. It’s like dealing with completely different organisations. They are just streets apart, and I don’t know why that is. I don’t understand why religion would play such a big role.” – C*

*“There is such a big difference in general. The ones (Copts) I’ve met are more educated, they’re more trained, they’ve got the same work ethic that we’ve got and I don’t know why. I don’t know if they go to a different school or a different church, or whether it’s their upbringing ... I have no idea.” – C*

*“They don’t trust each other at all. Their relationships are woven around the family plan ... for example: a Cairo-Egyptian would not report to an Egyptian coming from Upper Egypt under any circumstances, because they’re viewed as a lower clan. It’s literally a cast system like what we have in India. Of course religion comes into it. A Muslim doesn’t want to report to a Coptic Christian and vice versa. There’s always tension around those instances. My Muslim engineers will not employ a Christian technician ... Their inner landscape is not able to cater for a secular environment. They can’t think like that. They can’t separate their religion, their family, their church and their mosque and their Imam, from work. And it’s mingled, twisted in a way that if you want to untangle it, it’s twisted in a knot. You wouldn’t*

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<sup>46</sup> To sit here and read the Bible. But when you leave here, the elders also, instead the women eating or cooking, they sit and read the Bible. I think they’re brainwashed to do it. Oh, and apparently you get extra credit, when you do this and this and that. Someone told me that if you do such and such you will get credits. I’m not sure how the system works.

*even know where to begin. But they hate reporting to each other, they do not trust each other.” – G*

*“You have to either work for a Christian company or an international company because if you work for a straight, Muslim company, there’s a lot of underhandedness that goes on ... there are some things where you have to bribe ... wherever you go, a tip here a tip there just to make life easier.” – C*

The first quote presented by C states: “they (the Copts) have got the same work ethic that we’ve got and I don’t know why”. By this the respondent equates a Christian Egyptians’ work ethic as similar to her own Christian work ethic. Regardless of the fact that Copts are not Puritan, for many respondents, there seems to be a similarity in the work ethic between Egyptian Copts and themselves. C therefore seems in complete agreement with Weber when she says, “I don’t understand why religion would play such a big role.” For some of the respondents there is a clear distinction between a work ethic among Muslims and among Copts. Gathering from the above it seems important to acknowledge some truth in Weber’s causal relationships between religion and a work ethic.

### **5.1.8. Personal and professional relationships and trust**

Crucial to the workings of a successful office are professional relationships and trust. The following quotes reflect South African expatriates’ perceptions of their relationships with their Egyptian colleagues and Egyptians in general:

*“After three years I only have one Egyptian friend.” – A & B*

*“Well I work with both blue and white collar Egyptians. I find them very difficult to actually build true relationships with. I describe them as transactional. As long as it’s transactional they’ll be friendly and when the transaction is finished and the money stops flowing, the relationship, or what you thought was there, disappears. Um, at work though, I think with my direct junior managers, I develop quite good relationships, but still I question how real those relationships are. And that is one of the reasons. I would like to start my own business, but in order to have a business, you need an Egyptian partner and I don’t know if I can trust an Egyptian. Ja, I don’t know if I can trust them, they’re always [untrustworthy] – even the ones that I’ve built such a good relationship with here – I still think, if they can, they will do something wrong, you know? And, then the cultural divide is huge, there’s very*

*different socialising at work because you can't socialise, there's no such thing that on a Thursday afternoon everyone goes to get beer, or drinks, and the people who do drink, you would not go drink with them, so there's no socialising, there's this huge divide.*" – B

*"It's very hard to make Egyptian friends ... our cultures are so different. We have one Egyptian friend only ... In three years we were only able to make one Egyptian friend, a young guy, and he's a really cool guy, he's different, even at work ... I mean still, he's got a lot of Egyptian in him ... I think Egyptians would love to be friends with us, it's fancy to have a foreigner friend you know: 'Oh look, I've got some foreign friends, look at that, I'm fancy!' But I don't think we could be friends."* – B

*"We often misunderstand each other, I definitely get frustrated."* – B

*"I don't know how strong my relationships are. In South Africa your relationships are more genuine ... Here, if you pay them, they are loyal."* – B & A

*"It's been very interesting really, because I had Egyptian friends, but I've lost them all, because of sensitivity. I've had really good Egyptian friends, but one by one they all left, because I've said something that they misinterpreted or I said something the wrong way, it's a minefield. They're so sensitive about things and half the time you don't know what has upset them, and the women also take friendship very seriously. If they consider you a friend they'll call you every day and they expect you to invite them wherever you go, because they do things as a community."* – C

*"In skool is ons verhouding met die Egiptenare baie goed maar ons is nooit in die inner-circle nie."*<sup>47</sup> – S

*"Nee ons sal nooit wees nie, want dit kom by jou geloof, want geloof is 'n groot barrier tussen ons en hulle. Werksgewys is ons baie vriendelik, but they will never let you into that 'Inshallah' kring."*<sup>48</sup> – L

*"Jy sal nie dieselfde werksverhouding hê hier soos by die huis nie. By die huis [Suid-Afrika] het ons ook 'n diverse werksgroep. Jou kans om 'n vriendskap daar te bou is baie*

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<sup>47</sup> At school our relationship with the Egyptians are very good, but we are never in the inner circle.

<sup>48</sup> No, we will never be, because it concern religion, because religion is a very big barrier between us and them. Work-wise we are very friendly, but they will never let you into that *Inshallah* circle.

*maklik as hierso. Maar ... ongelukkig regeer die religion hulle alles. Alles van hulle is gebou op hulle geloof ... en jy kan nie deel wees van daai alles nie, want soos L sê. Jy kan nie aan daai inner sirkel kom nie. Jy kan baie naby kom.*"<sup>49</sup> – S

The above quote by S is really important when he says, "back home we also have a very diverse work group, but your chances of building a friendship there is much easier than here". He states that although he would be able to build friendships across cultural lines, he states that it is very difficult (perhaps impossible) to build friendships across religions (particularly referring to Islam).

*"Jy kan nie 'n Egiptenaar vertrou nie. Ek's baie verkeerd as ek dit sê. Hulle vertrou mekaar nie.*"<sup>50</sup> – I

*"Hulle's nie stupid nie, hulle is skelm. Hulle steel. Dis nou 'n baie lelik ding om te sê, maar expats gebruik nie Egiptiese girls om hulle huise skoon te maak nie.*"<sup>51</sup> – I

*"Ek vertou nie Egiptenare nie.*"<sup>52</sup> – I

*"I'd be suspicious not because they're Egyptian, because of the language – they don't want to be bad in anyone's eyes. They can't do that. So if you say to a guy, 'Can you fix this? It's broken'. He'll say, 'yes, yes!', although he's got no clue how to fix it. He doesn't want to say, 'no', because it's not what we want to hear."* – M

*"I'd say there's very little trust among the Egyptians – it's because of the ... not just culture, but because of the political situation here, because they're not protected in any way – you can hire, and fire – do whatever you like and the laws ... there's no recourse. Egypt is made for people with money."* – V

The above statements clearly demonstrate that very little trust exists between South African expatriates and Egyptians in general. The respondents suggest the reasons to be threefold: language barriers and that Egyptians are transactional (merely loyal to money) and untrustworthy in general. Cultural and religious differences are also perceived to be insurmountable. I argue that the lack of trust, poor communication and minimal relationship building among South African expatriates and Egyptians add to the misunderstandings and lack of dialogue that exist on a global level between the Euro-American West and Arab-

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<sup>49</sup> You will never have the same work relationships here as you would have back home. At home (South Africa) we are also a diverse work group. But your chance to build a friendship is much easier than here. But ... unfortunately, religion rules their everything. Everything here is built on religion ... and you cannot be a part of that. You cannot enter that inner circle ... You can come very close.

<sup>50</sup> You can't trust an Egyptian. I'm very wrong when I say that, but they don't trust each other.

<sup>51</sup> They are not stupid, they're sneaky. They steal. It's a very bad thing to say, but expats don't use Egyptian girls to clean their houses.

<sup>52</sup> I don't trust Egyptians.

Islamic East. Change will only happen when these tensions are bridged on a micro level at the office or in social settings. It is all too obvious that a separation between South African expatriates and their Egyptian colleagues exists on a personal level and that this contributes to the difficulties. The first quote presented by B, when she states, “the cultural divide is huge” point to the perceived cultural distance between herself and her Egyptian colleagues. Various respondents therefore offer various reasons for the lack of trust or friendships between them: religion, culture and language. Regardless of the reason, there seems to be a willingness among South African expatriates interviewed to reach out to their colleagues, but are met with some hostility.

The above themes, to a large extent, have been used in an attempt to prove the argument that religious, political, social and cultural conditions in Egypt, as perceived by South African expatriates, influence an Egyptian work ethic. These factors include religion, status, level of education, class, unemployment and lack of accountability on the part of the government. It is also clear from the above statements that South African expatriates concede the significance of Egyptians’ political and social realities. Unemployment, corruption and a despotic regime has a tremendous (negative) effect on the morale of the Egyptian society. Alaa Al Aswany (2011:109; 142), in his most recent book, *On the State of Egypt* (2011), presents us with an eloquent portrayal of modern Egypt before the February revolution:

Hard work does not necessarily lead to success, academic excellence does not necessarily lead to a respectable job, and a commitment to morality does not necessarily lead to social advancement ... The added fact that a despotic regime gives priority to loyalty over competence, and therefore gives jobs to loyal supporters who usually are not objectively qualified to do the job, makes them dread the appearance of anyone really competent who might take over their position. That’s how a despotic system is transformed into a frightful machine that routinely eliminates people of talent, fighting and persecuting them, while at the same time attracting failures and incompetents as long as they sing and dance for the president and praise his genius and magnificent achievements.

Al Aswany therefore ascribes the shortcomings of an Egyptian work ethic and society as a whole, as highlighted by the respondents, to the despotic and corrupt system which discourages Egyptians to apply themselves in any area save that of daily survival. The author (2011:183; 190) continues in highlighting how an undemocratic and unsympathetic regime ruins the reputation of its nation:

In fact what that presented did is the same as what all government officials do: portray ethics as invariable, completely divorced from social and political circumstances. Generally they attribute Egypt's current tribulations to the poor morals of Egyptians themselves. Perhaps we can now understand why President Mubarak is always accusing Egyptians of being lazy and unproductive. Such thinking ignores the fact that productivity in any country requires a good education, equal job opportunities, and salaries that allow a decent standard of living ... Everything one earns in democratic countries through hard work and merit can be obtained in Egypt through personal contracts and cunning ... if you are talented in Egypt, you face a major problem and would be better off if you were average or even a dim-witted failure ... because the system is designed for average people and suffocates those with talent ... to have talent in Egypt is a burden because it gives rise to malice and envy, and many people will come forward to crush it.

Al Aswany therefore supports the argument of this thesis in denouncing the social and political realities rooted in the failures of Islamic societies and not in an Islamic work ethic, or religious tenets, *per se*. Al Aswany and Weber thus both agree on the detrimental effects of despotism and the systemic breakdown of Egypt.

Although these factors are essential to the argument of the thesis, it is also important to note that many respondents felt that religion in the workplace was hugely significant in hindering their Egyptian colleagues' productivity. Islamic beliefs and rituals such as the use of *Inshallah*, Ramadan, *Dowshah*, *Wasta* and praying five times a day are seen as detrimental to the efficiency in the workplace and contributed to the perceptions of a poor Egyptian work ethic. Some respondents also highlighted their experiences with Christian companies in Egypt to be more pleasant in comparison to pure Islamic companies. Regardless, therefore, the consequence of Egypt's flawed *system*, it is worth acknowledging, that for South African expatriates, religion also plays a significant role in shaping an Egyptian work ethic.

Respondents described an Egyptian work ethic as one lacking initiative and formal codified rules. They perceived Egyptians to be too emotional in the workplace, lazy and deriving no pleasure from their work. Respondents conceive the Egyptian office to be rigid, hierarchical, class conscious and patriarchal. Many respondents felt that poor and inappropriate (parrot learning) education, lack of social mobility and sufficient pay contributed tremendously to the presence of a poor work ethic.

South African expatriates perceived their own work ethic to be of a higher standard to that of their Egyptian colleagues. It is, however, worth stating that the majority of the respondents

can be classified as *homo economicus* and therefore display, per definition, a very strong work ethic. It is thus very difficult to distinguish whether South African expatriates in general display a higher work ethic than their Egyptian colleagues or whether this discrepancy is a direct consequence of the respondents' role in Cairo.

Respondents related more with Egyptian Copts (Christians) with regard to their work ethic. Responses gathered also seem less accommodating of Islam as a set of religious tenets and beliefs. Respondents were very disapproving of religious leaders in their fashioning of an illiterate, uncritical and hypocritical society. From the results gathered it is also safe to say that a lack of rational and effective bureaucracies, as defined by Weber, is found in Egyptian offices. The notion of a bureaucracy, however, seems interesting. There exists a lack of codified rules which is indicative of a weak bureaucracy. While, simultaneously, Egyptian respondents seem adamant to stay within the delineation of their job descriptions – which is indicative of a strong bureaucracy. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions on a typical Egyptian bureaucracy, other than the fact that it is based on charismatic elements such as patrimonialism and strong leadership.

It is extremely important to point out that the analysis of results was not an attempt to delineate a particular Egyptian work ethic as an ideal type, but rather to capture South African expatriates' perceptions of a work ethic and society different to their own. The historical trajectory and personal careers of South African expatriates have sculpted their world beliefs and assumptions which invariably created their perceptions. However, what remains is to ascertain why some perceptions have been created and what processes led up to them.

Much of the comments presented resemble a global discourse between Islam and the West and it is therefore important to recognise the influence of global media and ideas in the creation of perceptions. A lack of interaction among South African expatriates and their Egyptian colleagues perhaps also attributes to misunderstandings of concepts and behaviours. One respondent acknowledged that South African expatriates are isolated from the “real Egypt” in Maadi, and therefore only engage with fellow expatriates. These social encounters may also lead to the “othering” of Egyptians as a social group. The lack of trust, however, is not surprising, as Egyptians themselves, have very little trust among themselves due to a

corrupt and flawed government. Al Aswany (2011:171) however, also believes that this lack of trust on a micro level, results from the global status quo between the East and West:

... from my long experience of western society I believe that we as Muslims are responsible to a large extent for the powerful wave of fear of Islam ... It is our duty to offer the West the correct image of Islam, which created a great civilization that for seven centuries taught the whole world the principles of justice, freedom, and tolerance. If we fail in performing this duty then we will have no right to blame others.

The following chapter will serve as a conclusion to the thesis by restating the main research questions with an assessment of how they were scientifically addressed in the thesis.

## CHAPTER 6

### 6. Conclusion

Max Weber and I both share an interest into why the Arab world, particularly Egypt, after its centuries of magnificent triumphs, failed to carry through its achievements into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Egypt has been slow to develop economically whilst remaining politically stagnant for more than three decades. This thesis, in part, aimed to explore whether these failures are to be attributed to a particular work ethic, as Weber would have argued. Without question, business and work activities involve social interactions (Sen, 1997:7). It is for this reason that these social interactions have been studied in an attempt to discover what led up to the formulation of attitudes.

A key rationalisation of the underperformance of Egyptians and the Egyptian state is the lack of *Assabiya*, as argued by Neo-Khaldunian scholars. Societal tensions surface among the rich and poor and between those of the strictly maintained social classes. The governmental elites and those trying to make an honest living are further distanced by the religious manipulators and hypocritical sheikhs. Mixed and increased influences from the West together with social media are positioned in contrast to the rising Islamic fundamentalists, who together create a confused and struggling Egyptian society. Ahmed (2002:42) elaborates on the importance of *Assabiya* in Islamic states:

With Ibn Khaldûn's cycle broken down – with the interpenetration of global religious cultures, with the emergence of the audio-visual media penetrating even the most remote areas, with the mounting clamor of those who see the signs of the apocalyptic end of time, with the scholars silenced, with the growing sense of despair at the poverty and inequality in many parts of the world that challenges the notion of a just God in heaven who maintains a balance in human society based on justice and order ....

I explored the existence of an Egyptian work ethic through the perceptions and conceptions of South African expatriates working in Cairo. The experiences of South African expatriates in Egypt are fascinating in the sense that they perceive their own work ethic to be of very high standard. Tensions and frustrations therefore surface in the office due to the perceived dissimilarities in work ethics between themselves and their Egyptian colleagues. I argue that a

contemporary Egyptian work ethic is clearly discernible from the experiences of South African expatriates. Respondents also clearly identified their own work ethic to be very different from and superior to their Egyptian counterparts.

Drawing on the scholarship of Max Weber I considered the early Protestant work ethic, an Islamic Work ethic and a (white) South African work ethic in my theoretical overview. Central to Weber's thesis is the notion that ideas and beliefs of a society enable the success of their economy. Although the condition of Egypt's economy was not a central concept within the study, economic activities and approaches towards economic activities invariably shape the society's economic reality. Weber, however, does not claim that there is a definite causal link between ideas (work ethic) and material conditions, but rather attempts to explain why certain societies flourished economically while others did not. Sen (1997:9) states the significance of a business ethic in this process:

This variability not only is an observed characteristic of the world as we see it, but also it affects the successes and failures and the strengths and the weaknesses of different economies. Indeed, the presence or absence of particular features of business ethics can deeply influence the operation of the economy and even the nature of the society and its politics.

Weber's comparative study aims to show how "some distinctive features that at first sight were common to Islam and Calvinism, could not be considered responsible for the particular performance of Calvinism" (Salvatore, 1996:463). It is here where I would like to situate the thesis's argument. Despite the encompassing force of Islam in Egyptian society, this study argues that the social and political climate of Egypt further contributes to an approach towards work and business. An Egyptian work ethic therefore far overrides the Quran's view on work, as is argued in the literature review, and is further constructed by the lived realities of Egyptians. Factors such as unemployment, social class, bureaucratic and elitist corruption in addition to religious fanaticism significantly influence a work ethic.

Weber's insights *vis-à-vis* religion and economic ethics, however, remain inestimable, but one's analysis of Egyptian society should in no way remain within these theoretical confines. What Weber concedes – despite the fact that he positions Islam and Calvinism almost as dichotomies –

is that both Islam and Calvinism have in common the absolute character of the faith in God's transcendence (Salvatore, 1996:464). Weber contends that the inner-worldly asceticism of Islam diverges radically from that of Calvinism which ultimately leads to the rational work ascetics of the latter. It seems, however, as suggested by Salvatore (1996:468) that Weber's main purpose is to "fit Islam into a contrastive role with Calvinism as the quintessence of western *geist* and achievement, even more so since Islam seemed to be grounded on very similar doctrinal settings". Perhaps it is worth mentioning in Weber's defence that regardless of the "similar doctrinal settings" between the two "religions", Islam (as opposed to Calvinism) seems to move away from these doctrinal settings in its application and this, perhaps, is at the crux of what Weber might have argued had he lived to apply his analysis to Islam.

It is through the ideas of scholars such as Ahmed (2002) that this study has aimed to reveal a particular facet of Egyptian society whilst focusing on religion. It is only through the understanding of Islam that one can try to make sense of a society infiltrated with religious ideas and practices. It has therefore been imperative to study Islam's approach towards work whilst considering South Africans' own religious orientations. Weber, and perhaps Marx, was among the first scholars to realise the importance of religion within society. There has been much debate following their contemplations of the normative and actualised role of religion, particularly within the Neo-liberal economic and political paradigms, within deliberations of modernisation and secularisation. It has, however, been argued in this study that ignoring religion within Egyptian society would be a monumental mistake. It is important to state, as Ahmed (2002:43) suggests that "we [do not] accept each other's, or all, religions uncritically but that we understand them in order to make sense of what is happening in global society".

In the attempt to draw accurate and relevant conclusions it was necessary to explore the micro and macro factors influencing the experiences of cross-cultural colleagues. The question, however, is to what extent the macro factors influence the micro. Notwithstanding these external factors in the formation of ideas and philosophies, one also has to consider the personality and the particular experiences of individuals in the construction of their realities. Throughout the study an emphasis on historical factors (as emphasised in a Weberian methodological approach) were given in an attempt to understand the positions from which the socialisations and internalisations of ideas were manifested. History shows that Egyptian society has a very unique

relationship with foreigners and it also has a particularly positive relationship with foreigners despite their overt reluctance towards the acceptance of westernisation on a super-structural level. South Africans, however, as Haron (2006:461) claims, also have a particular position towards the acceptance of variant ideas and diversity in general and this should be emphasised in order to understand the reactions and constructions put forth by the South African respondents. Haron (2006:461) states:

South Africans have thus found themselves in similar circumstances and have gradually shifted from a situation where missionaries were of the view that all other religious traditions except their own were false, to a position where respect and tolerance is shown towards one another in all spheres.

Notwithstanding the relevance of the above statements, the findings clearly show that there are very little significant interaction amongst South Africans and Egyptians. Respondents suggested that there exist very little trust amongst themselves and Egyptian nationals. Any attempts made by the respondents were met with challenges. Reasons provided for this lack of trust include language barriers, religious reasons and insurmountable cultural differences. Some respondents valued the role of religion as a decisive factor, where others contributed the cultural differences and distance to be impregnable. This lack of meaningful interaction may be a primary source of misperceptions and faulty conclusions.

Drawing from their experiences in the workplace, South African expatriates were asked to describe, in their opinion, an Egyptian work ethic. An Egyptian work ethic was described as one lacking initiative, creativity and independent thinking. Egyptian workers were perceived to be lazy, emotionally immature with no respect for deadlines or timeliness. South African respondents also perceived their Egyptian colleagues to experience no pleasure from work, wishing only to finish as soon as possible, and being able to drink tea and play games. The Egyptian office was also described as very hierarchical, rigid and one lacking codified rules.

Many respondents displayed an understanding of their Egyptian colleagues' behaviour as they attributed poor education, classism and a military political environment as key contributors to the development of a poor work ethic. From the findings one can also gather that there were many attempts by the respondents to emphasise the cultural distance between themselves and Egyptian

nationals. This translated into ethnocentrism on the part of the respondents as many facets of Egyptian society were criticised and perceived as irrational or ineffective.

A general conclusion made from the data analysed is that South African expatriates viewed their own work ethic to be of a much higher standard than that of their colleagues. This included many phrases comparing “us” with “them”. These examples indicate a sense of othering on the part of the respondents. A question worth asking is whether one can conclude that South Africans – in contrast to their Egyptian colleagues – have a stronger work ethic due to their cultural-religious background (PWE) or whether they appear to have a stronger work ethic due to the fact that they are expatriates (*homo economicus*) particularly placed within the Egyptian context to fulfil a particular role? The majority of South African expatriates in Cairo can be classified as *homo economicus*. This implies, per definition, that the expatriate’s primary role during expatriation is to maximise economic returns. This ‘type’ of migrant also displays little desire to acculturate or immerse themselves in their host culture. The lack of meaningful interaction contributes (I argue) to reciprocal misperceptions regarding cultural phenomena.

Vital to the discussion of Egyptian society and its work ethic are the notions of bureaucratisation, modernisation and secularisation. Costas (1958:409) claims that in Egypt, “the routinisation of charisma in a bureaucratic direction has resulted in a totalitarian order, and, conversely, a totalitarian order is an example of the routinisation of charisma in a bureaucratic direction”. Egypt’s political organisation, prior to February 2011, showcased this charismatic bureaucratisation. The absence of a rational bureaucracy, described by Weber as crucial to successful and effective modernised societies, is a vital point to consider. It becomes clear that factors such as centralised communication, promotion by merit, a codified set of rules and impersonal organisational action, to name but a few, are missing in Egyptian workplaces. Egyptian society displays attributes characteristic of tribal societies considering the presence of patriarchy, patrimonialism and charismatic bureaucracies (sheikocracy). One may therefore argue that Egyptian society displays very few traits of a modernised society which, according to Weber, is crucial if material development is to be achieved.

Respondents interviewed presented very strong opinions regarding Islam and religion in Egypt. Many were very negative vis-à-vis Islam and the manner in which the government controls the ‘mind sets’ of their people. Those interviewed commented on the dissonance between belief and application. Many important religious beliefs and customs were regarded as “indoctrination” or an “excuse”. There is therefore a definitive reluctance on the part of respondents to engage with Islam and tolerate its offshoots in the workplace.

This study has been an attempt to make sense of two different societies meeting within the offices of transnational spaces. It is in these spaces that two religions, cultures, languages and historical trajectories come together to shape the worldviews and ultimately different approaches towards work. Although this study has in no way exhausted all explanations and controlled all variables it provides us with some insight into the realities of transnational professionals. The works of Max Weber were used to provide some theoretical insights into the realities of Islam and economics. It is important to recognise some theoretical limitations to these insights and to support them with empirical data.

### **6.1. Shortcomings of study and personal reflection**

The preceding study has endeavoured to make sense of a work ethic in two varying cultural and religious settings. As mentioned in previous chapters, the qualitative nature of the methodology did not enable the researcher to control for all variables. Irrespective of this shortcoming, it was not the purpose of the research to present any relationships or causal links, but merely to explore and describe an Egyptian work ethic as conceived by South African expatriates. Although the researcher did not include Egyptian respondents in her study, it does not affect the quality of the data gathered as the purpose of the study was to ascertain how South African perceptions are created and how this adds to the global debate between Islam and the West.

It is a tremendous challenge for the inexperienced researcher to get a firm grasp on the works of Max Weber considering the vast body of Weberian scholarship. It is also a daunting task for any emergent scholar to distinguish between relevant and accurate scholarship in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Another limitation in using the works of Weber, particularly with reference to the works on Islam, is that his study was incomplete at the time of his death. “Inasmuch as Weber was the founder of the serious study of bureaucracy, the areas of confusion

that he left behind [were very likely] because his work remained in-complete” (Constas, 1958:409). As indicated, it has been my aim to do justice to the works of Weber, without falling in the methodological and essentialist traps. It is therefore worth reiterating that this study is in no way exhaustive, but rather a start in terms of Western and Islamic micro relations. It represents a contemporary exploration into the world of Islamic studies which should be taken further.

## **6.2. Future recommendations and contribution of the study**

The study’s main purpose was to extract the ideas and perceptions underlying an outsider’s construction of an Egyptian work ethic. There seems to be general consensus among South African respondents *vis-à-vis* an Egyptian approach towards work. I argue in this thesis that these ideas and opinions stem from a lack of understanding and insight into Egyptian culture and the religion of Islam. This is particularly relevant when one considers a transnational workplace where colleagues of various nationalities are compelled to work together efficiently. It is therefore my contention that managers and human resource agents of transnational companies should take responsibility to develop intercultural competence amongst their transnational workers and the host country. Not only will this ease the adjustment process for expatriates, but perhaps it would create platforms for dialogue among cultures which, in the global context, may ease tensions between East and West.

The solution, in my opinion, should begin with the adoption of basic policies for every placement agency responsible for finding employment for workers in foreign cultural environments to facilitate intercultural (and perhaps linguistic) competence. I am convinced that these proposals are relevant to business managers globally, labour sociologists and cultural experts. I believe that it is host countries’ responsibility to require and enforce cross-cultural guidance by TNCs before allowing transnational workers to enter the host environment. A mutual understanding and acknowledgment of the importance of culture and the role that cultural competence and insight will have in facilitating peace in a global arena cannot be overestimated.

There is a need to rectify misperceptions of Islam since Islamists have, unfortunately, “hijacked” Islam and promulgated a view of Islam that has placed them in the corner of inhumanity and

terrorism. I believe in the importance of these micro spaces of the transnational office where a thorough communication and cross-cultural dialogue can occur. Ahmed (2002:44) highlights the need for such dialogue:

For us, the dialogue of civilization is a necessary pre-condition to global harmony. But dialogue by itself is no solution. There has to be dialogue that leads to the *understanding* of other civilizations. For this, we have to move beyond, for example, Islam and understand the religions it interacts with: Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. Muslims are living as neighbors with these other civilizations, and are often isolated and don't understand them. The same is true of other faiths looking at Islam. Too many non-Muslims see Islam as caricature and as distorted images from press reporting. With understanding comes sympathy and compassion towards those who do not belong to our group or community or religion. For Muslims to confront the world with poise and confidence is to rediscover and even begin to repair the mainsprings of Islamic civilization. They need to re-build an idea of Islam which includes justice, integrity, tolerance and the quest for knowledge – the classic Islamic civilization – not just the insistence on the rituals; not just the five pillars of Islam but the entire building.

The South African and Egyptian cultural milieus, religious backgrounds and historical trajectories are considered to be ideological opposites. The tensions in the workplace arise because of colleagues' different worlds coming together within the delineated space of the office. An objective of the study was to identify these tensions and discover the possible explanations and philosophical worldviews underlying these differences. Hopefully, this study will be a space for cultural dialogue and promote the possibility that the cultural fault-lines might be blurred – as suggested by Samuel Huntington. As one discovers the paradigms and ideas underlying cultural actions and behaviour one can work towards understanding the differences. This is particularly true within the current global “othering” discourse which has placed Islam and Muslim societies to the fore. It was therefore the study's latent objective to emphasise what Michel (2005:355) states so eloquently:

It should be such a broad tolerance, that we can close our eyes to others' faults, show respect for different ideas, and forgive everything that is forgivable. In fact, even when our inalienable rights are violated, we should respect human values and try to establish justice. Even before the coarsest thoughts and crudest ideas, with the caution of a Prophet and without boiling over we should respond with a mildness that the Qur'an presents as 'gentle words'.

In Through the process of creating intercultural dialogue amongst members of varying cultures, particularly between Islam and the West, a two- way process is necessary: “for Muslims to explain Islam to non-Muslims and for non-Muslims to be responsive and make an effort to understand” (Ahmed, 2002:27). There seems, however, to be a reluctance among Muslims to participate in this process. This reluctance stems from the equation of westernisation with the cultural and intellectual forces of globalisation and modernisation.

Considering all theoretical approaches, empirical research and analysis of data, it is at the end of this thesis that I would like to conclude on the way forward: Firstly, it is the responsibilities of migrants and expatriates (considering the ‘type’ of migrant in question) to acknowledge the importance of inter-cultural understanding and dialogue and to value the opportunities for the aforementioned. I also hope that through this brief and limited exploration of this topic, I will inspire some interest into completing the works of Weber on Islam. Following Weber’s historical comparative method might provide valuable insights into to the relationship between religion and economies, particularly within the Islamic world.

It is through this study that I have tried to convey the message that there is a responsibility across religious and cultural fault lines both from within the Muslim world and within the non-Muslim West to address cultural and religious misconceptions. Regardless of the magnitude of such a task, I argue that this process should start in the micro spaces such as the transnational office. In conclusion, it is perhaps worth conceding that in any attempt to present fresh ideas and conclusions it is seldom that we actualise these ambitions and one can do no better than to use the exact words of Max Weber and Bryan Turner (1974:4) to end this study:

In our attempt to present developmental aspect of ... religious history relevant to our problem, we entertain but modest hopes of contributing anything essentially new to the discussion, apart from the fact that, here and there, some source data may be grouped in a manner to emphasise some things different than usual.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A: Interview Schedule

### Interview Schedule<sup>i</sup>

#### Introduction:

1. Research Topic Brief
2. Permission to Record
3. Anonymous and Confidential
4. Please answer all questions truthfully
5. May refuse any question at any time and may quit the interview at any given moment
6. Email address: If respondent wishes to validate the transcripts and receive the completed report
7. Any questions before we start?

#### Section A: Demographics:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Race
4. Marital Status
5. Nationality
6. Home Language
7. Educational Background
8. Size of the family and stage of family cycle
9. Can you speak the language of your host country?

## **Section B: Details of Expatriation:**

1. Frequency of expatriations
  - a) first expatriation?
2. Intended duration of stay
3. Duration of current expatriation
4. Have you visited your host country prior to expatriation?
5. Reasons for expatriating
6. Willingness to relocate

## **Section B: Family**

1. Trailing Spouse
2. Age of the children
3. Has the family expatriated?
4. Importance of family in making decision regarding expatriation
5. Situation of spouse: Working not working; nationality; accompanying to host country?

## **Section C: Work and Employment**

6. Did your company involve you or provide you in any cultural training before expatriation?
7. Did they provide you with any information regarding your host country and host culture prior to your expatriation?
8. Tell me about the organisational culture of your employer?
  - c) culture; b) employees; c) conflict in the workplace
  - d) What is the nationality of your organisation and most of your co-workers?
9. How would you describe the work ethic of your workplace and co-workers?
  - b) Do you ever feel that their work ethic clashes with yours?
10. Do you ever experience communication gaps or language barriers to be a problem in the workplace?
11. Does your employer organisation provide you with any support in the case of any problems that may arise?
12. Do you feel satisfied in your work environment and employment position?
  - a) why/ why not?
13. Communication:
  - a) language
  - b) difficulty in receiving exact information and data
14. Do you feel that Egyptians lack initiative?

15. Group thinking?
16. Do the Egyptians have to be pushed to get a job done?
17. Open discussion of problems?
18. Lack of imagination in problem solving?
19. Open minded in the workplace?
20. Willingness to accept responsibility?
21. Lack of industriousness?
22. Decision making
23. Trust
24. Good personal connections, friendships with Egyptian co-workers?
25. Respect for cultural differences?
26. Do you feel that the Egyptians are adequate in their jobs?
27. Do you feel that they have adequate training and education?
28. Importance of traditions and religious practices?
  - a) Does it interfere in getting the job done? / making progress
29. Planning and control?
30. Efficiency, professionalism, modernity, rationality
31. Egyptian notion of fate and destiny
32. Cultural distance
33. General job satisfaction
34. Satisfaction with pay
35. Satisfaction with co-workers
36. Satisfaction with supervision
37. Satisfaction with growth opportunities
38. Intent to remain
39. Ability to Individualism vs collectivism
40. Leadership
41. Communication – face-to-face meetings
42. Managerial hierarchy
43. Power
44. distance
45. democratic vs. autocratic
46. participative
47. assertiveness

48. work with multicultural workforce
49. Paternalism
50. power distance
51. uncertainty avoidance (rules and procedures designed to limit risk and uncertainty, intolerance for abnormal ideas and behaviors),
52. individualism (tight social frameworks, loyalty to family, friends, and the organization)
53. Masculinity/ femininity (competition and performance are somewhat valued). Culture is recognized as one of the most important variables influencing ethical decision-making
54. Capitalism and Neo-liberalism
55. Are the Egyptian co-workers easily influenced by your western values and beliefs?
56. From a very young age, children of the Gulf countries are taught the importance of loyalty and obedience. Family units teach children to restrain their individuality and maintain a harmonious atmosphere. The social order of the family serves as a prototype for conduct in business organizations. Adults emphasize sharing, co-operation, group harmony and a concern for group welfare (Morris and Pavett, 1994). Further, because people in such cultures score average on the masculinity/femininity scale, they also tend to be neither aggressive nor asserting of their ethical behavior. Consequently, employees tend to emphasize group-welfare and harmonious relationships. Because of this effort, they may exhibit similar beliefs in their judgments of ethically challenging situations. In individualistic cultures, however, variations
57. Work hard to accomplish tasks 2. Achieving tasks successfully 3. Express ideas freely and honestly 4. Supporting the goals of the organization as long as they don't go against one's principles 6. Loyalty to one's supervisor/boss 7. Complying with the professional code of ethics
58. Do you think that other South African expats would agree with you to Egyptian society? – Homogeneity of expatriates

## **Ethics**

1. Organizational Ethics in Developing Countries. Standards differ from one culture to another, and actions considered "moral" in one culture may be viewed "unethical" in another. Gulf countries are classified as high on uncertainty avoidance and power distance. People in such cultures are hardworking and obedient, and tend to yield to the directives held by superiors who establish rules and long-range plans that can shield them against anxieties about the future (Lowenstein, 1967). Such people endorse conformity and relationships more than confrontation and individuality (Singh, 1990). They do not sever existing associations and are cautious about entering new ones (Kale and Barnes, 1992) because the cost of social or organizational deviant behavior is very high in these cultures.

2. How important are business ethics issues in daily life in?
3. What sorts of issues arise?
4. Would you be able to quantify the (approximate) average percentage of your time in Egypt spent dealing with ethical issues?
5. Do you perceive your own ethical orientation to have been affected by the time you have spent in Egypt? How?
6. How did you cope?

### **Section D: Culture and Language**

1. Do you speak the language?
  - a) If yes, how and when did you learn the language?
  - b) Why did you learn the language?
  - c) If no, why do you not speak the language?
  - d) Would you like to learn the language?
  - e) What is preventing you from speaking the language?
2. Do you think that Arabic is a very big part of Egyptian society?
3. Do you think that your in/ability to speak the language influences your interaction with the nationals?
  - a) why/why not?
4. Do you often feel excluded from your workplace, individuals or society, because you are unable to speak the language? Why/ Why not?
5. Do you feel that you would better understand Egyptian and Muslim society if you were able to speak the language?
6. How often do you speak your own language?
  - a) do you miss speaking your own language?
7. Do you perceive your own culture to very different from the host culture?
  - a) why/ why not?
8. Have you visited Egypt prior to your expatriation?
9. Did you experience culture shock when you first arrived here?
  - a) do you think that your visit eased you into the culture?
10. Do you ever experience conflict in this regard?
11. Do you consider some of your host culture's practices wrong or in conflict with what you believe? Explain?
12. Do you make an attempt to learn some cultural artefacts of your host culture? Why/ Why not?

13. Do you think that you would ever accept Egyptian culture and incorporate some of their artefacts into your own life?
14. Does your newness and exoticness motivate you to learn more about the work and culture values of your co-workers?
15. Do you think there is much cultural differences around here (Denial)
16. What kinds of difficulties or problems associated with having cultural differences around here exist
17. When it comes down to the bottom-line, is it more important to pay attention to cultural differences or similarities among us. If respondent emphasizes the importance to pay attention to similarities, follow-up with,
18. What do you think the similarities are (Minimization)
19. Do you make any specific efforts to find out more about the cultures around you (Acceptance); (5)
20. Do you try to adapt your communication to people from other cultures? Does it mean anything to you to look at the world through the eyes of a person from another culture?
21. Do you feel you have two or more cultures (Adaptation);
22. Has your adjustment to other cultures led you to question your identity?
23. Do you feel apart from those cultures that you are involved in (Integration)
24. Naming the 'other'?
25. Homogeneity of Egyptian society?
26. Conceptions of time? Time and rhythm of host country's life – conception of time

## **Section E: Society and Identity**

1. Do you feel part of the Egyptian society?
2. Would you like to feel part of the society? Why/ Why not?
3. Do you make any attempts to join the society?
4. Do you think it is possible for you to assimilate yourself into the Egyptian society?
5. Would you say that you keep on the periphery or do you immerse yourself into mainstream society?
6. Do you have any friends who are nationals?
  - a) Why/ why not?
  - b) Are the majority of your friends other expatriates?
  - c) How much time do you spend with nationals? Do you enjoy their company? or are your meetings forced, i.e. non-voluntary?
7. Tell me more about the neighbourhood in which you live?
8. Do you feel strong ties with your homeland?
9. How do you maintain these bonds?

10. Would you say that your sense of identity became more visible when you expatriated?
11. Do you sometimes feel that you belong neither there nor here? Explain?
  - a) Would you describe it as a sense of homelessness?
  - b) Would you say this is a general feeling among expatriates or only you?
12. Do you sometimes feel confused or uncertain about your identity?
13. Do you ever experience feelings of alienation from the nationals?
14. Do you feel that you may have certain stereotypes about Egyptians and Muslims?
15. Do you think that they in return have stereotypes about you (Westerners)?
16. In general, how do you feel that society perceives you?
  - a) as an expatriate?
  - b) as a Westerner?
  - c) do you ever feel any animosity from your co-workers or the general public?
17. Do you feel comfortable talking and interacting with nationals?
18. Do you feel comfortable making use of local facilities and services, activities or visiting local shops?
19. Do you perceive your expatriation to be a permanent or temporary situation?
20. Do you make any attempts to settle yourself here?
21. Do you view this period as a transition phase?
22. Do you feel that you just accept things as they are because this is only temporary for you?
23. Do you perhaps feel that it is impossible for you to assimilate yourself into Egyptian culture because it is just too different from yours?
  - a) Or that you just generally do not get along with Egyptians?

## **Section F: Individual**

1. Would you say that you are someone who adjusts easily?
2. Social support?
3. Are you happy in your expatriation?
  - a) Why/ Why not?
  - b) Why don't you end your expatriation?
  - c) Are you happy in the host country? Or organisation?
4. Would you say that the financial benefits are greater than the cultural and personal sacrifices that you have made or are going to have to make?
5. Do you feel that your life is ideal – i.e. you are satisfied with the way in which you are living it?
6. Do you feel that you have had to make big sacrifices with regards to your personal ideals and goals and beliefs because of your expatriation?

7. What are your plans for the future?

- a) stay?
- b) leave? return home?
- c) change jobs?

**General questions or comments:**

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Thank you very much for your time and assistance. It is greatly appreciated. Here is my email address if you have any queries or comments: [14994437@sun.ac.za](mailto:14994437@sun.ac.za)/ [milandre.v.wyk@gmail.com](mailto:milandre.v.wyk@gmail.com)

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<sup>i</sup> Final Interview Schedule  
Compiled 2 Sept 2010