SHOP FLOOR CULTURE AND POLITICS IN EGYPT

SAMER S. SHEHATA

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For Soraya and Said

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Acknowledgments

It is sometimes said that in Egypt, nothing is permitted but everything is possible. The refrain is usually heard when discussing the difficulties of dealing with the Egyptian government. The adage applies equally well to the challenges of conducting research in the country. This book proves the adage to be at least occasionally true.

I wanted to study shop floor culture and politics in Egypt through participant observation by working in a factory as a worker. It was considered unlikely that someone could gain access to an Egyptian state-owned factory in order to undertake such a study. In the end I was able to do so, but not without some difficulty.

The Egyptian government, like other regimes, especially nondemocratic ones, views information as a valuable resource. Technically, one must obtain government clearance in order to carry out research in the country. Obtaining clearance for field research, understood broadly to include everything from interviews to site visits (let alone participant-observation), is virtually impossible. Decisions about such matters are usually made by military and security officials, not bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research. Such requests are routinely denied. Conducting research about the Egyptian government or any of its agencies can be even more complicated, as what the government considers to be matters of national security is quite expansive. State-owned factories and the people who work in them fall in this category.

Though the challenges of conducting research in Egypt have not prevented scholars from undertaking excellent fieldwork-based studies in the country, they have at times made the process more difficult. This study is no exception. For example, my fieldwork was delayed by more than a year as I attempted to go through the official—and sometimes unofficial—channels in order to obtain research clearance. Ultimately I failed to secure clearance, but I was able to obtain informal approval for the project at the local level, from factory officials and,

most importantly, from the chief executive officer of the company in which I eventually worked.

A number of people facilitated my entrée into the company and by doing so, made this study possible. Hala, Ahmed, and the entire Azab family opened many doors for me in Alexandria, including this one. Many other individuals and institutions provided different types of invaluable assistance, and I owe all of them a great deal of thanks.

The project began as a dissertation in the politics department at Princeton University. John Waterbury, Atul Kohli, and Carlos Forment served on the dissertation committee and each did all the things committee members do and then some, wherever they were, whatever the occasion, and always with good cheer. Most importantly, they provided the freedom to pursue a topic that interested me in the manner that I wanted, even if this did not closely match their own intellectual inclinations. I am grateful for their support.

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I was also fortunate to meet some of the leading scholars of Egyptian political economy while undertaking this project. Ellis Goldberg, Zachary Lockman and Robert Vitalis each encouraged me from the very beginning even though I could promise little in return. I have benefited enormously from their intellectual engagement. Joel Beinin and the late Marsha Pripstein-Posusney were also exceedingly gracious toward a younger scholar working on a topic they knew well.

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Of course, without my friends in the factory none of this would have been possible. They have been with me, whether they realize it or not, ever since my first day on the shop floor. They give new meaning to the word generosity. For in the midst of plenty generosity is one thing, but under conditions of scarcity it is entirely another. Of course, I have changed their names to protect their identities. I would especially like to thank Wagdi *al-winch*, Safwat *al-harami*, Fathy, Nabil, Karim, Said, *'Am* Sayid Rizq, Mahmoud, sheikh Ramadan and everyone else in the wool preparations department. My closest friend in the factory, sheikh Darwish, deserves special thanks. He taught me more than he will ever know.

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I was extraordinarily fortunate to meet Riem El Zoghbi on a chilly New York evening some years back. Since then, she has enriched my life beyond measure. Together with the remarkable Mr. Omar, they are my constant source of inspiration.

Notes on Translations and Transliterations

I have used a simplified form of a standard transliteration system for rendering Arabic words into English. Often the transliteration reflects Egyptian colloquial Arabic rather than the standard written language. For example, I have used the "g" rather than the "j" as appropriate (e.g., *sign* [prison] instead of *sijn*). In a few cases I have translated words based on context rather than the literal dictionary meaning. The intention throughout has been to make the text accessible to readers rather than a strict adherence to a formal transliteration system.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

No country in the Middle East, with the possible exception of Israel, has seen as much scholarly attention devoted to its workers as Egypt. The first book-length studies in English about the Egyptian working class appeared in the mid-1980s.[1] Since then, a number of important works on the subject have appeared.[2] Before this, of course, a significant literature on the history of Egyptian workers existed in Arabic, most notably the work of Rauf Abbas and Amin Ezz Al-Din among others, in addition to the personal memoirs of a number of union leaders.[3]

Despite this attention, however, we still know remarkably little about what goes on inside Egyptian factories. Moreover, much of the literature on Egyptian workers, in both Arabic and English, simply took class formation for granted. Class formation occurred, it was assumed, as a consequence of the building of large factories, the advent of industrial production, and the introduction of capitalist social relations. When class formation was not taken for granted, more often than not authors confined themselves to accounts of organized activity, "political history," and formal labor institutions. In other words, the question of class formation was approached almost exclusively through instances of strikes, labor organizations, and collective action.

What remain sorely lacking are accounts of ordinary workers and an analysis of working life.[4] Not only do we know very little about what goes on inside Egyptian factories, we know remarkably little about shop floor culture and politics and how they are related to class formation. The realms of everyday and industrial life, the social relations in production, accounts of the labor process, struggles on the shop floor, and shop floor culture have so far been all but neglected. One of the primary goals of this study, therefore, is to provide an ethnography of factory life—a detailed account of shop floor culture and politics in two factories where I worked.

Those interested in the heroic battles of a few revolutionary workers will find little of interest in the following pages. Formal labor institutions and strikes are also not my primary concern. Rather, this

book explores the everyday and seemingly trivial in order to grasp the character of social relations on the shop floor.[5] I describe a group of ordinary Egyptian workers who are unremarkable in many respects. I analyze the minutia of factory life in order to understand what it means and how it feels to work in the factory. For what people experience everyday—what they know and how they live—fundamentally shapes their consciousness and being and is, therefore, at least as important as momentary political battles or exceptional historical situations.

As an ethnography of shop floor culture and politics in two Egyptian factories, this study examines a number of issues relating to workers' experiences at work and the process of class formation. By class formation I mean how certain individuals come to think of themselves as workers as opposed to some other category of identity and how others come to view them as such, often with divergent and conflicting interests from themselves.[6] This book analyzes how working class identity emerges at the point of production; how "economic relations" are simultaneously relations of signification and meaning; and how the production of things is, at the same time, the production of categories of identity, patterns of interacting, and understandings of self and other.

What many have taken for granted—individuals becoming conscious of themselves as workers with distinct identities and interests—must, in fact, be explained. People do not become proletarians simply by entering factories or as a result of the positions they occupy in the division of labor. The traditional paradigm of structure determining consciousness, or the necessary movement from "class-in-itself" to "class-for-itself," has not held up, either historically or theoretically. As Michael Hanagan has noted, "proletarian identity does not come included as a standard accessory in the crates that bring the machine technologies to the factory floor; it has to be constructed using local materials drawn from the larger context of social life in which factory and machine are located."[7] This is as true for contemporary Egypt as it is for nineteenth-century England.

The question becomes, therefore, how is proletarian identity constructed? How do individuals come to think of themselves as "workers" and how do others come to understand them as such, often in contrast with themselves? This study explores the role of the shop floor and the importance of workers' experiences in the process of class formation. By doing so, I attempt to reconceptualize class formation at the micro-level, inside the factory, at the point of production.

Through participant observation, working as a winding machine operator in two Egyptian textile factories, I found that the social relations *in* production are essential in determining how individuals come

to understand themselves and their interests. "Worker" is a category of identity whose substantive content is produced and reproduced daily through both material and discursive practices. In this respect, social class is a system of meaning as well as a system of production. In the factory, small, everyday, mundane occurrences and practices that workers experience in common, seemingly insignificant in themselves, serve as crucial rituals in a continuous process of class formation. These common experiences and the shared culture they generate are the invisible cement that make collective identity (and ultimately organization and action) possible. This suggests that the existing literature on class formation fails to pay sufficient attention to the importance of culture and the symbolic dimensions of group formation.

The social organization of production—the way the factory and work are organized—profoundly shapes how individuals come to think of themselves and others. The significance of this should not be lost. How work is organized is not exclusively or even primarily the result of particular technologies or production processes. It is a contingent social arrangement, something that could always be otherwise. Thus, different ways of organizing production (and different rules and procedures governing social interaction in the factory) can have profound effects on what it means to be a worker and how this identity is understood.

Examining company policies and practices that systematically differentiate workers from nonworkers reveals how the organization of work contributes to the process of class formation. It is partially through these practices that the category of worker emerges inside the factory at the point of production. What it means to be a worker and how others understand this turns out to have a great deal to do with how work is organized.

Shop floor culture is also integral to the process of class formation. By shop floor culture I mean the distinctive material and symbolic forms specific to workers that develop out of the circumstances of the work hall. In the factories where I worked, for example, this included certain recurrent rituals such as tea and the particular manner in which it was consumed, forms of working class sociability (*hizar*—joking around and horseplay), verbal and nonverbal communication specific to the work hall (spoken and sign language), dress and clothing (plastic sandals), conceptions of masculinity and the particular way time, among other things, was experienced by workers. It was through such a distinctive culture that workers differentiated themselves from others, whether intentionally or not, and were themselves differentiated by others.

As well as reconceptualizing the process of class formation at the point of production (chapters 1 & 2), this book also addresses ques-

tions of power and resistance, the labor process, authority relations in the firm and the epistemology of ethnography. In chapter 3, I describe the labor process on the winding machine, the machine I worked on, analyzing the amount and intensity of physical labor required of machine operators. For in addition to producing identities, that is workers, the factory also produced goods: cotton and wool woven fabric and readymade garments. Thus, I describe how hard workers worked and analyze why they worked as hard as they did.

Getting people inside factories after all, is not the same as getting them to work. And the intensity and quality of work are never primarily the result of formal negotiations or labor contracts. Despite the existence of institutional mechanisms for ensuring a certain amount of output, workers managed to play an active role in negotiating the amount and intensity of effort they expended each day. These negotiations did not take place in boardrooms nor were they the result of collective bargaining, however. They transpired on the shop floor, each day at the machines. Workers had an arsenal of strategies and tactics, techniques and methods they employed often quite successfully to control and regulate when, how, and how hard they worked. In addition to describing how work was supposed to be accomplished, therefore, in chapter 4 I document how it actually got done.

If the factory is about the production of identities as well as the production of commodities, it is also about power. By shop floor politics I mean the micro-relations of power and authority that exist between superiors and subordinates in the factory. This, of course, includes the negotiation of effort mentioned above. The factories where I worked, typical of most factories and many organizations, consisted of a series of authority relations, a chain of command, linking superiors and subordinates.

In chapter 5, I analyze authority relations in the firm. What was remarkable about authority relations in these firms was that they were incredibly hierarchical. A peculiar organizational culture emerged in which each individual within the rigid hierarchy of authority relations became subservient to those above while dominating those below. Power was exercised arbitrarily and without limitation. By analyzing how power is generated and exercised by those who hold positions of institutional authority—shift supervisors, engineers, and most notably the chief executive officer—and describing the culture this generates, I explain the political culture of authoritarianism in the firm.

One of the objectives of this study is to convey what daily life, including work, in the factories is like. I accomplish this by paying close attention to the quotidian activities of the shop floor and the

day-to-day experiences of workers. I describe much of what transpires in the factory, at times in broad brush strokes and at others in minute detail. This is not a story about mass strikes or revolutionary workers; it is about everyday working life. The aim is to bring the social world of the factory to life.

Approaches to Social Class and Class Structure

Questions concerning the nature of social class, how it "happens" and how it is reproduced are not new. They are among the oldest, most contentious, and highly debated issues in social science. As a prelude to what follows, therefore, it will be worthwhile to briefly discuss how I understand social class, what I take to be its defining characteristics, and the traditions that have influenced my research.

Central to Marx's conception of social class is the idea that it is primarily about one's relationship to the means of production. Different relationships to the means of production come with different sets of interests. Capitalism is characterized by the existence of two primary classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. While the bourgeoisie own the means of production, workers own nothing but their labor, which they are forced to sell (on pain of starvation) to capitalists for a wage.[8] The relationship is one of opposition and structural conflict. Thus, rather than defining class as an occupational category or income level, in the Marxist tradition it is understood as a particular type of *social relation* between individuals and groups. As E.P. Thompson has noted, "classes do not exist as separate entities, look around, find an enemy class, and then start to struggle."[9] Rather, classes exist historically in relation to other classes.[10]

Marx believed that bringing large numbers of workers together in factories would have significant consequences. Workers would realize the centrality of their role within production and in the capitalist system as well as their common interests against their employers. Armed with this consciousness, workers would "form combinations (trade unions) against the bourgeoisie."[11] These organizations would eventually turn into working class political parties.[12] Living in close proximity with one another and sharing "modes of life" would further unite the proletariat and contribute to the development of a "revolutionary working class."[13] Working class struggle, coupled with the contradictions inherent in capitalism, according to Marx, would eventually lead to the system's collapse. Much of twentieth-century Marxism has subsequently been concerned with answering the question, "why no revolution?"

In addition to one's relationship to the means of production (one's "objective class position" and the set of interests this creates), consciousness, culture, and a shared mode of life (the subjective dimensions of class) are important factors in the process of class formation. Class is said to have both objective and subjective dimensions. In other words, individuals do not come to act in class ways only because they occupy similar positions in an economic division of labor. Consciousness, culture, and experience are fundamental to class formation. These two dimensions correspond to Marx's famous distinction between "class-in-itself" and "class-for-itself."

More recently there has been renewed interest in the process and dynamics of class formation. Much of this literature explicitly criticizes the "teleological" and "essentialist" aspects of the older, more mechanical conception of class formation. Ira Katznelson and Michael Hanagan, among others, reject the idea that individuals will automatically come to consider themselves to be workers, let alone organize or act collectively on this basis. Class formation, they insist, must be understood as both a "contingent outcome" and a "continuous process."[14]

What does this mean? By contingent outcome, these scholars have come to reject the teleological determinism of the traditional theory: the necessary movement from class-in-itself to class-for-itself. To say that class formation is contingent is to imply that it is an uncertain outcome and not a foregone conclusion, as earlier Marxist theorists had claimed. Instead, class formation is said to be uncertain: only one of many possible outcomes. Individuals do not necessarily come to think of themselves as workers, or exclusively as workers, and they need not act politically on this basis. To claim that class formation is a continuous process is to imply, as Zachary Lockman notes, that "it is not something that happens once and for all to produce a working class with a fixed character. It is rather an open-ended, ongoing process, as classes are constantly remolded by changing economic, political, and cultural forces."[15]

Class should also no longer be thought of in essentialist terms. Katznelson, Zolberg, and others have come to realize that for historical reasons there has been significant variation in working class formation. Not all working classes look alike, let alone think or act alike.

But we must go further. For too long, especially among more traditional Marxists, class has been understood as an exclusive, that is, all-or-nothing identity. In other words, scholars have thought of workers as *only* being workers and by doing so have denied the possibility that their identities could be complex or multifaceted. If they were not manning the barricades, planning revolutions, or reading *Capital*,

workers were somehow thought to be deficient, not conscious of their true identities and interests.

This, of course, is theoretically as well as historically problematic. While class often remains a salient feature of identity, the old ways of conceptualizing class as a singular, exclusive all-or-nothing identity are mistaken. Class and other identities are not mutually exclusive.[16] All identities, including working class identities, are never singular; they are always complex, multiple, and overdetermined.

My understanding of class structure is also quite specific and requires elaboration. Throughout much of the history of social science, the concept of structure has been thought of in opposition to agency. Structures have been conceptualized as being external to human action, as limitations and constraints on change. Agency, by contrast, is associated with freedom and choice, contingency, and the ability of individuals to act in and therefore affect the world. Like the relationship between society and the individual, the difficulty of social analysis has been formulating explanations of phenomena that overcome this antinomy.

Following Anthony Giddens, I do not take structures to exist independently of human action. All structures, including the class structure of society, must be understood as being both constituted through and the outcome of human agency.[17] Structures have a virtual nonexistence in time and space and are produced and reproduced in social interaction.

This has radical implications for how we should understand both class and class structure. By class structure I do not mean the occupational geography of Egyptian society. Neither do I take it to be about the different positions people occupy in a division of labor; languages that are often used but are essentially misleading. Nor should it be understood as a fixed, definite, rigid set of primarily "economic" relations (i.e., division of labor, level of technology) independent of the individuals who make up these relations, and radically other than human action. Like all structures, the class structure of society *exists only in human interaction*. It is not a thing, but must be produced continually through practice.[18]

This too has significant implication for how and where we should look in order to examine the class structure of society. A theory of structuration focuses attention on the realm of everyday practices and interactions. It is here, during seemingly trivial face-to-face encounters that the class structure of society is produced and reproduced.[19] Every time Fathy, for example, a winding machine operator in my department, jumped to attention, hid his broken tea glass, and saluted the engineer as the latter confidently marched onto the shop floor (always with the

stride of authority and too busy and self-important to acknowledge any of the workers), I witnessed before my eyes the Egyptian class structure *in action*, being produced and reproduced. For it is in the realm of ordinary day-to-day activities, recurrent practices and patterns of social interaction that the class structure of society is *enacted* and takes material form.

Method: Choosing Cases and Factories and the Logic of Fieldwork and Participant Observation

The research methods we employ are to a large extent determined by the questions we ask and the subjects we seek to explore. Because my goal was to examine shop floor culture and politics, participant observation was the most appropriate method. Ethnography rather than questionnaires, interviews, or archival research was best suited for studying workers' lived experiences and the social world of the factory. What better way, after all, was there to penetrate what Marx called "the hidden abode of production," on whose threshold there hangs the notice—"No Admittance Except on Business."[20]

Only through long-term participant observation would I be able to spend sufficient time observing workers and production. It was also unlikely that other methods of research would allow me to explore particular subjects. Issues like resistance, informality, and the social relations of authority, for example, were unlikely to come up in the course of interviews or conversations, regardless of how informal or relaxed. Engineers and shift supervisors would most likely be unwilling to discuss conflict or insubordination. And it was unimaginable that workers would disclose, in the course of interviews, the various shortcuts they employed in order to fulfill their production quotas in the shortest amount of time and with the least amount of effort. Only intensive fieldwork in one or a small number of locations would allow me to understand daily life and work in the factory.

Of course, it was by no means certain that spending months in one or two factories getting to know workers and observing production would lead to openness on their part or on the part of their superiors. It was partially because of this that I believed that working in the factory and more specifically, performing manual labor, would, to some extent, bridge the gap between "them" and me. After all, I was quite literally coming from a different world—the "first world," a world of privilege and the world of academia. Working alongside others day in and day out, I thought, might allow me to establish relationships that went

beyond that of simply being a "social researcher." Toiling away in the factory eight hours a day, six days a week, I hoped, would establish at least one point of commonality, albeit artificial and temporary, between myself and my co-workers. It would be one way I could make myself less different and, therefore, hopefully more acceptable.

Working on a machine would also provide experiential insight into the physical dimensions of factory labor such as fatigue, stress, boredom, noise, and exhaustion. It would allow me to get a feel for the rhythm of work and the daily routine, providing me with a sense of how hard workers work and what was required of them in terms of effort in order to fulfill their production requirements. In the end, I learned not only how to operate the machine, but also how to manipulate the institutional system that regulated production and measured output.

Working on a winding machine, keeping workers' hours, and using workers' facilities, as well as participating in the daily activities of the shop floor, led to the development of a significant amount of trust between me and other workers. Socializing on the shop floor and then later outside the factory gates gave workers a chance to learn about me and understand what I was up to, quelling many of the doubts they might have otherwise had about the purpose of my research.

This is particularly important in Egypt, as both the populace and the regime, for different reasons, have become quite suspicious of social research. As in other nondemocratic states, the Egyptian government views almost all information as potentially threatening, a strategic resource to be managed carefully—so much that the government denied my application for research clearance even before I arrived in the country. The populace, on the other hand, has grown accustomed to living under a regime that maintains a number of intelligence-gathering agencies while providing few political liberties. The government, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (the state-controlled labor organization) and company management have all been known to collect information on workers by using spies and informants. Therefore, it was essential for me to establish that I was carrying out research for a doctoral dissertation and that the information gathered would only be used for academic purposes.

I encountered more than a few problems myself dealing with the Egyptian government and the security apparatus. The funding agencies that awarded me research grants—American institutions—required that I obtain official clearance from the Egyptian authorities. But as I mentioned above, my clearance was denied, as is any research the government considers remotely politically sensitive. My first months in the country, therefore, were spent trying to get the decision overturned. I mobilized

my contacts within and around the Egyptian state. Friends and family arranged countless meetings with officials at the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Education, the Arab League and other government agencies. Finally, one particularly well-connected relative called a friend in one of the intelligence and security agencies. I was given the man's name, a meeting was set up, and I was directed to his office.

His office turned out to be in one of the most heavily guarded complexes in the entire country. As one of the agencies "handling the terrorist problem," the area was under tremendous security; it was, quite literally, a fortress. Roadblocks had been set up on the surrounding streets and the road leading to the set of buildings where his office was located had been permanently sealed off. As I approached on foot I could see a number of manned watchtowers and armed soldiers patrolling the perimeter of the building on foot. These were lean, well-fed, professional soldiers—not the illiterate traffic cops fulfilling their military service found elsewhere in Cairo.

At the entrance I was asked what I wanted and why I was there. When the officers confirmed that I had an appointment after using a walkie-talkie, I was searched, made to walk through a metal detector and then waited for someone to escort me to the man's office. A few minutes later my escort appeared, a young soldier brandishing an AK-47. We passed through a large courtyard in the middle of the complex on our way to the office. There I saw several armored personnel carriers with soldiers inside, ready for action. I also noticed several civilian cars parked there, but all of them had their license plates covered. Unable to resist asking my escort about the covered license plates, he told me, without pause, that this was so no one would be able to tell which officials and officers drove which cars, in case someone wanted to assassinate them, for example.

When we arrived at the office, another soldier, also carrying a machine gun, met us. He was waiting outside my contact's office, permanently stationed there. I had been inside Egyptian police stations and military bases before, but the level of seriousness and intensity here was disturbing, as if everyone was prepared for battle, ready for conflict. What was I doing here, I thought? All of this was so I could receive official research clearance? I later learned that this complex was the same place where Islamist and other political prisoners are tortured.

I had never met my relative's friend before. Although dressed in civilian clothes, he turned out to be a high-ranking military officer. He greeted me warmly and asked about my relative. The usual pleasantries were exchanged and a mandatory glass of tea soon appeared. He was

told that my research clearance had been denied, he explained, but he knew nothing of the research and did not know what I intended to study. I began explaining my project. After listening attentively to everything I said, he had only one response. "*Seebak min al-siyassa wa al-iqtisad—al-hagat di bi tikhrib buyut*" (stay away from politics and economics—these things are the ruin of households).

Although I eventually managed to undertake research, I never received official government clearance. I describe how I gained entrée into the factories where I worked in chapters 5 and 6. Suffice it to say here that I accomplished this the Egyptian way: informally, through personal contacts.

Friends and family arranged for me to visit many different types of factories; large and small, public and private, in a range of sectors and a number of locations. This included food-processing plants (cooking oil, milk, and cheese production, frozen vegetables, fruit packaging, and Western-style snack foods) in and around Alexandria, the 10th of Ramadan city and in the Delta region, textile and readymade garment factories in Burg Al-Arab city, the Cairo Free Zone and Alexandria, furniture and wood factories in Alexandria and the 10th of Ramadan city, a steel factory outside Alexandria, an electronic parts manufacturer in the Cairo Free Zone, and a kitchenware factory in Alexandria. I visited more than fifteen medium- and large-scale factories overall, and a smaller number of *wirash* (workshops). I made repeat visits to many of these facilities.

I conducted research in all of these factories. The primary purpose of these visits, however, was to choose where I would carry out long-term fieldwork. In the end, I chose two textile factories in the Alexandria region. My decision was based on two equally important factors. The first was where I could secure entrée and more specifically, where I could secure the type of access I desired, since it was one thing to be allowed to visit a factory once, ask a few questions, and interview a number of workers and managers, and quite another to be given permission to conduct intensive research, including working on a machine for an extended period of time.

The second factor was no less important. Although from the beginning my intention was to carry out intensive fieldwork including participant observation in only one or at most two factories, I nevertheless wanted to choose the factories carefully. Some factories are better suited to generalizing about Egyptian workers than others.[21] For example, although I had the opportunity to work in a large steel factory—a thoroughly impressive, high-tech, and extremely profitable

Japanese-Egyptian joint venture where the management style was entirely Japanese (based on teamwork and having a minimum of hierarchy)—I questioned the extent to which this company shared significant features with other large-scale manufacturers in Egypt.

For these reasons I was drawn to the textile industry and the Egyptian public sector. As a result of cotton cultivation, the textile industry is one of the oldest in Egypt, dating back to the early nineteenth century.[22] Although many other industries have long since taken root (including food processing, iron, and steel, chemicals, petroleum, pharmaceuticals), textiles, both cotton and wool manufacture for local consumption as well as export (in the form of readymade garments as well as fabric), remain one of the core areas of Egyptian manufacturing.

Textiles and food processing are the largest manufacturing sectors in the country.[23] Over four thousand textile firms employ upward of one million people, accounting for 30 percent of the industrial labor force.[24] According to the Federation of Egyptian Industries, the sector makes up 26 percent of Egypt's manufacturing output and 24 percent of industrial exports. In 1990, the value of textile production was 11 billion Egyptian pounds and by 2001 that figure reached 17.2 billion pounds.[25] The sector is also an important source of foreign revenue.[26] Textile and clothing exports were $1.4 billion in 2004 and in 2007 textile exports to the U.S. exceeded $860 million.[27]

Public sector firms dominated both textile production and employment in large-scale manufacturing after the nationalizations of the 1960s.[28] Many of Egypt's textile workers employed in large manufacturing firms, therefore, have traditionally been employed in public sector companies, although this is changing as a result of ongoing privatization. Although the majority of Egyptian workers are employed in the private and informal sector (and do not necessarily work in factories), many of those engaged in large-scale manufacturing work in public sector companies.[29]

In 1981 public sector textile companies employed more than 290,000 people, the great majority of whom were factory workers. At the time, thirty state-owned textile companies employed more than 27 percent of all public sector workers, making textiles the single largest sectoral employer of industrial workers in the country.[30] The sector has remained the largest employer of industrial workers. By 1991, textile manufacturing accounted for "nearly half of total employment in public sector industry."[31]

Although the size of the public sector has been reduced considerably as a result of privatization, it remains significant for several reasons. Privatization is politically sensitive and public sector workers have been

active in the recent wave of labor protests that began in 2006. The sector also remains significant in terms of employment and public sector debt.[32] According to a front page article in *Al Ahram* in 2006, the total debt of public sector spinning and weaving firms was 9 billion pounds. Although the number of public sector textile workers has decreased to approximately 100,000, public sector companies still dominate the spinning and weaving segments of the industry, accounting for 90 percent and 60 percent of production in these areas respectively.[33]

It was for these reasons that I decided to work in a public sector textile firm. I worked in two companies. My primary research site was an old, established spinning and weaving firm originally founded before the revolution, in 1946, by a Greek-Egyptian businessman.[34] The company, which I will call MIDIA, was nationalized in 1961 and expanded significantly thereafter. Most recently, it has been slated for privatization.

Unlike many public sector firms, however, MIDIA was profitable, producing wool and cotton fabric and readymade garments for the local and foreign markets. The company also produced blankets and military uniforms for domestic use and high-end bed linens and T-shirts for export. In 1981, the company had 10,204 employees, making it the seventh largest textile company in the country.[35] In 1996 and 1997, when I worked there, it employed approximately 9,000 people, 6,000 of whom were workers, in nine different factories scattered throughout Alexandria.[36]

Illustration 1.1. "The Wool Factory" building at MIDIA.

I worked the day shift in factory number nine, popularly known as "the wool factory," the second largest in the company. The factory employed nearly 2,500 workers and I worked in "The Combing and Wool Preparations Department," the stage directly before spinning. On my shop floor there were combing, pulling, and winding machines. I worked on a thirty-spindle, English-made "Platt" winding machine (*makanit barm*) in a production as opposed to an assembly line. I spent nine months working on the shop floor and an initial period (about six weeks) becoming familiar with the company. During this preparatory period I learned about the firm's internal structure and organizational culture, the production process involved in manufacturing woven fabric out of raw wool and cotton and, very importantly, how to operate the machine I would eventually work on.

The second company I worked in was a large textile firm on the outskirts of Alexandria. This company, which I will call Misr Textiles, was a fully integrated spinning and weaving operation, taking in raw cotton and producing finished fabric and ready-made garments for both the local and foreign markets. The firm was founded in the early 1980s as a joint venture between Egyptian and foreign capital with initial start-up costs, I was told, approaching five hundred million US dollars. The facility was massive, occupying close to 500 *feddans*[37] and included a water station and a power plant. It employed nearly 11,000 people, most of whom were shipped in daily from Alexandria and the surrounding areas on the company's fleet of several hundred buses.

I worked the day shift at Misr Textiles for one month in spinning factory number two. Before beginning work I spent an additional few weeks learning about the company. And as I had at MIDIA, I worked in the same type of department and on the same type of machine. But whereas I had previously operated a thirty-spindle winding machine (wool), at Misr Textiles I worked on two 120-spindle German-made winding machines (cotton). The basic labor process, however, was the same.

Although I used a number of different research methods for this project, only this type of fieldwork provided direct access to workers at the point of production. Participant observation was, by far, the most stimulating and original aspect of my research. Ethnography, I suggest, is also the most empirical of the human sciences, the most concrete method of investigation, without necessarily being empiricist.[38] For I "was there" in Clifford Geertz's sense, talking with workers, working in the factory and participating in everyday life.[39] I write about real people in real places based on direct observation and my

interpretations. There are no Robinson Crusoe figures in the pages that follow, no *Homo Economicus*, the figment of the economistic imagination.

Ethnography is also, in one sense, the most demanding form of social research, utilizing all of one's senses and physical being, much more so than archival research, surveys, or interviews, for example. It uniquely implicates the researcher in the research process and the production of knowledge and requires a level of involvement far beyond other methods of research. Ethnography also provides access to the "perspective of the participant" (the view from the ground or the "natives'" point of view).

Like all research however, this study is not without limitations. In addition to working in a factory, I had originally intended to live in a working class neighborhood. For although the point of production is, without question, one of the most important places where class "happens," neighborhoods, communities, and households are also significant sites of class formation. In other words, class takes place in multiple locations and is not limited to the activities of the work hall. After choosing my research site, however, I realized that there were a number of practical difficulties involved in living in a working class neighborhood. First, there were simply no apartments for rent in the areas where I had intended to live. And as a single unmarried man at the time, living with a working class family, especially one that included women (wives and daughters, for example) would have been unacceptable if not impossible.[40]

But there was another, quite telling, problem as well. Except for a handful of areas close to a few large industrial plants, it would be somewhat inaccurate to speak of "working class" sections of Egyptian cities. Although the area around MIDIA, for example, was home to a number of factory workers, it was also home to various other sorts of individuals. Low-level government employees, people engaged in petty commodity production and the informal economy, and small-time traders, among others, also lived there. Rather than being referred to as working class sections of the city, areas like this were known as *manatiq sha'beya* (popular districts).[41]

In the end, not living in a working class neighborhood made little difference for this particular project. I was engaged in research eight hours a day, six days a week during working hours, not including the time I socialized with workers outside of work. When I returned home from the factory each day I was physically and mentally exhausted. I would then spend at least two to three hours each evening (and

sometimes longer) transferring my shorthand notes and observations from the pocket-sized notebooks I carried at work into my computer. Trying to conduct additional research in a working class or *sha'bi* neighborhood in the afternoons and evenings would have been overwhelming if not impossible.

I had also hoped to transcribe long conversations, giving workers a chance to express themselves in their own words. Although I managed to do this a few times, there were several practical reasons why regularly transcribing entire conversations verbatim proved unworkable. First, I simply could not spend the entire day walking around, chatting with workers and recording our discussions. I had to attend to the winding machine and make sure it continued to run properly. When we spoke, therefore, it was often while we were working, eating, or having tea. We also spoke when we had free time or when we made free time. Second, regularly taking my notebook out and writing things down in the middle of engaging discussions or when we were simply talking to pass the time would have been awkward and unnatural. At times I did this. But more often, if I wrote down anything at all at the time, I would simply jot down phrases, sentences, and summaries of what I saw happening in front of me and then wait until later, when I was by myself (sitting on the scale next to the machine, in the workers' bathroom, occasionally in the administration cafeteria or when I went home each night) to expand upon my notes more fully.

Using a tape recorder, of course, was out of the question. Having done research in Egypt before, I knew this. But workers also told me so. Several times during informal conversations with co-workers who had become close friends, the idea of a tape recorder was brought up. Workers expressed their concerns: a tape recorder would have provoked suspicion and would have made certain conversations impossible. No one, for example, would have been willing to speak critically of their superiors, the company, or the government, let alone say anything self-incriminating (see chapter 4, "Indiscipline and Unruly Practices") if their voices were being recorded.[42]

Structure of the Book

The following chapters can be thought of as answers to a series of related questions. Chapter 2 asks, *who* is a worker and how is this identity understood in the factory? Chapter 3 asks, *what* is work and how was it supposed to be accomplished at MIDIA and Misr Textiles? Chapter 4, by contrast, asks *how* was work actually done at both factories?

Chapter 5 examines *where* work took place—meaning, the institutional context of work and how this affected workers' experiences. Chapter 6 asks an important epistemological question: *how* do I know what I know about Egyptian workers and factories? And the conclusion aspires to do what all conclusions hope to accomplish—drawing the various threads of our story together. Who, what, how, and where? These are the basic questions. I hope that by the end of the book, I will have provided at least some of the answers.

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Chapter 2

Plastic Sandals, Tea, and Time

Shop Floor Culture and the Production of Class in Egypt

Workers' Experiences at Work

Who Is a Worker?

What distinguishes workers from nonworkers in the factory? Does being a worker entail something other than working on a machine and getting one's hands dirty? Does it mean more than simply working on a shop floor instead of sitting behind a desk? In one sense, getting one's hands dirty, standing by a machine all day, or sitting behind a desk are only simple markers—markers that indicate, in a kind of shorthand, whether one is a worker or not. What it *means* to be a worker, however (not to mention "lived experience"), goes well beyond this. After all, most engineers and all shift supervisors work directly in the factory and more than occasionally get their hands dirty. Yet no one in these factories considers shift supervisors or engineers workers.

While part of what it means to be a worker is undoubtedly to work on a shop floor amidst loud machines and to get one's hands dirty, what being a worker entails, what it means, and how it feels goes well beyond a little dirt and a lot of noise. Workers are continually differentiated, and are themselves conscious of this differentiation, through a whole series of company rules, regulations, and practices. The substantive content of this differentiation, what results from the process itself, largely defines what it means to be a worker. For being a worker always means, being a worker instead of, or in relation to, something else, someone else, or some other category of identity.

In the companies where I worked, being a worker meant, first and foremost, not being part of the administration and management, and vice versa. Getting dirty and working on a machine turned out to be

only the beginning, rather than the end, of what it meant concretely to be a worker.[1]

Producing Difference

Everything from how workers get to the factory every day, to what they experience when they leave the company premises systematically differentiates them from administration and management.[2] Practices that differentiate workers are varied, but always entail privileges for nonworkers. At MIDIA, for instance, unlike management and administration, workers are not provided with transportation to and from the factory (i.e., company buses). Coming to work, therefore, often entails taking two forms of public transportation—a combination of bus, train, and shared mini-bus (*mashrew*) is common.[3] Simply getting to the factory each day involves considerable time, hassle, headache, and a not so insignificant amount of money on a worker's wage. The administrative staff, by contrast, arrives and departs from work on company buses, at no cost or inconvenience to themselves.

The importance and social significance of this should not be lost. Public transportation in Egypt is neither easy nor comfortable, and the discomfort and hassle involved in getting from place to place makes for regular conversation. Thus, the fact that administration employees and management ride in comfortable buses, with a place to sit, often assigned, next to other company employees of similar social standing, is not an insignificant perk when compared with the *bahdalla* (abuse, discomfort) that workers experience daily simply getting to and from work.

The working hours are also different for workers and the administration. Most members of the administrative staff and management work from either 8:00 or 8:30 A.M. until 2:00 or 2:30 P.M., depending on their specific position in the company.[4] Most workers, on the other hand, work eight-hour shifts. There are three eight-hour shifts; the first shift being from 7:00 A.M. until 3:00 P.M.; the second from 3:00 P.M. until 11:00 P.M.; and the third from 11:00 P.M. until 7:00 A.M.[5] Thus, during the day shift, when there is quite a bit of contact between workers and the white collar employees, workers arrive earlier and leave later than management.[6]

Whenever the company requires extra production (which is not an infrequent occurrence), many workers must work on their only day off, Friday, at $1^1/_4$ pay. Management, of course, is never required to come on their day off, work extra hours, or meet production deadlines. Additionally, it is not unusual for workers to have fewer days off for holidays than the administration and management, often receiving

fewer vacation days during the *Eid* (Feast) and sometimes working on national holidays. For instance, although the company administration, and most of the country for that matter, did not have to work on July 23, the anniversary of the 1952 Egyptian revolution, my co-workers and I celebrated by toiling away on the factory floor, in the heat and humidity of Alexandria in late July.[7]

The method the company uses to account for absences and attendance also differs for workers and nonworkers. In contrast to the common practice found in U.S. factories, workers in both factories I worked in did not punch clocks or sign in and out. Their attendance was noted by the shift supervisor who conveyed this information, in one form or another, to the *Muraqba* department (inspection or control department). On some shop floors, workers would deposit their company identification cards into a box in the morning, which would eventually get taken, usually by a worker, to the control department for inspection. Management and administrators, by contrast, sign in and out at clocks directly in front of the control office.[8]

Due to the dirt, grime, and oil of the shop floor, workers, unlike management, change into work clothes shortly after they arrive at the factory. Work clothes were not provided by the company and workers bring old clothes to wear at work. The condition of these clothes can only be described as terrible. Many of the pants and shirts workers wore had clearly been resewn at the seams and at least half of the workers wore pants with broken (and sometimes permanently open) zippers. Fathy, for example, used a rope he found in the factory as a belt. Shift supervisors usually put on white or blue coats (somewhat like lab coats) provided by the company over their street clothes.

In the factory that I worked at the longest, workers changed into work clothes at lockers that were directly on the shop floor, visible to anyone who happened to be passing by. Workers usually keep a set of work clothes and sandals in their lockers, as well as a few other items they might need throughout the workday.

Plastic Sandals

The plastic sandals that many workers wear while working turned out to be one of the most interesting and significant aspects of what it means to be a worker. As the factory produced textiles and not steel, iron, or heavy machinery, our feet did not need much protection from the machines or the activity of the shop floor, although certain machines in the weaving departments could be very dangerous. Therefore, because of the heat, grime, and humidity of the floor, coupled with the relatively high cost of shoes (shoes that, if worn for work, would inevitably wear

out quickly), most workers wore plastic sandals—of the bathroom variety—on the shop floor.[9] Sandals allowed one's feet to stay relatively cool and made cleaning up at the end of the day easy, when workers would go to the bathroom, wash their hands and scrub their feet before changing back into their street clothes and leaving work.

These sandals, more than anything else—more than the old, worn, and tattered work clothes that workers would change into after arriving at work; more than the grime and dirt on one's hands; more than whether one arrived courtesy of the company buses or along with the masses on public transportation; more than whether one signed in at the company clocks—plastic sandals worn in the factory were the most easily identifiable marker that one was a worker. Only workers, as I found out, wear plastic sandals.

Wearing sandals made so much sense that I thought about bringing a pair myself to wear while working. When I casually mentioned this while having tea with several of the young engineers in the administration cafeteria one day, their reaction was both surprising and quite revealing. The young management staff was horrified that I had even thought of doing such a thing and I was told, in no uncertain terms, that wearing sandals would not be appropriate. Their response was part of a much larger pattern of reaction I encountered from the administration. There was, quite literally, a struggle over where my loyalties were and with whom I would identify: management or labor. But this was about more than allegiance and shocked reactions. It was not simply a question of whose team I was on, but rather, another type of discourse was taking place. The young management staff implied that wearing sandals would not be "right," that it was "beneath me"—certainly beneath any of them—and "quite improper." After all I, like them, was educated. I had gone to university and had the privilege of having tea, if I wanted, in the administration cafeteria upstairs. And it was only because of my research that I found myself on the shop floor, hands dirty, standing by the machines. They were telling me, albeit indirectly, that it was socially scandalous, even shameful, to wear plastic sandals in public and at work.

What I had stumbled upon in my innocent attempt to be slightly more comfortable while working was the social importance and semiotic significance of wearing plastic sandals. Wearing plastic sandals in the company is a sure sign that one is a worker, in fact, it is *the sign* that one is a worker. It, more than anything else, says at once and unmistakably, to all who can see you, without ever speaking or uttering a word, "I am a worker!" Plastic sandals are the semiotic sign *par excellence* signifying, demarcating, differentiating workers from nonworkers.

Eating on the Shop Floor

Another practice workers have come up with in response to company constraints is the preparation and consumption of meals at work. While many employees bring food with them each day, workers, especially those working the day shift (7:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.), almost always bring enough food for at least one, and more often two, meals a day.[10] Unlike the administration and management, workers do not have access to the company cafeteria. No set lunch hour exists when they are allowed to leave the shop floor, let alone the factory, get something to eat, and return to work.[11] Thus, workers usually bring unprepared foods with them to the factory and, quite literally, prepare meals directly on the shop floor, right next to the machines.

Preparing and consuming food on the shop floor is specific to workers and thoroughly informed by the material conditions and culture of the shop.[12] For example, workers refashion old blades taken from machine tools into makeshift knives, which they use to cut up tomatoes, onions, and other vegetables. As workers are not supposed to sit down while on the job, there are no tables or chairs on the shop floor (except for the shift supervisor's). In addition to preparing food, therefore, workers create places to sit and surfaces to eat on, again using available materials from the work hall. This is accomplished creatively. Spindles used for the winding machines, carts used to carry material, buckets and barrels are all transformed into makeshift tables and chairs.

More often than not, workers eat together out of collective plates sharing what they bring to work that day and sometimes even organizing collective eating arrangements with other workers for the following day. Leftovers, if there are any, are shared with co-workers. This form of generosity, as well as others, is highly valued.

Eating on the shop floor, therefore, has a definite and distinctive feel to it. Sitting on spindles, upside down buckets and barrels or on a work cart by the side of a machine, conversation made difficult by the clamor of moving metal, eating with co-workers out of the same collective plate, never with forks and knives, is something specific to workers and the culture of the shop.

Tea

Tea is at least as important as meals. Almost everyone in the factory and in Egypt more generally, consumes several glasses a day and until quite recently tea, along with sugar, was subsidized by the state. The importance of tea and subsidized sugar is exaggerated in the factory,

Illustration 2.1. Eating breakfast by the side of the machine.

however, where tea and tea time have a special, multifaceted significance and have become a daily ritual in the life of the shop floor and its members.

The average number of glasses of tea consumed a day ranged between two and three, with very few people drinking less than two

Illustration 2.2. Fathy eats dinner, sitting on the scale, next to a cat.

glasses daily. Only one type of tea is available to workers: cheap, loose-leaf tea. Although tea bags are served upstairs in the administration cafeteria, workers actually prefer loose-leaf tea over tea bags. With loose-leaf tea, unlike tea bags, one can adjust the darkness and strength of the drink depending on how much tea is placed in the kettle or glass. And on the shop floor, workers demand that their tea be especially dark and strong, a darkness and strength tea bags simply cannot produce. In fact, tea must be so dark that one can not easily see through it and this was the test of good tea in the department where I worked.[13]

As mentioned above, tea bags are served upstairs in the cafeteria, which is open only to nonworkers. There, tea is served individually (by the glass) by a small staff of young women. Employees usually approach the counter, request their tea, and are served immediately. If a senior administrator, engineer, or an important guest arrives, however, one of the cafeteria staff leaves the counter and takes the order at the table where they are seated. As well as tea, the cafeteria offers "Turkish coffee" when available, soft drinks, and occasionally biscuits, pastries, and light sandwiches, all at heavily subsidized prices.[14]

Although thoroughly institutional, the cafeteria provided a relatively pleasant place where company staff could have a drink, socialize, and leave the monotony and boredom of their usually collective and always overcrowded offices. For white-collar employees the cafeteria was conducive to wasting time, meeting friends, and factory gossip. A large room with windows running the length of one wall, which overlooked the street and filled the cafeteria with light, comfortable chairs, round tables with table cloths (although always covered with clear plastic), a telephone, carpeting, a clean bathroom, and several fans for summer temperatures, the cafeteria provided welcome relief on my semi-regular visits.

The scene on the shop floor could not have been more different. Between the time we finished breakfast shortly after arriving at work (slightly after 7:00 A.M.) and the time the engineer came (usually right around 8:00 A.M.) the worker designated to get tea stopped what he was doing, left the factory floor, and headed toward the workers' "buffet" armed with an old, dented aluminum tea kettle that had clearly seen better days. Each shift had a fairly regular tea man, usually someone who could leave the hall without significantly affecting production.[15] My favorite tea man was Mahmoud, a short, gruff fellow in his late fifties, always unshaven and originally from *Sharqiyya* governorate. He wrapped a *kuffiyya* around his head in winter and shuffled, more than he walked, around the shop floor. About ten minutes after leaving

Mahmoud would reappear with both tea and sugar and on entering the hall announced to one and all that he had indeed returned with a steaming hot kettle of tea. Competing with the thunder and noise of the machines, which made normal conversation impossible, Mahmoud would shuffle onto the shop floor, banging the tea spoon on the kettle and yell, with a broad grin on his face, *"ya Menayfa, ya Bahayim—al-shay! ya Menayfa, ya Bahayim—al-shay!"* (Oh Menoufis, oh animals—tea!).[16] After one or two yells of Mahmoud's distinctive tea call, and noticing workmates walking quickly with glasses in the direction of wherever tea was being served that day, one realized that Mahmoud was back and it was teatime.[17]

Everyone on the shop floor, including the shift supervisor, comes and partakes in the *tea ritual* as it is a regular event in the daily life of the shift, informally marking the end of one period and the beginning of another. The actual pouring of the tea, however, is hardly an organized or systematic activity as all kinds of action, movement, talk, positioning, and banter takes place in the constant attempt to get one's glass filled first. Everyone gathered, usually the entire shop floor, wants the tea, sugar, and the spoon at the same time, and this is inevitably a source of joking, horseplay, and petty conflicts. Almost always, while whoever has the kettle pours, someone else grabs hold of the spoon and starts stirring those glasses already filled with tea and sugar. The fervency of the combined activity, the lack of coordination, the separate movements of people in close proximity, all of this usually results in spilled tea and sugar, temporary disorder or *fawda* (chaos).

In addition to the tea itself, teatime provides a chance to mill around a bit, talk, and interact with one's workmates, joke, and waste a few minutes of the workday. Discussion can range from yesterday's football matches to the latest factory gossip and news, to international events and politics. Football and the national football league, however, are favorite subjects for many, and if the discussion proves particularly interesting, whatever the topic, the gathering tends to extend in time.[18]

As well as being a break from work and a chance to hang out with work mates, tea—the way it is consumed on the shop floor—provides a much needed source of nourishment and subsidized energy during the eight-hour work shift. Tea can keep you on your feet and awake for the rest of the shift, and for many it has become an addiction. Subsidized tea has become a sacred right, one of the few workers enjoy and one that they would not easily forgo.

In short, tea and the tea ritual are tremendously important in the daily life of the shop floor. Tea not only provides workers with a momentary break, a short escape from the boredom of work, allowing

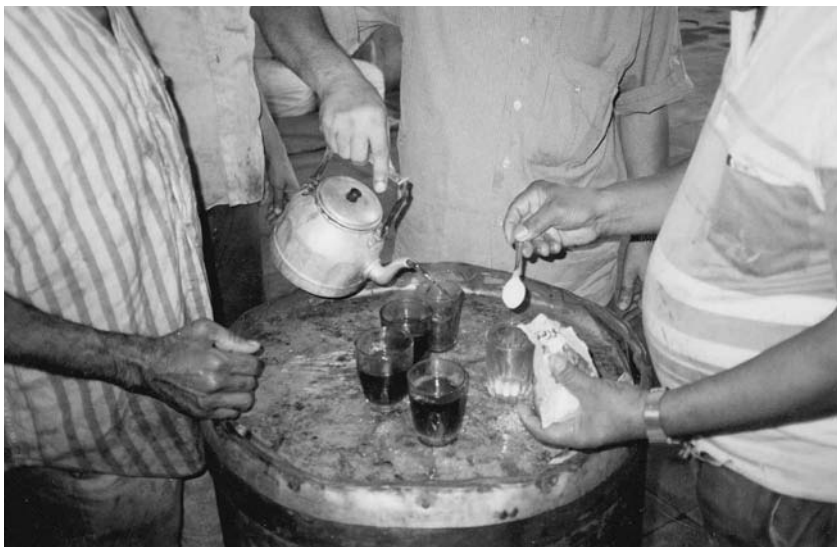

Illustration 2.3. Afternoon tea.

them to temporarily leave the side of their machines, it also provides a chance to socialize with mates, gossip, talk, and even clown around. Teatime, whether in the morning or afternoon, is always greatly anticipated and has become a regular marker in the passing of the workday. As well as structuring the day by marking the passing of time, teatime allows one to look forward to something closer to the present than the end of the shift. It provides one with the feeling that time has passed, that something has been accomplished, even if this is simply the passing of time itself.

For our analysis, tea is important not only as a ritual in the daily lives of workers. It is an essential part of shop floor culture. Tea and the tea ritual are significant not only in terms of how they are experienced by workers on the shop floor, but also because they are quite distinctively working class. Although everyone in the factory, and for that matter in the entire company, from the lowest porter to the chief executive officer, has tea each and every work day, the particular way tea is consumed on the shop floor clearly distinguishes workers as a group from nonworkers. Only workers wash their glasses with their own hands directly on the shop floor, rubbing the inside of the cup with their fingers and then splashing water on the factory floor, as if in a coffee shop.[19] The pushing, shoving, and jockeying for position around an overturned *istawana* (barrel), the playful fighting for an

extra spoon of sugar, the splashing of water on workmates, all of this only occurs on the factory floor. The chaos and rowdiness of the shop floor tea ritual could not be more different from the polite, respectable decorum of the middle-class cafeteria upstairs where the young cafeteria staff politely ask how many spoons of sugar you would like and where tea is consumed sitting on a chair, behind a table.

EXITING THE FACTORY

One of the most striking and dramatic ways workers are differentiated from management, however, has to do with what they experience on their way out of the factory each day. Almost all employees enter the company grounds through the same large, open-air entrance. A gate is opened at the beginning and the end of the work shift separating the street and the company grounds. All employees pass through the gate on their way into and out of the company. On their way out of the factory, because they have changed back into their street clothes, the difference in appearance between workers and administrative staff and management is not as great as it was minutes earlier. What happens to workers and white-collar employees, however, and what each experiences upon leaving the factory, could not be more different.

White-collar employees walk through the gates past the usually smiling security guards. If they happen to have a bag with them they open it briefly for the guards to cursorily check the contents. Very rarely, however, do the security guards thoroughly search their belongings.[20] Workers, by contrast, not only have their bags searched, and searched more thoroughly I might add (by security guards who are usually not smiling), they also stand in lines and are physically searched—that is, they are frisked or bodily searched—before leaving the company grounds.[21] For the most part, these searches are routine, quick, not terribly thorough, and a regular, if not taken-for-granted, part of what workers experience at work each day.[22]

As well as offending my sensibilities (my sense of fairness since only workers were singled out for body searches in addition to the physical awkwardness of having someone pat their hands all over your person) at first, the idea of bodily searches did not seem terribly sensible to me, since what, after all, could a worker possibly sneak out of a spinning and weaving factory? (I worked on a machine that was approximately 25 feet long.) Certainly a worker could not leave with a roll of woven fabric! Although we joked about this, the topic had a special relevance in the department where I worked as discussion and laughter were grounded in something that had once happened, and was not forgotten, to a fellow co-worker.[23]

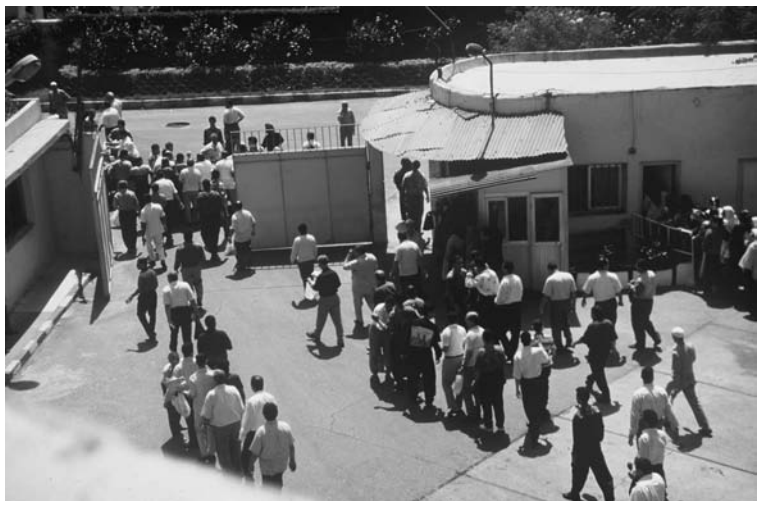

Illustration 2.4. Employees are searched as they exit the factory.

Eight years ago a mechanic named Safwat was caught with a machine counter in his pocket as he was leaving the factory (a machine counter [‘*addad*] is a device that counts how many rotations the machine has done in a particular time indicating, for instance, how much material is on a spindle). Apparently, a particularly kind engineer was exiting the factory at about the same time and intervened so that the security guards would not report poor Safwat to the higher-ups. From that day onward, Safwat has been constantly teased about this incident. His name was transformed throughout the entire factory, from Safwat to “Safwat *al-harami*” (Safwat the thief). In fact, once during my shift several engineers were commenting on how most of the counters in our department (and throughout the whole factory for that matter) were old, broken, and no longer functioning. One of the engineers jokingly remarked, “go tell Safwat to bring one (of his) from home!”[24]

Wages and the Payment System

Wages and the payment system are yet another important way in which workers are systematically differentiated from management. First, workers’ wages are less than the already dreadfully low salaries paid to administrative staff and management. Second, the basis, frequency, and method of payment are substantively different as well. While most administrative staff receive a monthly salary, workers are paid a daily wage, which varies depending on job classification, seniority, and

individual output.[25] While administrative staff are paid monthly, workers are paid four times a month; two times for basic pay (*al-muratab al-assassi*) and twice for "incentive pay" (*hawafiz*).[26] Basic pay is usually distributed on or around the 1st and 15th of the month, while incentive pay is distributed on the 7th and the 23rd of the month.

Most interestingly for our purposes, however, is the actual method of payment or the way in which wages are distributed. Whereas workers endure long lines and are paid in public, management is paid discreetly and with a minimum of hassle. Almost all white-collar employees are greeted each month by a company payment employee who visits every office. This person hands each employee a sealed envelope bearing his name, whose contents include a pay receipt and, more importantly, their salary in the form of cash. The way wages are distributed to workers could not contrast more sharply.

Although workers know on approximately which days they will be paid, they do not know exactly when during the day they will receive their wages.[27] When the "pay man" is spotted walking onto the company premises with an escort and an old, beat-up suitcase filled with thousands of pounds, the news quickly spreads, by word of mouth, throughout the entire factory.[28] On payday, workers run to their lockers on the shop floors (while yelling to their co-workers that the "pay man" has arrived) to fetch their company identification cards, thus beginning the burdensome and time-consuming process of actually getting paid.

Once they have their company identification cards, workers must go to the control office on the ground floor of the factory, wait in line, and pick up their pay stubs. Then they head upstairs to an empty, neglected room devoid of all furnishings except for a table and two chairs on the second floor of the factory. It is here that the two company payment employees sit behind the table, one with a list of workers and the other with a suitcase overflowing with money. The workers then wait in what are always two exceedingly long lines, usually extending well outside the room and into the hall.

At the end of the first line workers must show their pay stubs (and in theory their factory identification card) and sign indicating that they have received their wages. After finally reaching the front of the first line, showing their pay stubs and signing, workers then have to make their way to the back of the second line. This also usually extends outside the room, where they must wait some more. This line, however, is what it is all about. For at the end of the second line, workers finally receive their wages—that is, if the money in the suitcase has not run out.[29] Once they finally make it to the front of

the second line, workers hand over their pay stubs and the employee in charge of disbursement counts out the amount of cash that equals each worker's wages for that period. This occurs in front of everyone else in the room. When the money is handed over, workers usually recount it, there and then. Often when workers return to their shop floors, they recount their money again, checking wages against the specifics of the pay stub.

The payment process involves workers physically moving about the factory, going to several different locations and standing in what are inevitably long lines. The process can be slow and irritating, not to mention inefficient from the perspective of lost labor hours. Nevertheless, many looked forward to the opportunity to walk about the factory wasting a few minutes, getting away from their machines and shift supervisors, and off their shop floors.

Because workers have to leave their workstations, stand in line to receive their pay stubs, and then go to the second floor to receive wages, some kind of permission, tacit or otherwise, is needed from their shift supervisor. Naturally, the shift supervisor never allows all his workers to leave the shop floor at the same time. Therefore, one or two individuals often went and collected the pay stubs for an entire department. To receive their wages, however, workers needed to go upstairs, stand in line, and sign in person.

I wasn't the only person to notice the stark contrast in the actual mechanics of the payment process. Occasionally, workers would complain about how they got paid in comparison to management and the administration. *Sheikh* Darwish, a 54-year-old Nubian mechanic who had worked in the company for 39 years, and Nabil, a winding machine operator and a 30-year veteran of the factory, often grumbled about how "employees (*muwazafeen*) have it much better . . . they get an envelope with their salaries in it whereas we stand in two lines!"[30] Both looked forward to getting paid, but neither looked forward to the ordeal they had to go through before receiving their pay. Although many workers did not specifically criticize the payment process as being a thoroughly *public* event (getting paid in cash and having their wages counted out in a crowded room in front of others), I suspect that for some the awkwardness and possible humiliation of such a public transaction was an issue.[31] One only needed to compare the scene in the packed room full of anxious workers still in their tattered work clothes, standing in long lines waiting to get paid in cash in front of their fellow workers, with the professional, "respectable" and discreet manner in which white-collar employees received their pay to understand sheikh Darwish and Nabil's criticisms.

Time and Wages

One of the more interesting consequences of the company pay system was how workers thought and talked about time, their sense of concrete time and how they experienced its passing. As mentioned earlier, workers received their wages twice a month (not including incentive pay, which in this factory was significantly less than basic wages and therefore that much less important), usually on the 1st and the 15th of each month. The fourteen days in between each payday are known and referred to by all workers as the *muda*, the pay period.[32]

The muda, therefore, is the period of time for which workers receive their wages and workers speak and act in terms of the muda. The muda, quite literally, structures their sense and experience of time not only on the shop floor, but also well beyond the factory gates. Workers talk and think in terms of the muda in terms of how they organize their lives and the lives of their families. Whenever they think of the future—purchases, savings, or paying off debt—the muda is their familiar frame of reference.

Of course, one of the primary reasons that the muda and consequently the end of the muda or payday (*al-abd*) holds such a central place in workers' and their families' lives is their lack of economic security.[33] Many live, quite literally, from one payday to the next. The end of the muda and the arrival of payday, therefore, is a real *event*. It is noticeable even to an outsider who has only witnessed regular workdays because of the variety of activities associated with the disbursement of wages.

What exactly goes on during payday? In addition to the usual commotion as workers embark on the long process of actually receiving their wages, several different types of activities, all relating to money, take place as a direct result of the disbursement of wages. First, all informal savings societies or *gam'eyas,* are organized around the end of the muda and payday. Gam'eyas are extremely popular and are the most common way workers attempt to save money.[34] At the end of the muda everyone in the gam'eya, sometimes numbering upward of forty, pays the agreed upon amount of money to the society where it is then distributed to the fortunate person whose turn it is to collect the money that week. This usually entails someone in the gam'eya, designated at its inception, collecting the payments throughout the factory.

The face of the factory is transformed in other ways on payday. While the informal economy is always present in the background of factory life—from individuals selling pirated cassette tapes to others selling everything from clothes, bottles of *tahina*, packages of tea, and

cartons of cigarettes (sometimes on credit)—on payday the informal economy springs to life and is everywhere visible. On this day, some company employees who engage in informal economic activity (selling things in the factory for extra money) literally walk around, from shop floor to shop floor, office to office, hawking their wares. Others have regular customers they visit at the end of each muda. Sometimes on payday someone will approach you, show you what they have to offer, a sweater or shirt for example, let you examine it, tell you where it's from and that it's a good deal, and attempt to make a sale. For some, payday simply means walking over to the worker who sells cartons of cigarettes on credit (only Cleopatras of course, the least expensive local cigarettes) and making a purchase. Whatever the form, the factory's informal economy emerges to the foreground, to center stage, on payday.

Payday is also an occasion to settle debts and pay off loans. Wages are low, life is expensive, and getting into a jam isn't difficult. Borrowing money from a co-worker, a friend in the factory, or a relative outside is, therefore, relatively common. Usually, relatively small amounts of money are involved and if the loan or debt is to be paid off in installments, which is frequently the case, payment occurs at the end of each muda, on paydays. Similarly, if a worker (or an employee) has made a purchase from the annual company sale (such as a television, refrigerator, or clothing), deductions from wages are made at the end of each muda.

For all workers, however, the end of the muda has a special significance simply because it entails getting paid. No matter how inadequate wages are, workers can feel a little bit better leaving the factory on payday, even if only temporarily. Often the end of the muda means something out of the ordinary for workers, something they associate with getting paid. Fathy, for example, my workmate on the winding machine (or *barm*) looked forward to payday not only because he was getting paid, but also because he treated himself on this occasion. Like the great majority of workers, Fathy held a second job in the afternoon. In his case, relatively unskilled except for his knowledge of the winding machine, this entailed hauling cartons of fruit and vegetables on his back at the wholesale market. When Fathy worked the day shift, he would leave the factory at 3:00 P.M. and head directly for the market where he worked until 8:00 or 9:00 P.M., depending on how much work there was, and went home terribly exhausted after that. When Fathy worked the afternoon shift, beginning in the factory at 3:00 P.M., he would spend his mornings (8:00 A.M. until the early afternoon) working at the wholesale market. On paydays, however, he gave himself a break

from his second job, backbreaking as it was, and went straight home from the factory. For Fathy it was a vacation, *"nuss yuwm shughl!"* (a half day of work!), as he would say.[35]

Not only is the company pay system (the muda and payday) extremely important in the lives of workers, the muda and payday structures, at least partially, how workers experience time and perceive its passing. Workers speak, plan the immediate future, and act in the present in terms of the muda. They save, pay debts, make purchases, live and "enjoy life" in relation to and through the category of the muda and the company pay system. Payment into gam'eyas and savings, as well as that lucky day when it is your turn to collect the gam'eya money, are inextricably associated with the muda. Buying things from the informal economy in the factory and settling old debts, not to mention purchases outside the factory, are also regulated by the muda. The muda, and therefore "company time," has become forever internalized. It is a basic category, a taken-for-granted event, part of the essential structure of the worker's social world, affecting their very experience of time.[36]

While one could include many other company rules and procedures, those described above are essential for differentiating workers from management and producing and reproducing the category of worker. As well as the formal and informal ways management practices actively distinguish between individuals within the company, thereby creating the specificity and content of this category, workers themselves, through a distinctive shop floor culture and habitus, also actively produce and reproduce their identities as workers in relation to management and the administration. Before turning to this process of "self-making" and identity formation, however, I will briefly discuss the structure of the workday and what most workers experience collectively each day in the factory. This section will describe the daily, routine activities workers engage in other than work—what workers experience every day and how work feels—and provide the reader with some sense of the structure and experience of time for workers inside the factory.

The Structure of the Workday

The workday has a definite and perceptible rhythm to it, based on regular events that help divide the day, thereby structuring the passing of time internal to the workday itself. By describing what takes place during the workday I hope to provide some sense of what workers experience in the factory and on the shop floor; how work feels, and the structure of time at work. Although the order of some of the activities

I describe below can vary depending on the department (i.e., when the tea ritual is enacted), for the most part the daily events and routines occur in roughly the same order and time for most workers.

As mentioned above, workers at MIDIA were not provided with transportation and, therefore, had to get to work on their own. This usually entailed taking several different kinds of transportation. But before getting on the bus or train, workers would bring food with them from home as well as buy food on their way to work. If vegetables were to be brought (i.e., tomatoes, onions, peppers, lettuce, parsley), these would usually come from home. Bread, *fuul* (fava beans) and *falafel*, however, were always purchased on the way to work, arriving at the factory warm. A local *sha'bi* (popular) market (*'Izbit Hassan*) was located in the immediate vicinity of the factory and some workers chose to arrive a little early and purchase food items from there. As well as the usual fare of fuul, falafel, and bread, fried potatoes, pickled vegetables, cheap sweets (*hareesa*), and other types of street food were available.[37]

Trains, buses, and other forms of public transportation either rarely ran on time or did not follow set schedules. Because workers did not want to arrive too late each day, many would purposely make it to the company a few minutes early. When workers arrived early they usually stood outside the company grounds or found a place to sit and chat with others just outside the main factory gates. Even after the bell rang, proclaiming the end of one shift and the beginning of another, many would mill around outside, stealing another minute or two of freedom before eventually passing through the factory gates. These minutes provided a chance to gossip and catch up with friends and co-workers who worked in other departments or areas of the factory.

It was important not to arrive *too late* to work, however. For after 7:10 A.M., the flow of workers walking through the factory gates visibly diminished, making anyone entering after that time noticeable and possibly "late," depending on the discretion of the security guards.[38] As workers walked onto the company premises, the security guards stood somewhat attentively, monitoring those who entered as well as those who left.

Once on the company grounds, many would mill around in front of the elevators, read the notice board outside the entrance of the factory's main building, or talk to co-workers outside their shop floors for a few minutes before eventually making it to their work areas. On the shop floor, greetings were exchanged between workers before or while they changed into their work clothes at their lockers. Although greeting, or at least acknowledging acquaintances and all co-workers

on one's shop floor was important, greeting one's shift supervisor was especially important, almost mandatory. For the most part, *workers greeted* their shift supervisors and not the other way around. This was seen as a sign of respect and considered particularly important if one wanted to stay on the shift supervisor's "good side."[39]

After making it to work, exchanging greetings and gossip, reading the notice board, and changing into one's work clothes, preparing breakfast was the first serious work of the day.[40] Before breakfast could begin, however, preparation, including washing plates and vegetables, preparing the food, a place to eat and something to sit on (makeshift tables and chairs), had to occur. Some of these activities took place directly on the shop floor while others were often performed upstairs in the workers' bathroom (washing plates and vegetables).

The first tea ritual took place shortly after breakfast. This involves someone leaving the shop floor and bringing back a kettle of dark, hot tea from the "workers' buffet." As described earlier, the ritual usually involves everyone on the shop floor, including the shift supervisor.

What is particularly important for our purposes, however, is the timing and order of activities. Tea on the shop floor is a kind of liquid dessert, especially as a result of the amount of sugar many workers placed in their tea, and must come *after* breakfast. Because the engineer arrives in the department around 8:00 A.M. each morning, both activities must take place before that time. Preparing breakfast, cleaning and cutting vegetables, sitting down and eating, and spending time around an overturned barrel drinking tea are all technically not permitted in the factory and all of these activities, therefore, must be completed *before* the engineer appears, around 8:00 A.M. Thus, workers have between the time they enter the shop floor (usually around 7:10) and the engineer's arrival to prepare and eat breakfast and have their tea as well as everything else they do in the morning; all of these activities are planned, undertaken, and timed accordingly.

Engineer Abdo Farag was responsible for our department and would arrive precisely a few minutes after 8:00 A.M. each morning. In his sixties, he had been working in the company for approximately forty years. Abdo Farag held a high position in the administration and was well respected, known to be both knowledgeable and serious about his work. More often than not, someone would spot the engineer outside the shop floor making his way in our direction. This information would then be quickly conveyed to us, either by hand signals or word of mouth. If workers were not already standing up when he arrived, they quickly rose to their feet. And although "Abdo Farag" (as we call him) made no effort to look at us (the workers), not only

did we stand up when he arrived, we stood at attention.[41] As soon as the shift supervisor saw or heard about Abdo Farag walking onto the shop floor, he walked toward the engineer and greeted him, whoever the shift supervisor happened to be that day.[42]

Often, workers are still drinking their tea when the engineer appears and everyone makes a conscious effort to make tea consumption less obvious and appear as if they are busily working. Both Abdo Farag and the shift supervisor then walk over to the new shipments of wool as well as the previous day and night's work, where the engineer looks over both and gives orders concerning what he wants done. If any papers need to be signed or information conveyed between the two men, it is done at this time. The engineer's departure is greeted with some relief, allowing all of us, especially the shift supervisor, to take a deep breath, sit down, and take it easy again, marking the end of a distinct, if informal, period in the daily life of the shop floor.

The next event that takes place with regularity is the mid-morning tea, the second tea of the day, which occurs sometime between 9:30 and 9:45 A.M. Like the first tea, everyone participates in this tea ceremony. I, however, would sometimes take this opportunity to go upstairs to the administration cafeteria at this time in order to speak with managers, engineers, and administration staff. This habit began when a group of young white-collar employees, several of whom were in charge of showing me around the company and its factories during the first month of my fieldwork (before deciding where I would eventually work) invited me to the administration cafeteria to have tea, talk, and help them with their English. This became a fairly frequent occurrence, one that I looked forward to for several reasons. In addition to giving me some relief from the deafening noise of the shop floor and a glass of strong coffee, which was available nowhere else in the factory, these semi-regular visits provided me with much general information about the company, the working life of white-collar employees, administration gossip, and general insight into how they viewed workers, top management, and the firm. My time in the administration cafeteria and my interactions with white-collar employees provided a significantly different perspective of the company, company politics, and production from that of the shop floor.

The collective noon prayer, in the back of the work hall, was the next regular event in the life of the shop floor. Prayers always took place sometime between 12:00 and 1:00 P.M., depending on the time of the year. Before prayer, workers would individually make their way to the workers' bathroom on the second floor where they would wash and perform ablution before returning to the factory floor. Although

some administrators performed the noon prayers together, workers who prayed always prayed together with their shift supervisors, somewhere on their own shop floor.[43] A worker would yell the call to prayer over the sound of the machines, more often than not only faintly audible. The workers then gather in the back of the hall in an area where prayer regularly took place. One or two men would lay out mats on the factory floor that the workers in my department had purchased together, with their own money. Not everyone participated in the noon prayer and those who did not included Coptic Christians as well as a handful of Muslims.

Lunch usually took place directly after prayer and since it consisted of breakfast's left-overs, it required less effort. Not everyone ate lunch, however, as some preferred to wait until they left the factory to eat a more substantial meal at home with their families. Some workers did both, eating a small lunch after prayers and then another cooked lunch (*tabeekh*) at home. And like breakfast, the final tea of the day was consumed *after* lunch. Although not everyone participated, a smaller scale tea ritual always took place.

Between the final tea of the day and the time workers slow down, turning their machines off and cleaning them, there are no regularly scheduled events and one could almost say it was a period of uninterrupted work—almost. Then, somewhere between 2:10 and 2:20

Illustration 2.5. Afternoon tea on the shop floor.

P.M. most workers finish up. Finishing included more than stopping the machines and cleaning them. It also meant going upstairs to the workers' bathroom, usually with soap and a rag, and washing one's hands and sometimes one's feet and hair. Some workers would spend a few extra minutes in the bathroom, speaking with people from other departments and smoking the last cigarette of the workday. Workers then return to their shop floors and change back into street clothes at their lockers.

By this time it was usually between 2:30 and 2:40 P.M. and once workers got out of their work clothes, they would find a place to sit down. In my work hall, this was usually on a cart by the back entrance of the shop floor, which opened up onto the company courtyard and provided workers with an easy exit to the factory gates. As well as chatting, telling jokes, and talking politics with workmates and the shift supervisor for a good ten to fifteen minutes, tea accounts were also settled at this time. Everyone would approach the worker who brought tea that day, go over how many glasses they had and pay—five piasters a glass. And because our department was located on the ground floor and the back exit led directly to the factory gates, workers from shop floors located farther away would often come and sit with us so they could be closer to the exit when the bell rang. This was, of course,

Illustration 2.6. Waiting for the bell to ring.

against company rules and occasionally someone from the control and inspection department made rounds checking to see if people were waiting illegally on our floor.

When the bell finally rang at 3:00 P.M., there was a mad rush through the door to the factory gate. It seemed like the end of the shift never came soon enough and everyone wanted to leave the factory as soon as possible after the bell rang. One young engineer once remarked that in the morning, when the workers enter the factory they all look depressed and unhappy while in the afternoon, when they leave, "they look like they are going to the cinema!"

Unlike the morning, workers would run down the factory steps instead of waiting for the slow moving elevators. In some cases, this meant coming down nine floors (and in a factory with very high ceilings, one flight of steps was significant). When the bell rang, the stairwell was a dangerous place to be as workers ran down the steps at frighteningly high speeds. Before leaving the company grounds, however, there was still one more process to go through—being searched at the factory gates. With so many workers and relatively few security guards, workers would often form lines and wait to be searched. Once through the gate, however, you were free, at least temporarily, until your next job.

This was the structure of the workday for workers, day in and day out. Getting to work each day, buying food, arriving at the factory gates, small talk and chit chat, reading the notice board, exchanging greetings with co-workers and the shift supervisor, breakfast, tea, the engineer's inspection, mid-morning tea, noon prayers, lunch, afternoon tea, slowing down and cleaning up, waiting for the bell and exiting the factory. All had an order and regularity that went well beyond any individual worker's conscious agency or control. The structure of the workday and the order of these activities had become internalized by most, appearing almost as natural as the passing of the day itself. And because this factory was part of an old and established public sector firm, many had worked in the company for more than thirty years and had experienced this structure for decades.

Workers experienced the passing of time during the workday not primarily as the passing of abstract time (the passing of minutes or hours) but as the passing of these regular events in the daily life of the shop floor. While I am certainly not claiming that the workers in this factory, or workers in Egypt more generally, were like Evans-Pritchard's Nuer—without any conception of abstract time—I am claiming that time during the workday was, in large part, experienced as the passing of recurrent events and activities, which because they were so structured,

regular, and routinized were thought of, spoken about, and experienced *in relation to each other*.[44] Thus, time was measured largely by reference to the daily activities associated with the workday itself and the relation of these activities to each other. Breakfast, the tea ritual, the passing of a certain engineer, the noon prayers, washing up, changing and waiting for the bell, and so on, all had significance in terms of time *independent of the clock*. In fact, there were no clocks on the factory floors. The only clocks in the entire factory were the time-clocks where the white-collar employees signed in on their way in and out of the factory, and those in the administration cafeteria. When a worker returned after leaving the shop floor for a few minutes, he didn't ask what time it was. Instead, he asked if Abdo Farag had come, whether we had finished with prayer, or whether the last tea had been served. This was the case not because he was necessarily interested in Abdo Farag, prayer, or tea, but because he knew the precise relation between these regular events and their position within the larger structure of the workday. Even when workers had watches (which was not always the case), time was experienced primarily as the flow of activities themselves rather than the passing of minutes or hours. This was the case both at the level of the individual workday and over larger stretches of time, beyond the workday and the factory gates, in terms of the muda.

Of course, this phenomenon is not specific to this particular set of workers or workers more generally but extends to individuals and groups enmeshed within certain types of institutions and their structures. Teachers and pupils also experience time in particular concrete forms—as the passing of particular "periods" in the day, for instance. What is noteworthy, however, is the *extent* to which the experience of "company time," both within and beyond the individual workday, had become internalized and the most common way workers thought, planned, spoke, and acted in relation to time. And because of the company pay system and the muda, workers took company time with them outside the factory gates.

Shop Floor Culture

Religion and the Institution of Sheikh

Religion manifests itself in multiple ways on the shop floor. In both factories where I worked the overwhelming majority of employees were Muslim. Islam—and religion more generally—was held in high regard, even by those who were not outwardly religious. No one, for example, denied the importance of religion, joked about the subject, or attempted to justify behavior that violated Islamic principles. And no one was

willing to defend secularism. Even workers who never participated in the daily noon prayers, for example, often said that they hoped they would become more religious in the future.

As well as being one important feature of workers' identities differentiating Muslims from Coptic Christians and Muslim Egyptians from "the West," for example, religion also played many of its standard functions.[45] Islam was an integral part of a system of thought, or worldview, that both prescribed certain ways of acting in the world while providing answers to many of life's most difficult questions. Islam also manifested itself directly in the form of a number of standard rituals and practices, including the usual religious references in daily speech (*alhamdulillah*, *insha'allah*, *masha'allah*, etc.), collective prayer (and all of the activities surrounding prayer, i.e., ablutions, the call to prayer), the use of Islamic history and *hadith* (sayings of the prophet) to support arguments, and occasional discussions of Islamic history. One of the most peculiar and interesting aspects of religion on the shop floor, however, was the institution of sheikh.

What was remarkable about the institution was that it was completely informal. In other words, there was no explicitly agreed upon process through which the title was conferred. Despite this, there was very little if any ambiguity, confusion or disagreement regarding who the *shuyukh*[46] in our department were. Everyone, for example, knew that Darwish, Ramadan, and 'Abary—and only these three—deserved the title in front of their names. On our floor, no one else received this honorific of respect. Yet none of these men had ever applied, formally or otherwise, or had been nominated, for the title.

The title of sheikh came with a fair amount of status. It was a mark of esteem and dignity, as well as a source of power and authority. Being a sheikh affected one's interactions with workmates and shift supervisors. Among workers, shuyukh were often looked up to as pious individuals and men of religious knowledge. As such, they commanded a fair amount of respect and deference. This ranged from workers who at times sought out their counsel and advice, especially concerning religious matters, to individuals who would occasionally ask shuyukh to mediate small disputes between themselves and others. The thinking, of course, was that shuyukh were particularly honest and could be trusted to render judgments or propose solutions that were impartial and just to both parties.

Being a sheikh affected social interaction with co-workers in other more subtle ways as well. The status and respect that came with the title (and the religious foundations of this) limited the type and extent of *hizar* (horseplay and joking around) that took place between workers

and shuyukh. Hizar is an integral part of shop floor culture that occurs frequently and can take multiple forms. Workers, however, simply could not (or at least, were less likely to) joke around in the same manner and with the same intensity with shuyukh as they could with others. Humor regarding sex, playful insults, and the pushing and shoving of physical horseplay, for example, were less likely if not completely inappropriate between regular workers and shuyukh.

The title also affected the character of social relations between shuyukh and their shift supervisors. Being a sheikh had its privileges. It meant that supervisors could not be as harsh, condescending, or insulting as they could normally be with other workers. Although shift supervisors, for example, often addressed and referred to workers as *ya wala* (boy) followed by their name (as in *ya wala* Sayed), they did not do this with shuyukh. The very title denoted that precisely because of religious learning and faith, a sheikh was definitely not a boy (not a *wala*). Shuyukh were either referred to simply by their names or, at times, with the honorific title of sheikh placed before their names. Similarly, shift supervisors were never as verbally insulting or physically abusive with shuyukh as they were with regular workers.

After working in the factory for more than a month I decided to probe the mechanics of this highly established and well-functioning institution more directly. I began questioning workers about the characteristics of shuyukh and how it was that someone became a sheikh. At first I encountered a fair amount of puzzlement, but then people were able to make their knowledge of the institution more explicit. Although it was never discussed as such among workers, when I brought up the question of the characteristics of shuyukh in conversations with workers on my shop floor as well as in other departments, the answers I received were remarkably similar.

Most workers focused on a few recurrent qualities. A sheikh, it was said, was a person who "*bi yifham fi al-din*" (is knowledgeable in religion, meaning Islam) and this usually meant that the individual knew a fair amount of the Quran and a significant number of *hadith*. People also said that a sheikh was someone who *"bi sulli fi ma'ad al-sulla"* (prays when it is time to pray—implying that shuyukh perform all of the required prayers). Shuyukh were also said to be righteous individuals who acted without bad intentions and were able to give good, ethically and morally appropriate advice.

Omar Sa'ad, a miscellaneous worker in my department who also sold pirated cassette tapes in the factory to make extra money, elaborated even further on the attributes of shuyukh. As well as the basic criteria mentioned above, Sa'ad added that a sheikh was someone who

had "*husun al-khuluk*," (good morals) and was "*sadeq fi kalamu*," (truthful), "*mu'tadel fi gamee al-ahwal*," (moderate and fair in all situations) and "*amin*" (trustworthy). His ideas were representative of the qualities I often heard used to describe shuyukh. Although Omar Sa'ad was particularly religious, prayed regularly, and was one of the few workers who had made a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina (and was sometimes addressed as *hajj*), he was not a sheikh.[47]

Another attribute I heard frequently when I asked workers about shuyukh was beards; almost everyone I spoke with mentioned that shuyukh had beards. After a moment's reflection this did not seem surprising. I could not think of a single sheikh I had met in the factory who was not bearded. This was certainly true of the three shuyukh on our shop floor. Darwish, Ramadan, and 'Abary were the only people in the department, in fact, who had full beards. What remained unclear, however, was the precise nature of the relationship between facial hair and the institution of sheikh. Was a beard necessary in order for someone to become a sheikh?

Perplexed, I brought up the subject in a conversation with Nabil, a winding machine operator fond of both explaining things and listening to himself speak. Somewhat disingenuously, in the way of an anthropologist, I asked whether everyone who had a beard was a sheikh. Nabil stopped what he was doing, looked me straight in the eye and said, "*mish kull man hab Romeo*" (not everyone who loves is

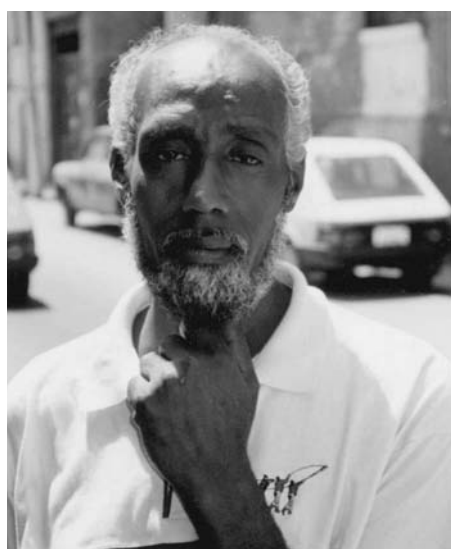

Illustration 2.7. Sheikh Darwish with beard, my closest friend in the factory.

Romeo).[48] With barely an elementary school education, Nabil had most accurately described the relationship between beards and shuyukh—a beard was a necessary but not sufficient condition.

The efficient functioning of the institution was revealed soon enough during an encounter I witnessed between two workers. Karim was a fair-skinned, tall, and lanky middle-aged winding machine operator in my department. Ahmed worked upstairs in spinning and occasionally came to our shop floor with an empty cart to collect finished spindles. He was in his early thirties, bearded, and always wore a skullcap.

When Ahmed walked onto the floor that day he saw Karim being pushed around by the shift supervisor. Although it was only hizar, at times hizar between unequals came close to physical abuse. The shift supervisor pushed Karim dangerously close to the revolving spindles. Karim, however, could not retaliate, at least in the same fashion. As Ahmed stopped the cart in front of the machine, he said tauntingly "*Karim bi yidarrab, huwwa khawal*" (Karim's getting hit, he's gay). Karim's immediate response was "*inta ilit adab . . . inta 'amil nafsak sheikh*" (you're without manners . . . you're pretending to be a sheikh). When Ahmed requested help loading the cart a minute later, Karim and I refused. Ahmed responded by clowning around, sitting on Karim's lap, pretending to kiss him and playing with his hair. Clearly disgusted by this form of hizar, Karim remarked, "he is stupid. He's not a sheikh."

It was clear to me and apparently well known to others that Ahmed tried hard to convey the impression that he was religious. His behavior, however, occasionally belied this. Although he prayed, was bearded, wore a skullcap and tried to impress upon co-workers that he was pious, no one confused him with a sheikh. Everyone knew who the real shuyukh were on the shop floor. Everyone knew who deserved respect and deference. Ahmed was an imposter.

Later that week I found myself upstairs in the administration cafeteria. I decided to ask some of the white-collar staff and engineers about the institution of sheikh. Much of what they said sounded similar to what I had heard on the shop floor. Many described shuyukh as religious men who always performed prayers at the appropriate times, were trustworthy, and honest. Some mentioned that shuyukh were bearded. A number of individuals emphasized the linguistic origin of the term, explaining that it had nothing to do with religion or Islam. Mohamed, for example, a young chemist, said that the word sheikh "comes from *shaykhukha* (old age, senility); it does not necessarily mean a Muslim, just someone old in years."

Almost universally, however, the administrators and engineers I spoke with were quick to point out that the people who were referred

to as shuyukh on the shop floor were not really shuyukh at all. After describing the religious knowledge required to be a sheikh, one man made the discussion more concrete, referring specifically to the workers in the factory. He asked rhetorically, "You don't think the people you've gotten to know down there (the workers) are knowledgeable in these matters? No. They are not *real* shuyukh; a real sheikh has memorized the Quran, like shuyukh in al-Azhar,[49] has memorized the *hadith* (sayings of the prophet), knows the science of *fiqh* (jurisprudence in Islam) and religious sciences, and can issue a *fatwa* (religious ruling). But the shuyukh downstairs are *nuss kum* (short-sleeved, fake), *couscoussi ala hummussi* (couscous on hummus, nonsense)."[50]

It was not that white-collar employees and management were any less religious than the workers downstairs. Rather, Islam had a different character and texture on the shop floor. Although administrators sometimes prayed together, for example, they did so far less frequently than workers. There were no shuyukh among the management staff. Among management, titles were based on education, formal institutions, and accreditation systems that created categories and status distinctions. They were engineers, accountants, directors, and department heads.

There were a number of other ways that religion manifested itself in the factory among both workers and administrators. This included the company's yearly partially subsidized and always oversubscribed trip to Mecca and Medina, the prevalence of *higab* (head covering) among female employees, the importance of the Eid holiday, and the often heard phrase (especially among some) that "'*elm al-din aqwa min 'elm al-dunnya*" (religious knowledge is more powerful than worldly knowledge).[51]

WORKERS' NICKNAMES

If the title of sheikh was an honorific of respect, it was by no means the only word occasionally placed in front of or behind workers' names. Nicknames were quite common on the shop floor and certain individuals were known throughout the company primarily by such names. Earlier I mentioned two such individuals, Safwat and Wagdi. Both men worked in my department and were known universally as Safwat *al-harami* (Safwat the thief) and Wagdi *al-winch* (Wagdi the tow truck). Obviously, nicknames usually conveyed something about the person. In Safwat's case this was because he had been caught years earlier attempting to steal a machine counter from the factory. In Wagdi's case, the reference was to his massive protruding belly and tremendous size. He was a large man by any standard.

One of Wagdi's closest friends was *only* known by his nickname. *Filfil* (pepper) worked in the machine shop next door. Although I inter-

Illustration 2.8. Wagdi *al winch* (the tow truck).

acted with him daily for the better part of ten months I never heard or even learned his real name. Everyone referred to him only as Filfil. Along with Wagdi, the two were always getting in trouble: they were the school clowns.

In Mohamed '*aknana*'s case (Mohamed the disagreeable), an older mechanic who had retired and was later rehired as a consultant, the nickname referred to the fact that he had a tendency, in both work and life, to be needlessly unpleasant. '*Aknana*, as he was referred to, was also not the best mechanic. In addition, his personality was such that some, especially the other mechanics, found him difficult to work with. Although nicknames like '*aknana* and *harami* conveyed elements of criticism and insult, in the context of the factory and the dense social relations of the shop floor they were simultaneously playful expressions of affection and endearment.

Mohamed '*aknana* returned to MIDIA after I had been working there for seven months. This is how I recorded how his co-workers greeted him after his long absence.

> When Mohamed 'aknana' came to visit—an old, thin man with a worn face who used to be a mechanic in this hall working on the old machines—everyone greeted him very warmly with hugs and kisses and exaggerated handshakes from all. He has been a year in retirement. Even sheikh Ramadan, who reportedly (by Nabil) made his life miserable (and I have heard sheikh Ramadan complain about him to me), greeted him warmly. Wagdi not only kissed and hugged him, but gave him several playful waist checks (knocking his huge belly into Mohamed's) and sheikh Darwish snuck up from behind him and jumped on his back. Darwish quickly put his hands over Mohamed's eyes and squeezed him. Abdel Moneim was the first to greet him and Omar Sa'ad brought him into the hall as if bringing in a trophy for all to see—holding his hand while walking in and out of the shop floor. Minutes later both Nabil and sheikh Darwish came and spoke to me about him.

Although everyone agreed that 'Aknana was difficult to work with, not a particularly skilled mechanic and at times simply unpleasant, on his return to MIDIA he received a hero's welcome. The bonds that developed after working with the same people for many years on the shop floor were particularly strong.

Many other people in the factory had nicknames. This included Said *harissa*, who often brought *harissa* (an inexpensive sweet) to sell in the factory, Ramadan *bulgha*, who sold shoes in the factory (*bulgha* means slipper or shoe in rural Egypt) and Mahmoud '*Awalem* who once worked in a band ('*awalem* are female performers and the term carries a negative, tawdry connotation).

And then there was Said *macarona*. Said was someone I got to know at Misr Textiles, the second factory where I worked. Of course, *macarona* is the Arabized form of macaroni. It was used to describe Said, a short, funny, happy-go-lucky man with a false set of teeth because, it was claimed, he only ate macaroni. Said was originally from Menouf, a town in the Delta and his wife and children remained there after he began working at Misr Textiles. Said moved to the outskirts of Alexandria and lived the life of a bachelor, occasionally visiting his family on Fridays. The only meal he knew how to prepare, it was said, was macaroni.

Said was hilarious. He was obsessed with sex and desperately wanted to buy a satellite dish. He believed that with a dish he would be able to pick up sexually explicit television programs from Europe

and Turkey and was seriously considering applying for a company loan to finance his libido. When I told Said that I didn't think these programs were available on satellite television, he proceeded to list specific stations and the times such programs aired. Unlike most workers, Said had a significant amount of schooling. He had attended a regular high school (not a technical school) but failed the *sanawayya 'amma* (high school exam). As a result, he knew a few words of English and French and was regarded by everyone else on the shop floor as "the intellectual."

Hand Signals

If nicknames conveyed information about people, hand signals conveyed relatively precise meanings without the use of words. As a result of the open spaces of the work hall, the tremendous size of shop floors, the distances between workers, and the deafening sounds of the machines, workers devised a number of signals and gestures, a sign language specific to the work hall, to communicate with one another. There were hand signals to indicate that one was going upstairs to the workers' bathroom, to ask if one wanted tea, to invite someone to share food and to warn that a *mas'ul* (a higher up) was approaching. All of these signals as well as others were based, to some extent, on certain aspects of the physical movements involved in the activity that was being described. For example, the hand signal for prayer was raising both hands to either side of one's face. This movement mimicked a regular part of prayer. Similarly, the sign used to indicate that one was going upstairs to the workers' bathroom vaguely resembled the movements involved in taking off one's pants. Both hands were moved horizontally across one's waist, as if to indicate the undoing of a belt.

One of the most frequently used signals was the gesture associated with inviting someone to share food. If a worker was eating and someone walked by, as a matter of form, the worker invited the passer-by to stop and share the meal. This was done by taking one's right hand formed in an open palm and pointing it toward the food. The reciprocal gesture of gratitude involved placing one's right hand on one's heart and sometimes patting one's chest several times. This particular gesture was not specific to the shop floor but was common outside the factory as well, particularly among lower socioeconomic classes.

Although there were a number of other well-known hand signals (including signals used to ask if tomorrow was a vacation or payday, to indicate that one was leaving the hall to smoke a cigarette and a gesture used to convey uncertainty about a question), the single most important hand signal in the factory functioned to warn co-workers

that a *masu'ul* ("higher-up") was approaching. Tapping your fingers on your shoulder was the sign to "take care" (stand up and look busy) because danger, in the form of a "higher-up," was on the way. The origin of the gesture most likely had to do with the fact that military and police officers display their rank on their shoulders. Tapping your fingers on your shoulder, therefore, was probably intended to signify that someone of higher rank was approaching. The signal was subtle and therefore effective and because company policies were often broken, from the simple rule of not sitting down on the job to much more serious infractions, this signal was particularly important.

In addition to hand signals, there were a number of gestures and a great number of expressions that were more or less specific to workers and the shop floor. One such gesture was kissing the palm of one's hand before shaking hands with someone else. This was usually done with exaggerated enthusiasm and was symbolic of warmth and emotion, indicating that you held the person whose hand you were about to shake in high esteem. Of course, this was only done with people one knew (a friend, relative, or co-worker, for example), and usually only after not having seen the person for some time. It reflected a form of sociability that, although misleading to characterize as exclusively "working class," was certainly not characteristic of the middle and upper class.[52]

The expression *abu warda* is an example of language specific to the work hall. The first time I heard this I had no idea what it meant. One morning at Misr Textiles several of us were talking about a co-worker's unexpected absence when someone remarked with a smirk, apparently attempting to explain the situation, that "he (the absent co-worker) had probably been hit with *abu warda*." Warda is a woman's name in Arabic and therefore *Abu warda* literally means "Warda's father." "*Warda,*" however, also means "flower," and thus the expression also means "the flower's father." In the context described above, however, neither meaning made sense. Thus, when I heard the expression several weeks later I immediately asked what it meant. Shukri, a worker in my department, explained that *abu warda* referred to a woman's sandal since many women's sandals were adorned with plastic flowers. Being hit with *abu warda*, therefore, meant that someone was taking abuse from his wife.[53]

Workers also referred to particular machine parts with names they made up themselves, irrespective of the technical names of these parts. For instance, the small piece at the top of the winding machine that came in contact with the wool as it was being wound was called the *bantalon* (pants). Workers also referred to the curved revolving metal

bar on the hydraulic platform (on the front of the winding machines) as a *fanous* (lantern). This metal fixture vaguely resembled the shape of a lantern and thus this name made sense. Engineers, of course, only referred to these parts using their technical names.

Makeshift Production

Earlier I described how workers made makeshift tables and chairs out of the materials available on the shop floor. Because sitting down was against company rules, tables and chairs were unavailable. Despite this, workers often tried to sit whenever they could. Their dilemma, however, was where to sit and what to sit on. Spindles placed together, old buckets and barrels turned upside down, work carts—even the scale—occasionally functioned as a place to sit and a surface to eat on. The most common makeshift chair, however, was created out of several spindles placed close together. Workers would then place recycled cardboard from the containers of imported wool on top of the spindles in order to create a flat and therefore more comfortable surface to sit on.

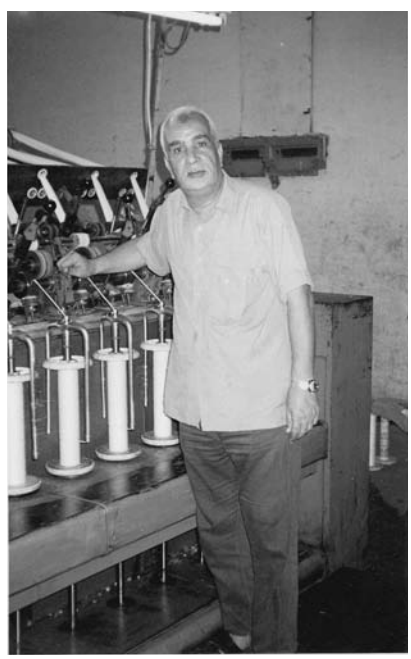

Illustration 2.9. *'Am* Sayid Rizq, a shift supervisor, standing in front of the winding machine. The upside-down u-shaped metal device that sits on top of the spindle was known as the *fanous*.

Makeshift tables and chairs were not the only solution workers came up with in the face of company constraints and their material circumstances. In fact, many activities inside the factory had a makeshift quality to them, including production.

In addition to places to sit and surfaces to eat on, workers made "homemade" knives out of old worn-out blades from the combing machines. Blades were taken next door to the machine shop where they were sharpened and cut to the appropriate size. The knives were used in the preparation of meals, for cutting vegetables and mixing different types of food together, as well as for minor machine repairs and other work related activities.

Even measuring production had a makeshift quality to it. Because many of the machine counters were broken (machine counters—that in the case of the winding machine, for example, recorded the number of spindle rotations) production at MIDIA was measured by the number of spindle changes workers performed. I describe this practice in detail and explore its implications in chapter 3. Suffice it to say here, however, that this resulted in significant imprecision for both measuring output and the standardization of production (i.e., the amount of wool on each spindle or in the case of the pulling and combing machines, the amount of wool in each barrel). This was the makeshift solution that the production and control departments had come up with in the face of limited resources.

The line between creative problem solving under conditions of scarcity and getting things done in the quickest possible fashion, without regard to precision or quality, is not always clear.[54] What I am characterizing as "makeshift" includes both types of activities. For example, although workers were supposed to clean their machines each day using special brushes, no one did this. Instead, workers used scrap or excess wool (*'awadim*) from production to clean their machines. Every machine produced scrap, making cleaning material readily available. A small amount of wool was rolled into a ball and used to wipe off machine surfaces. This was easier than retrieving a brush from a locked cabinet at the other end of the shop floor and it seemed just as effective.

Making sure the finished product (spindles full of wound wool) remained clean was also occasionally a problem. At times, hundreds of spindles would sit in the work hall, in front of the winding machine, sometimes for more than a day, waiting to be taken to the next stage of production (by people like Ahmed, the young man I described earlier who wanted to be considered a sheikh). Although not as dirty as coal mining, textile manufacturing is not the cleanest of industries. Millions

of tiny wool fibers are released into the air as a result of the production process, eventually settling on the factory's floors and walls, the machines, and the workers. The work hall became particularly messy during the semi-regular cleanings. At these times, compressed air is used to dislodge the oily, grimy, and sticky fibers that settle on, and become lodged in, the machines. Before using compressed air, however, workers would tear out the plastic packaging from the imported wool containers and use this to cover and protect the finished spindles.

Plastic was not the only material recycled from the packaging of imported wool. Recycled cardboard was also put to good use and not just to create seating. Many of the machines at MIDIA were old and because of age and the constant vibration of moving metal components, small parts of these machines occasionally became loose. In many cases where simple pressure needed to be applied, workers would take small pieces of cardboard, also removed from the packaging of imported wool, and jam this in between the loose metal pieces, creating the necessary tension to keep the machines from falling apart. I was continually amazed by the amount of small folded cardboard I found jammed into many of the machines.[55]

Creative problem solving in the face of limited resources gave Mahmoud, the tea man, great pride. Mahmoud was an old-timer who had worked in the factory under the original Greek owner, before the company was nationalized. He praised the ingeniousness of the Egyptian worker, his inventiveness and ability to overcome all sorts of obstacles. The Egyptian worker, Mahmoud declared, was unlike other workers. And Mahmoud had proof. He took me to the oldest machines on the shop floor, which he explained were made in the 1940s and purchased by MIDIA secondhand ten years later. Thanks to the skill of the Egyptians, however, they remained in running order.

> These machines should have been considered junk (*khurda*) long ago . . . but we know how to use them. The *khawaga* Spiro—who was the head of the factories (before nationalization)—once said that the Egyptian worker is worth four engineers from abroad! The Egyptian worker—if something goes wrong with the machine—will find a way to fix it one way or another—including making do with what he has. The worker himself will figure out what is wrong with the machine. . . . Whereas the foreigner—unless he gets the exact piece for this part with the specific number will not get the machine to work—even if this means that the machine stands idle for 15 years or becomes junk (*khurda*)!

Mahmoud added that in the 1970s or '80s (he wasn't sure) a component from one of the old machines was sent to England, where the machine had been manufactured, so that MIDIA could order a replacement part. The English responded in a letter stating that not only were they unable to provide a replacement part, this particular machine was so old that they didn't even have one in their museum. The English, Mahmoud claimed, offered to give MIDIA a brand new machine in exchange for the old machine, which they wanted to display in their museum.

Mahmoud's story is almost certainly apocryphal. But his point is not entirely invalid. For example, about ten years ago a certain small rubber component broke in one of the Japanese combing machines in the shop floor next door. The mechanics call it an "auto-libbler," and as the name implies, it is an automatic regulator of sorts. MIDIA was unable (or unwilling) to obtain a replacement part. Sheikh Ramadan, however, who was known to be particularly skilled, managed to find a similar looking rubber part in a Fiat 124 automobile. Ramadan refashioned the Italian automobile part and successfully made it fit into the Japanese combing machine. His makeshift solution managed to keep the old combing machines next door running for the last ten years. Everyone said the piece worked well. The only problem was that Ramadan was the only mechanic with enough skill to make the homemade repair.

Makeshift culture extended well beyond the shop floor. It is one of the basic operating principles of Egyptian society with both negative and positive consequences. The positive consequences are obvious. Ramadan, for example, was able to keep the old Japanese pulling machines running despite not having the proper replacement parts. The negative consequences of makeshift production, however, can also be serious.

The combing machines next door, for example, ran at a slower speed than what they should have been operating at. Sheikh Ramadan, the ingenious mechanic described above, explained to me why this was the case. MIDIA's machine shop, he said, was responsible for making replacement machine gears when the original machine gears wore out. The machine shop purchased steel from local, usually public-sector suppliers. The quality of the steel manufactured by many of these suppliers, however, was often shoddy. As a result, the gears produced by the machine shop were substandard; not as strong or durable as they should have been and as a result did not last as long in the machines. In order to keep the gears from wearing out too quickly, the factory compensated by running the combing machines at a slower speed. The implications for production and efficiency are obvious.

What Mahmoud failed to mention in his discussion of the "English system" was that there are advantages to doing things by the book, following standard procedures, and using the specified parts and the appropriate material. Making do with what one has, solving problems creatively, making the best of a bad situation, in short, dealing with conditions of relative scarcity is indeed commendable: necessity is the mother of invention. But ad hoc solutions to foreseeable problems and disregard for established procedures often lead to suboptimal solutions. In this negative sense, makeshift production and makeshift culture extend well beyond this particular factory and this particular society.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described how workers' experiences on the shop floor contribute to the process of class formation. The social relations

Illustration 2.10. A safety poster displayed in the factory. It reads, "Be careful . . . You need your eyes, so take care of them." No one wore protective eyewear in the factory.

in production are essential in determining how individuals come to understand themselves and their interests. In the factory, small, everyday, mundane occurrences and practices that workers experience in common, seemingly insignificant in themselves, serve as crucial rituals in a continuous process of class formation. These common experiences and the shared culture they generate are the invisible cement that make collective identity possible.

The culture of the shop floor plays an important role in the process of class formation. Workers differentiated themselves, whether intentionally or not, and were differentiated by others through a distinctive culture that emerged out of the material conditions of the work hall. Religion (collective prayers and the institution of sheikh), nicknames, hand signals, gestures, expressions, and makeshift production were, for the most part, practices specific to workers.

One could easily devote an entire monograph to shop floor culture. Such a discussion would include, for example, extended accounts of religion, gender, masculinity, and food and drink (detailing the kinds of foods workers bring to work and consume during breakfast and lunch). It would also describe how these and other activities take place. Eating, for example, involves both a political economy (what workers can afford) as well as an economy of taste (culinary sensibilities and preferences).[56] Fathy's style of eating, for example, (stuffing large amounts of food into his mouth to the point that his cheeks became distended with golf ball-sized protrusions) or the amount of food Wagdi *al-winch* regularly consumed (five loaves of bread for breakfast and lunch every day) would have horrified the middle-class white-collar employees upstairs.

Regarding tastes, many workers said that they did not enjoy potato chips because they were not filling. Potato chips are not a *sha'bi* or "working class" food in Egypt. Wagdi *al-winch* remarked, for example, "I could eat an entire *istawana* (barrel) of chips and it wouldn't do a thing." For him, it was not real food. Wagdi preferred hearty food that satisfied his appetite. His was a sensibility specific to his class.

There were also other habits specific to workers and the work hall. Darwish, for example, constantly maneuvered and remaneuvered the position of his testicles through his pants (without being the least bit conscious of this) and many workers cleaned their genitals after urinating in the workers' bathroom by splashing clean water from the stream of water that constantly dribbled down from the broken urinals onto their penises. This was the *habitus* of class. It is impossible, however, to convey the extent of shop floor culture in a few pages. My intention here has been merely to provide a glimpse of the material and symbolic forms specific to the work hall.

Chapter 3

The Labor Process

The Labor Process and Resistance

While chapter 2 addressed the question of workers' identities and the process of class formation, this chapter takes up the subject of work itself: what work entailed for winding machine operators at MIDIA and Misr Textiles, how work was supposed to be accomplished, and how it actually got done. Questions of work have often been addressed under the rubric of "the labor process" and have received considerable attention. The labor process continues to be a central concern of several, quite different, scholarly traditions. Industrial relations, the sociology of work, and Marxist analyses of production all focus on work and the social organization of production.

Of course, these traditions approach the subject from significantly different perspectives. While industrial relations and the sociology of work take up questions of "output restriction," "effort-bargaining" and "informal groups," Marxist scholarship focuses primarily on conflict between capital/management and labor, control of the labor process, and the question of deskilling.[1] Despite significant differences, however, all three approaches share a basic concern with the activity of work.

The labor process under capitalism (or any system of wage-labor) is, by its very nature, a site of negotiation, if not direct conflict and struggle, between capital and its representatives (e.g., management) and labor. Capitalism is a system of production in which capitalists purchase labor power and not actual labor (nor the finished products of labor) from workers in exchange for wages. Labor power is thus bought and sold like any other commodity. Labor power, however, is no ordinary commodity. Unlike raw wool or cotton (or any commodity for that matter), the value of a worker's labor power is not predetermined or constant. Indeed, wage labor is the most peculiar type of commodity precisely because it is not fixed but fluid, not dead but alive.

What this means for capitalists and managers is that even after purchasing labor power they are still left with a formidable challenge:

converting abstract labor power into concrete labor. Put differently, they must transform workers' capacities for work into actual activity. Capital and management must somehow or other get workers to *actually work*—and in the manner and with the intensity they desire, an unenviable task indeed. It is the indeterminacy of this challenge that makes the labor process one of the most important sites of resistance in the factory. For it is during the labor process that some of the most contentious shop floor battles are fought: conflicts about the pace and intensity of work and the extraction of effort. These daily battles are the trench warfare of factory life.

In order to discuss these issues concretely, during the labor process at MIDIA, I first briefly outline the manufacturing process in the wool preparations department. I then describe the labor process associated with the winding machine in greater detail. Only with this background will an analysis of the labor process and resistance at MIDIA and Misr Textiles fully make sense.

The Production Process in the Wool Preparations Department

At MIDIA, preparing the wool (*tahdeerat al-suwf*) is the first stage in the long process involved in the manufacture of woven fabric, and eventually readymade garments, out of wool and cotton. Several processes are required before wool preparations can begin, however, including mechanized cleaning and carding. These operations take place outside the plant. What was used as raw material in my department had already gone through several production processes and was, in fact, another factory's finished product.[2]

There are three types of machines in the wool preparations department—combing, pulling, and winding machines—and production occurs in this order. Rolls or sheets of bundled wool, what we called wool tape (*shireet*), arrive from outside the factory and are the raw material for our department. This soft, fluffy tape, no more than four inches in width, is fed first into one of the combing machines (*makinat tamsheet*). The tape passes through a fine metal comb (hence the name) where it is stretched and straightened, aligning the tiny fibers of similar length. The combing machines also remove dirt and excessively small fibers. Several rolls of wool tape are placed in the machine at the same time and, through the combing operation, come out into a barrel (*istawana*) as one single tape. As well as combing, therefore, the machine also creates a denser, thicker tape.

Pulling (*sahb*) is the next stage of production. In several respects, pulling and combing machines are similar, except for the use of metal

combs. Again, more than one tape is fed into the pulling machine, usually between four and six, depending on the desired density of the finished product. Inside, the wool fibers are simultaneously pulled and straightened, producing a single, denser, thinner, tape. The wool goes through three different pulling machines, becoming thinner and denser each time, before beginning the next stage of production.

Winding is the final stage of wool preparations and the winding machine, or *makinat barm* as it was called, is the largest in the entire department.[3] With thirty spindles, the machine requires thirty barrels of wool tape, one barrel for each spindle. The wool from each barrel is placed over a series of fixed conveyers suspended behind the machine that direct the thirty pieces of tape and keep them separate. When it finally reaches the machine, the wool passes through a metal roller that compresses the tape. Then, the wool tape enters a metal box (*gihaz* or device) on top of the machine, where it is stretched as it passes through two more rollers. After exiting the gihaz, the tape, much thinner and looking yarn-like for the first time, is further attenuated as it passes under a final roller.

Now considerably thinner, the wool is wound onto fast moving spindles (rotating clockwise) on the front of the machine. It is here that the actual winding takes place. Thirty large yellow spindles made from industrial, heavy gauge plastic whirl at a dizzying speed. The spindles are located on a hydraulic metal platform (‘*arabaya* or cart, on the front of the machine), which is itself continuously moving up and down. The revolving spindles create the winding process while the vertical movement of the platform ensures the wool is wound evenly. The dual processes of stretching and winding produce a thinner and stronger material that will eventually become yarn. The machine also serves to transfer the wool from barrels onto spindles; spindles that fit directly onto the spinning machines in the next stage of production.[4]

The winding process, therefore, accomplishes three things. First, the tape is stretched and, as a result, becomes thinner. Second, the machine does what its name suggests; it winds the wool, twisting the fibers, increasing their strength and making them less likely to tear. Finally, the winding process transfers the wool onto large plastic spindles located on the front of the machine.

After the winding process, the wool, now on spindles, is ready to leave the department. The spindles are taken upstairs to the next stage of production, spinning (*ghazl*), where they are fitted directly onto the spinning machines (*makinat ghazl*).

Spinning is somewhat similar to winding rather than being an entirely different process. Hundreds of spindles are fitted directly onto

long spinning frames. The wool rope is spun once again, producing a finer, thinner, and stronger yarn. Like the winding machines, the spinning frames transfer the wool from the large winding machine spindles onto smaller spindles. It is only at this stage of production that someone unfamiliar with the textile industry can easily recognize what is being produced: wool yarn.

These smaller spindles eventually make it to the weaving department. There they are attached to automatic weaving machines (*makinat naseeg*), which weave the yarn into cloth.

The Labor Process on the Winding Machine

> The supervision of machinery, the joining of broken threads, is no activity which claims the operative's thinking powers, yet it is of a sort which prevents him from occupying his mind with other things. We have seen, too, that this work affords the muscles no opportunity for physical activity. Thus it is, properly speaking, not work, but tedium, the most deadening, wearing process conceivable. The operative is condemned to let his physical and mental powers decay in this utter monotony, it is his mission to be bored every day and all day long from his eighth year.
>
> —Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845)

Like other machine-tending activities, winding machine operators spend much of their time simply monitoring their machines and making sure they continue to operate.[5] Ensuring the proper functioning of the machine requires close observation. Constantly watching one machine or patrolling several—looking for torn threads, tangles, excess wool, and other malfunctions—is not necessarily easy. Work involving physical activity, however, mostly takes place when the machine is *not* running: setting it up, repairing the tape when something goes wrong (i.e., a torn thread, tangle); restarting the machine when it stops (including minor repairs); and changing the spindles when they become full.

A number of other work-related activities must also be undertaken. First, the winding machine operator must bring barrels of wool tape to the back of the machine. Naturally, there is some logic to the layout of the shop floor as pulling machines are located approximately thirty feet behind the winding machine.[6] Once the wool has gone through all three pulling machines, the pulling machine worker pushes the barrel containing the finished tape to the space in between the machines for the winding machine operator to use.

The winding machine requires thirty barrels of wool, one for each spindle. The barrels, however, never run out at exactly the same time. One of the reasons for this is because they are not filled with the same amount of wool tape. The counters, which were supposed to automatically regulate when a barrel of wool tape was full, and thus when the machine should be turned off, were not working properly. This meant that workers themselves (by sight) determined when a barrel had enough wool tape in it.[7]

Thus, barrels must be checked fairly regularly in order to ensure that none runs out completely. If a barrel runs out, the machine automatically stops. Although stoppages neither damage the machine nor the finished product, they do make things more difficult for the worker. The work, effort, and time required to restart the machine are considerably greater than ensuring the machine does not stop in the first place.

When a barrel is close to empty the worker replaces it and carefully attaches the new wool to what is left of the older tape by hand.[8] The process resembles braiding hair as the ends of both pieces of wool are taken and a hand's length of each is placed over the other. The overlapping pieces are wound together producing one continuous wool tape. The patched wool is then carefully stretched to produce a thickness similar to an individual, unmended piece of wool tape. Finally, the winding machine worker rubs the mended wool gently between his hands, further compressing and strengthening the once separate, now overlapping pieces.[9] Care and precision are required, for if the repair is not done properly the mended piece might tear, stop the machine, or cause problems further along the production process. The experienced worker can perform the entire operation in a few seconds, producing one continuous piece of wool that will make it through the machine without tearing.

The winding machine operator monitors the machine while it is running, looking for tears, tangles, and other problems. This type of "machine tending" is the bulk of activity associated with operating the winding machine. At least 70 percent of the worker's time is spent simply watching the machine. If a tear or tangle is spotted, the worker must quickly stop the machine and make the repair. Sensors located in the front and back automatically shut down the machine if they come in contact with wool.[10] Sometimes tears occur that do not trigger the sensors, or the sensors are triggered only after a tear or tangle has already caused other avoidably larger problems. Workers naturally prefer to catch tears and tangles before they spread as this reduces the time and effort needed for repair.

The majority of machine stoppages occur as a result of tears on the front of the machine, between the time the wool leaves the last

roller and is wound onto the spindles. Because the spindles are located close to one another, if tears are not spotted quickly they are likely to cause tangles on neighboring spindles. If not caught immediately, tears can result in considerably more work for the machine operator and greater waste for the company. It is the possibility of more work, however, and not waste or concern for the company, that provides the incentive to pay attention and monitor the production process.

The basic principles of repairing tears are similar to those of connecting wool tape in the back of the machine as described above. First, the winding machine operator removes any and all tangles, sometimes by unwinding a small amount of damaged or unsuitable wool "rope" from the spindle. After removing rope, which appears either too thick or thin and any tangles or clumps, the worker must reattach the wool rope on the spindle to the wool tape from the machine. By rotating the spindle counter-clockwise, a small amount of rope becomes available to reconnect to the wool tape from the machine. Two small pieces of wool, one from the machine and one from the spindle, are placed on top of each other and gently wound together by hand. The spindle is then rotated clockwise, restoring the proper tension. If the repair is done well, when the machine is restarted the wool winds smoothly onto the spindle. The entire operation, including turning the machine off, repairing the tear and restarting the machine, takes less than a

Illustration 3.1. Fathy repairing a tangle on the front of the winding machine.

Illustration 3.2. Fathy bending down to make a repair.

minute for an experienced winding machine operator. Repairing these types of tears are among the most common activities associated with the labor process on the winding machine.

The single greatest expenditure of effort, however, comes at changing time. Four or five times a day (approximately every hour and thirty minutes) the winding machine operator replaces the filled spindles on the machine with empty spindles from the shop floor. Spindle changes, referred to as a *taqlee'* (removal), require a considerable amount of work as a number of different operations are involved.[11] First, thirty empty spindles are brought to the front of the machine from the side, where hundreds of spindles are stored. This is sometimes done while the machine is running, reducing the amount of down time, or the time the machine is not running.[12] After stopping the machine, the worker disconnects the wool on each spindle by carefully tearing it between the machine and the spindle. This must be done with great precision, however, or a significant amount of time and effort will later be wasted reattaching the wool to the empty spindles.

Usually there are several different ways to perform the same basic activity and often it is more a matter of personal preference that determines how an individual worker performs the specifics of a particular job. Some workers, for instance, remove the spindles and place them on the ground before bringing empty spindles to the hydraulic platform. Most, however, bring empty spindles to the platform before removing the filled spindles. This method makes considerable sense and is more

popular among machine operators. Performed in such a manner, workers can replace the spindles in a series of continuous motions, reducing the amount of time and overall movement required to complete the entire operation. The disadvantage of performing the job this way, however, is that it requires greater effort in a shorter amount of time.

Slowly moving from one end of the machine to the other, the worker removes each full spindle and replaces it with an empty one. This involves several different operations performed in sequence and requires coordination and practice. If the worker is right handed, for instance, the u-shaped metal device that fits on top of the spindle is removed with the right hand, making sure not to raise it too high (which would tear the wool coming from the machine). Then, the filled spindle (on the machine) is removed with the left hand and placed temporarily on the hydraulic metal platform. Filled with wool, these spindles are heavy. While still holding the metal device up in the air, the next step requires grabbing an empty spindle with the left hand and placing it onto the metal rod which protrudes from the hydraulic platform and on which each spindle fits. Finally, the worker lowers the u-shaped metal device with the right hand, placing it over the spindle. This entire operation is usually performed in a series of continuous movements, without interruption, from one end of the machine to the other, until all thirty spindles have been replaced.

Illustration 3.3. Fathy replacing the spindles on the winding machine.

After replacing the spindles the worker must still connect the wool from the machine to each of the empty spindles. Now, the winding machine operator slowly moves in the opposite direction, from one end of the machine to the other, hunched over at the waist, tying the wool around each spindle. After a small amount of wool is wrapped around the spindle, it is rotated slightly clockwise to produce the proper tension and eliminate unnecessary slack. Rotating the spindle too far can cause the wool to tear.

Only after the wool is connected to each spindle can the machine be restarted. One has to pay particular attention when restarting the machine as it is quite common at this point for one or two pieces of wool to tear, come undone, or wind improperly. One trick is to start and then quickly stop the machine a few seconds later. This gives workers a chance to walk along the front of the machine and survey all thirty spindles individually making sure there are no tears and the wool is still connected.

Replacing spindles (the taqlee') or spindle changes, requires considerable time and effort. Winding machine operators spend much of this time with their backs bent, hunched over the front of their machines. Workers must bend down in order to see and manipulate the wool tape so they can carefully tear and reattach it to the spindles. Repairs on the front of the machine also require a great deal of back bending. So much, in fact, that an older worker from a nearby weaving department once joked that "you could always tell if someone worked on a winding machine." "All winding machine workers," he said, "suffered from bad backs and were always hunched forward." There is a fair bit of truth to this. Spindle changes usually take place between four and five time a day and if one does this long enough—say thirty years—a chronic bad back is very likely to be the result.

Once a day, an auxiliary worker from the spinning department arrives with a large cart full of empty spindles. Although helping the auxiliary worker is not part of the winding machine operator's official duties, most gladly assist. Empty spindles are stacked on the ground by the side of the machine, where they are stored. Then both workers load the filled spindles (placed temporarily on the ground) onto the cart. When the cart is full, the auxiliary worker takes it back upstairs to the spinning department.

Operating the winding machine also involves a number of other duties. Workers are required to clean their machines at the end of each shift. This involves wiping away the tiny wool fibers that accumulate on the front of the machine and sweeping the area around the machine several times a day. Although it was never made clear to me whether

Illustration 3.4. Sheikh Darwish, a mechanic, making an adjustment to the winding machine.

lubricating the machine is the responsibility of the machine operator, the maintenance crew, or the mechanics, it is often left to the winding machine worker. Small repairs, involving the gihaz for example, or minor adjustments to the hydraulic mechanism, are also sometimes performed by the winding machine worker.[13]

Resistance and the Labor Process at MIDIA

Winding machine workers performed all the tasks required of them. How they performed them, however, was another matter. For example, operating the machine involved "machine tending" and not assembly line work. It did not, therefore, entail constant activity or continuous movement. Much of the time workers were not required to do anything other than simply watch the machines. As long as they were careful to look for tears and tangles, the machine continued to run properly. Winding machine operators needed to be somewhere they could see the front of the machine and watch the wool wind onto the spindles, a task that did not require standing up or constantly moving around.

Sitting down on the shop floor, of course, was against company rules. Everyone knew this. Most shift supervisors, however, tolerated workers sitting down while on the job. Thus, many workers, and not

just winding machine operators, were seated much of the time. Workers generally sat somewhere close to their machines. Winding machine operators were no exception. Most sat next to the empty spindles, by the side of the machine, with their backs against the wall.

The angle and view from this position are not the same as from directly in front of the machine. There were several reasons, however, why workers chose to sit in this particular location. Since the machine was close to the shop floor entrance, sitting down directly in front of it would have made oneself visible to anyone who happened to be walking by, including "higher ups" (*mas'ulin*).[14] Sitting by the side of the machine, by contrast, was less visible and therefore safer. There was also only one chair in the department and it belonged to the shift supervisor. Workers made makeshift chairs out of the materials available in the work hall: several spindles positioned close to each other with a piece of cardboard placed on top, thus flattening and enlarging the "seating area." Although this allowed workers to sit, it was not particularly comfortable. Thus, placing the makeshift seats against the wall provided much needed back support. A nearby scale guaranteed additional seating for the winding machine operator and his friends.[15]

This was not the only case of a significant divergence between the way work was supposed to be accomplished and the way it actually got done.[16] Cleaning was another example. Each worker was responsible for cleaning his machine at the end of the shift. In the wool preparations department millions of tiny wool fibers became loose as a result of the production process. Clearly visible, these fibers floated in the air, eventually settling on the walls, floor, machines, and undoubtedly in workers' lungs. The company provided special brushes for cleaning the machines. These brushes were kept in a locker in the back of the hall. At the end of the shift, however, after being in the factory for eight hours, the last thing workers wanted to do was to walk to one end of the shop floor, retrieve a brush, and then return it. Instead, workers used scrap or excess wool (*'awadim*) from production to clean the machines. Every machine produced scrap, making cleaning material readily available. A small amount of wool was rolled into a ball and used to wipe off the machines. This was easier than using a brush and seemed just as effective.

Although this practice was accepted by everyone on the shop floor, including the shift supervisor, it was against company rules. Workers used the brushes only on those rare occasions when high-level company officials were present. In fact, I only learned of the brushes several months into my fieldwork, when senior administrators happened to be visiting the shop floor. All of a sudden, the brushes appeared.

Although workers did not clean according to official procedures, all workers cleaned their machines. Cleaning was an accepted part of the work routine associated with quitting time and many looked forward to it precisely for this reason. Once a machine had been cleaned, it was unlikely to be turned on again. In fact, having finished cleaning functioned as an excuse not to restart one's machine.

Oiling the machines, however, was a different matter. The winding machine was supposed to be oiled once every shift. This entailed pouring a small amount of oil on each of the thirty metal rods on the hydraulic platform. The oil lubricates the rods, allowing the spindles to revolve more smoothly.

An entire shift often passed, however, without anyone lubricating the machines. It was never clear exactly whose responsibility this was. Maintenance workers, and sometimes mechanics, oiled the machines. Most often, however, it was left to the winding machine operator. Unlike cleaning, lubricating was not associated with the end of the shift or leaving work. There was no particular time it was supposed to occur. When it was done, it was usually as a result of the shift supervisor's nagging and insistence. If the shift supervisor forgot or the worker could not be bothered, it rarely was done at all.

One of the most interesting, subtle, and complex forms of resistance involved the pace and intensity of work. This type of resistance was so enmeshed into daily practice and established work routines that at first it was not apparent.

Sometime during the morning a control department employee (*qism al-muragea*) walked onto the shop floor informing the winding machine operator how many spindle changes were required that shift. This was the daily work assignment. The winding machine worker would be told, for example, to complete four spindle changes and leave the spindles on the machine three-quarters full.[17] Although production requirements changed daily, there was only a small amount of variation. No more than five and no fewer than four changes were ever required during a single shift.[18]

For reasons I will take up elsewhere, work assignments were generally low. On the winding machine, for instance, it was possible to produce considerably more than what was required. Although several machine operators claimed that each spindle change required one hour and forty-five minutes, this figure was greatly exaggerated.[19] One

spindle change, done properly and without haste, could take considerably less time.

It was inevitable, however, that there would always be some uncertainty as to the exact amount of time required for a spindle change. Workers could not predict how many tears and tangles would occur ahead of time or how long it would take to repair them. Each time something went wrong, the winding machine operator had to stop the machine and make the repair. Of course, this took time, and the larger the problem the more time was required. Also, there were different types of regular and accepted work interruptions (i.e., breakfast, tea, prayer) depending on the specific time of day and part of the shift a spindle change was performed. Thus, one spindle change might take considerably longer or less time than another.

There was yet another very important reason why the time required for each spindle change varied. Every machine in the department, whether pulling, combing, or winding, was fitted with a machine counter (*'addad*). On the winding machine, counters recorded the number of spindle revolutions completed. As well as keeping track of revolutions, however, machine counters were supposed to serve another important function: shift supervisors or control department employees could tell winding machine workers to replace the spindles after a specific number of revolutions had been completed. They could also check to see if machine operators replaced the spindles when they were told, thereby providing a means for monitoring production. Without functioning machine counters, however, none of this was possible.

The counter on the winding machine, as on *every* other machine on the shop floor and nearly every machine in the factory, was broken and had been so for some time. The broken machine counter made it necessary for winding machine operators to determine themselves when the spindles were full. This was done by sight and was therefore always imprecise. When the wool became even with the top of the spindle, it was "about full" and needed to be replaced.

The existing system left considerable room for manipulation. The decisions left to winding machine operators provided a discretionary form of power. By replacing the spindles slightly early, winding machine workers could *reduce* the time needed to complete each spindle change, allowing them to work less while still "fulfilling" their production requirements. Performing every spindle change five minutes early, for example, when done four times a day, reduced the amount of time the machine was running by twenty minutes *each shift*, thereby reducing the time the machine needed to be "tended." Completing one's production

requirement twenty minutes early, meant twenty *fewer* minutes of work each day. On average, most winding machine operators performed each spindle change between five and seven minutes early.

In many ways, broken machine counters were an unmitigated advantage for workers. Measuring work assignments and production by the number of spindle changes per shift allowed machine operators to manipulate the system within certain limits. Not surprisingly, they took full advantage of the situation. Replacing spindles early allowed workers to work less and work more slowly. It did not mean, however, that this necessarily resulted in "finishing early." Workers could translate less work time into a generally slower pace of work or they could take more breaks throughout the day. As will become clear in the following paragraphs, the result was usually a combination of both, and not simply finishing early.

And because determining when the spindles were full was a judgment call, inexact and subjective, this form of resistance did not call attention to itself. To an outsider it was completely inconspicuous. To those who worked in different departments, it was also not obvious, even if, like a factory administrator, they happened to walk by the machine every day.[20] Unless one was thoroughly familiar with the specifics of the winding machine (the way production was measured, the broken machine counter, etc.), this form of resistance was imperceptible.[21]

Occasionally, shift supervisors griped or groaned about spindles replaced early. These complaints were usually about spindle changes that occurred on previous shifts and spindles that were already on the ground, waiting to be taken to the spinning department. Making a formal complaint or saying something informally to an engineer or control department employee, however, would undoubtedly have gotten someone in trouble (either a winding machine operator and/or a shift supervisor from another shift). Shift supervisors had nothing to gain and a considerable amount to lose from doing so, and as far as I know, this was never done.[22]

Shift supervisors occasionally told workers on their own shifts to hold off on a spindle change or wait a few moments before replacing the spindles (*istana shwayya abl ma tighayar*). Replacing spindles early caused neither bottlenecks nor manufacturing problems further down the production process. It did not cause spinning machines to sit idle and the costs to the firm were marginal if not entirely abstract.[23] So much, that neither shift supervisors nor production administrators thought it necessary to carefully monitor winding machine operators, or tell them precisely when to replace the spindles. As long as spindles were not turned out undeniably early or sent to the spinning department half

full, however, no one got in trouble, neither winding machine workers nor shift supervisors. Everyone knew what was expected and what they could get away with. Thus, since changing the spindles slightly early did not have significant negative consequences for the company in terms of the quality of production or the supply of spindles (the raw material for the spinning department), it became a regular and routinized form of everyday resistance on the shop floor.[24]

Replacing the spindles early (or any similar practice by winding machine workers or others) and the "free time" this created came with its own potential problems, however. The workload at MIDIA was already relaxed, and by no means overwhelming. Although everyone worked (or, to be exact, almost everyone), no one worked at breakneck speed. No one strained to meet production requirements and no one worked until the very end of each shift. This was true for winding machine operators and for everyone else on the shop floor.

How to use this newly created spare time became a concern. For if someone finished their production requirements early, they could not just pack up and go home—they had to stay in the factory until the end of the shift. To complicate matters further, workers could not turn their machines off noticeably early without calling attention to themselves and potentially getting into trouble. No one on the day shift, for example, could turn their machine off at 12:30 P.M. or 1:00 P.M., even if they could meet their production requirements by this time. Workers began slowing down around 2:00 P.M. and started cleaning up sometime after 2:00 P.M. Even if workers could meet their production requirements much earlier, and everyone could,—four and a half changes by 12:45 P.M.—they had to be discreet. Thus, winding machine operators, like other workers, had to skillfully weave the time saved as a result of this form of resistance into regular work routines and the fabric of factory life.[25]

Although these issues faced all workers at MIDIA, Nabil was particularly conscious of them. He had once finished noticeably early and had been caught and reprimanded by the head of the wool preparations department (I describe this incident in chapter 4). Since this incident, he had become overly conscious of the speed and timing of his work (i.e., how long the machine was running, when he finished each spindle change). He deliberately paced himself, making sure not to meet his production requirements too early.

Once, late in the morning, when we were working together, the winding machine automatically stopped. As there were no visible tears or tangles, the stoppage most likely resulted from something in the back of the machine. A barrel had probably run out of wool or a piece of

tape had torn. Nothing serious, an easy repair. As I stood up to determine exactly what had happened so I could restart the machine, Nabil motioned for me to wait. He asked what time it was. When I told him it was nearly 11:00 A.M., he looked away briefly, as if engrossed in serious reflection. After a short while, Nabil told me to sit down so that we could continue our conversation. When I asked about the tear and reminded him that the machine was sitting idle, he said, "it's still early . . . I need to change this one [the spindle on the machine] at 11:45 and it's almost finished [full] . . . it's only 11:00." We sat for the better part of ten to fifteen minutes before Nabil finally got up to check the machine, without making the repair or turning it on. Only after another few minutes had passed and we had checked every barrel individually, replacing one and making the necessary repair by tying the wool together, did we restart the machine.

Nabil asked about the time so that he could think about how many changes he had completed that morning and how many were still ahead of him. During his moment of reflection, Nabil had calculated backward, determining when to replace the spindles based on how much time was left in the shift and not how long it would take to finish the spindles. In other words, Nabil had divided the time left in the shift by the number of spindle changes he still had to complete. By doing this, the time it took to complete spindle changes reflected the amount of time left in the work day and not the actual time needed to fill the spindles with wool. Realizing that he was significantly ahead of "schedule" and did not need to complete another change until 11:45 A.M., he told me to sit down and hold off making the repair. By letting the machine sit idle for a few extra minutes, he was regulating his work so that he finished his production requirement at a "reasonable" time (e.g., around 2:15) and avoided finishing too early. Nabil's strategy was to consume time, or waste it, depending on your perspective.

There were many other ways of regulating the pace of work on this, or any other, machine. Every part of the labor process could, of course, be drawn out and extended in time. Some work activities, however, were more subtly prolonged than others. Spindle changes were one of the easiest aspects of the labor process on the winding machine to manipulate in terms of time. Spindle changes took place at least four times every shift and involved many separate work activities, each of which could be potentially extended.

This became remarkably clear one morning when Fathy and I were working on the winding machine. For some reason, we did not eat breakfast immediately after arriving at work that day, which was our custom. We soon noticed Mahmoud, the tea man, walk past us

Illustration 3.5. Nabil, a winding machine worker, admiring a full spindle and posing for the camera.

and announce that he was leaving to get the morning tea. Looking at our watches, we realized it was already 7:35 A.M. Engineer Abdo Farag, the senior engineer in charge of our department, was due at 8:00 A.M., and we could not be seen eating when he arrived. This meant that if we wanted to eat breakfast before his arrival, we only had twenty-five minutes to finish our breakfast and have tea. By itself, this would not have been difficult. Unfortunately, we had the added misfortune of also having to perform a spindle change within this time. For at the very moment Mahmoud walked past, Fathy had turned the machine off and we were preparing to replace the spindles. Fathy briefly considered the dilemma and thought about delaying the spindle change.[26] He decided, however, that we would first replace the spindles and then sit down to eat the morning meal.

At the time, I had only been in the factory for ten weeks and was still not thoroughly familiar with how quickly work could be completed if one wanted to be exceedingly efficient. I was amazed and recorded the following entry in my field notes:

> "*Quickest change ever on the winding machine:*
> Fathy and I proceeded to do the quickest 'taqlee'' ever. Why? Because, Mahmoud went to get the tea and Fathy

> and I had to change AND eat before he got back. This says so much about work and how it is done on the shop floor. We could always work at this pace—changes on the winding machine could always be done this quickly. Fathy neither wants nor is required to work this fast (this well). It is thus not just the old machines and the outdated technology that regulate the pace and intensity of work. Nor is it (the pace) simply one of the by-products of over-staffing and excess employment."

Unlike Nabil, Fathy worked at a quick pace under normal circumstances. But these were no ordinary circumstances. This day he was extraordinary, removing the spindles in record time. We replaced all thirty spindles in less than five minutes, without dallying or hesitation and had time to prepare breakfast, eat, and still enjoy Mahmoud's tea—while it was still hot.

Resistance and the Labor Process at Misr Textiles

I worked at another textile factory, the Misr Textiles Spinning and Weaving Company, for one month. The idea was to compare certain features of this firm—shop floor relations, institutional structures, resistance—with MIDIA, my primary research site. Misr Textiles was significantly different from MIDIA. A relatively new firm, it was a fully integrated spinning and weaving company, established as a joint venture in the early 1980s. It employed approximately 11,000 people (workers, administrators, and management) and was located some thirty-five kilometers outside Alexandria. Unlike MIDIA, which consisted of a number of factories spread throughout the city, Misr Textiles occupied a single location. With more than 500 *feddans*,[27] the facility was massive, with its own internal roads, power generation facility, and water supply.

During this month, I worked on a winding machine in the combing, pulling, and winding section of "Spinning Factory Number Two." Work was surprisingly different from what I was accustomed to. The machinery was newer and more sophisticated, incorporating relatively advanced technology. Other noteworthy differences included the firm's institutional structures, the layout of the shop floor, and the composition of the labor force.

The workload was also substantially heavier, as workers were required to tend more machines. Each winding machine operator at Misr Textiles was responsible for two one hundred and twenty (120) spindle machines, a sharp contrast to the thirty spindle machines at MIDIA. The machines were positioned facing each other, allowing workers to

monitor both (and see both sets of spindles) at the same time. An area, or aisle, was left open between the machines so workers could make necessary repairs, replace the spindles, and walk comfortably in between. Each spindle required its own barrel, and every barrel had to be checked and replaced occasionally. Almost every part of the winding machine operator's job at Misr Textiles required greater effort.

An additional worker was assigned for every six winding machines precisely because of the heavy workload.[28] His job was primarily to assist with spindle changes. Replacing spindles, as I explained previously, is the single most difficult part of the winding machine operator's job and replacing two hundred and forty spindles (for two machines) several times in one shift is physically exhausting. Auxiliary workers helped with other tasks as well (i.e., replacing barrels behind the machines when they became empty).

The method of assigning work and measuring production also differed significantly from MIDIA. Each morning at MIDIA a production department employee informed the winding machine operator of the day's work assignment. Although assignments varied, the variation was limited. No fewer than four and no more than five spindle changes were ever required during a single shift. Similarly, production was measured by the number of spindle changes completed each shift. The broken machine counters were, of course, the reason for this and I have already described the type of resistance that resulted.

Things were significantly different at Misr Textiles. No one told winding machine operators how much work was required. They did not need to. Work assignments were by the week, and more importantly, never varied.

Production was also measured differently. Every machine counter was operational and equipment was generally newer and in better condition. Not only did the machine counters work at Misr Textiles, they functioned differently. Each winding machine was fitted with three counters marked "A," "B," and "C," which were sealed under glass, so they could not be tampered with. Counter A recorded production for the first shift, while counters B and C tracked production for the second and third shifts respectively. Each shift, and therefore every machine operator, had a separate counter.

The functioning machine counters ensured that production was measured by the number of spindle revolutions (the technical term is "hanks"), irrespective of the number of times the spindles were replaced. But like their counterparts at MIDIA, winding machine workers at Misr Textiles determined when to replace the spindles.

As far as management was concerned, the only thing that mattered was hanks. Hanks equaled production; they were not concerned with

when workers replaced the spindles as long as everyone produced the requisite number of hanks by the end of the week.

Although the machines were newer, more advanced, and fitted with fully operating machine counters, ostensibly ensuring a more accurate method of measuring production, the system at Misr Textiles was not without its problems. This became apparent my third week in the factory. By then, I had worked at MIDIA for more than five months and was thoroughly familiar with the basic principles, as well as the tricks and shortcuts, of the winding machine.

That week I happened to be working with 'Awad. Although not particularly talkative, he was a nice enough fellow. 'Awad lived in Kafr El-Dawar, a semi-industrial town outside of Alexandria. He was of rural origin, and definitely not urbane. He had been at Misr Textiles for nine years and before this, had worked in a textile factory in Iraq, also on a winding machine. Years of experience had made him a skilled winding machine operator.

'Awad's immediate supervisor was a man named Khamis, a *mubashir* (director) in charge of the combing, pulling, and winding sections of the shop floor. The company hierarchy at Misr Textiles was different from MIDIA's. Because of the tremendous size of the factories, the layout of the shop floors and the fact that combing, pulling, winding, *and* spinning operations took place in the same area, the shift supervisor's position and responsibilities were significantly greater at Misr Textiles. As a result, an additional supervisory position was established between workers and shift supervisors, the mubashir (director). There were four *mubashrin* (directors) on every floor, supervising workers and production, who reported directly to the shift supervisor.

Khamis began complaining about the winding machine operators at the beginning of my third week. He said that some of them, including 'Awad, did not replace the spindles as frequently as he wanted. A director in spinning, one of Khamis' colleagues, often complained that at times there were not enough spindles to run all the spinning machines. Obviously, this had negative consequences for production. Spinning machines without spindles meant some machines were sitting idle. When the shift supervisor made the rounds that afternoon, Khamis reported the problem: He said, "*al-wala* 'Awad (the boy 'Awad) who works on this machine only changes (the spindles) twice a day and the people from spinning are complaining." Although 'Awad was married, had a son, was in his late thirties and not much younger than the director, Khamis referred to him and the other workers as "boys."

As chance would have it, 'Awad was sick the next day and did not come to work. Khamis assigned a man named Abu Mohamed to

work in his place. Abu Mohamed was in his fifties, older than most of his co-workers, short, thin, and balding. Like ‘Awad, he too had tremendous experience. He had worked on a winding machine in this factory for fourteen years, almost since the company’s inception. Before coming here, Abu Mohamed worked at another textile firm in Alexandria for more than a decade.

Abu Mohamed worked hard that day. He and ‘Awad were both skilled workers who kept their machines running for most of the shift. The difference between the two could easily have been overlooked. Although both men ran the machine for approximately the same amount of time, the number of spindle changes each completed differed. Abu Mohamed replaced the spindles three times that day, compared with ‘Awad’s usual two. This pleased Khamis (the mubashir) to no end. So much, in fact, that toward the end of the shift he decided to switch ‘Awad and Abu Mohamed permanently. The machines, Khamis explained, were running two different types of material (with different percentages of cotton and polyester) and the material produced on ‘Awad’s original machine was in greater demand in the spinning department. ‘Awad’s habit of replacing the spindles only twice a day (compared with Abu Mohamed’s three changes), however, meant that there were fewer of these spindles (with this type of material) for the spinning machines. This, after all, was what Khamis’ colleague in the spinning department had complained about. When ‘Awad returned the next day he was told to work on Abu Mohamed’s machine.

It was not as if ‘Awad was producing fewer hanks than Abu Mohamed, or that one worker was fulfilling the production requirement while the other was not. Both men were producing the same amount of wound wool. The difference was simply that Abu Mohamed replaced the spindles more frequently. As a result, his spindles were smaller than ‘Awad’s, with less wool wound onto each. ‘Awad waited longer before replacing the spindles and thus, when replaced, each was larger, heavier, and contained more wool. Since production at Misr Textiles was measured by hanks and not by the number of spindle changes, it was possible for two workers to produce exactly the same amount of finished product while one replaced the spindles less frequently than the other.

Resistance Strategies Compared: MIDIA and Misr Textiles

Comparing Misr Textiles and MIDIA is revealing of resistance practices and strategies and how they relate to institutional systems of measuring work, output, and production. At first it would appear as if newer, more advanced machines with working machine counters, along with

a more accurate method of measuring production (based on hanks, or the number of spindle revolutions completed in a certain amount of time) left winding machine operators with little room for resistance. This was hardly the case, however.

Unlike workers at MIDIA, winding machine operators at Misr Textiles could not reduce their workload by simply replacing the spindles early. The strategy at Misr Textiles could not have been more different. In fact, it was exactly the opposite. Workers at both firms wanted the same thing—to reduce the time and effort needed to fulfill their production requirements. How 'Awad and the other winding machine operators went about achieving this, however, varied, because of the differing institutional contexts (i.e., company systems for measuring production) they operated within.

Winding machine workers at Misr Textiles reduced their workloads *not* by replacing the spindles *early*, but by replacing them *late*. At Misr Textiles, it did not matter how many changes were performed each shift, as long as the requisite number of hanks were completed by the end of the week. Because spindle changes are the most difficult, time-consuming, and physically tiring aspect of the labor process on the winding machine, workers attempted to *reduce* the number of changes they performed each shift. Reducing the number of spindle changes each shift by one (especially since every winding machine operator was responsible for two machines, each with one hundred and twenty spindles), provided significant savings of both time and effort.

Workers at Misr Textiles derived yet another advantage from replacing the spindles less frequently. Spindle replacements required the machine to be turned off for significant periods of time. But because output was measured by hanks, the time the machine was not running did not contribute to a worker's production and was essentially down time. Fewer spindle changes, therefore, entailed less down time, which meant that production requirements could be met faster.

Ironically, measuring production by hanks would appear to be more accurate than measuring it by the number of spindle changes. Despite this, however, workers managed to devise strategies of resistance, within the institutional systems in which they operated, to work less while still meeting their production requirements.

Some might claim that what I have described above merely reflects a set of flawed institutional structures at Misr Textiles. The "gaps" in the present system, the argument would go, could easily be remedied, eliminating this type of resistance altogether.

While it is certainly true that this particular *form* of resistance could be addressed, it is highly unlikely that all forms of resistance could be eliminated. What this example demonstrates, in fact, is that despite facing significantly different institutional contexts for measuring production, both groups of workers devised effective strategies of resistance. What is ironic and truly remarkable is that the practices that constitute resistance in both cases are exactly the opposite. As long as workers retain some amount of discretion (e.g., determining when to replace the spindles), they are likely to use it in their favor, in whatever system they find themselves. The forms of resistance may vary, but resistance strategies will remain, not as a gap, but rather, as an essential part of the labor process involving wage-labor and other forms of "extracted labor." Conflict, tension, struggle, and resistance are inherent in any system of production in which workers are paid for their labor and in which labor itself is a commodity. While institutional structures can be changed, allowing workers more or less room for maneuver, any system that leaves some decisions to workers is open to potential manipulation. Workers will almost always attempt to manipulate systems in their favor.

Machine Design, Technology, and Workers' Practices

Comparing the machines at Misr Textiles and MIDIA provides a final interesting irony also relevant for our discussion of resistance.[29] Comparing the different machines at the two factories demonstrates how despite (or in this case, *because* of) advanced technology, workers continued to take advantage of the system, whatever that system happened to be, as best they could.

The newer, more sophisticated winding machines at Misr Textiles were fitted with small vacuums (one for each spindle) on the front of the machines, immediately adjacent to where the cotton or wool left the last roller. The idea behind the vacuums was simple. On the older machines (at MIDIA for instance), a tear on one spindle often caused tangles on other nearby spindles. Not only did this waste material, tangles also caused the machine to shut down, either automatically by the sensor, or by the worker while making the repair. Tears and tangles therefore wasted time and material. Vacuums were intended to remove tears by sucking them into a shaft inside the machine *before* they caused tangles, reducing waste and allowing the machine to run uninterrupted for longer stretches of time.

The vacuums worked well; they effectively reduced the number of tangles, allowing machines to run without stoppages for significantly longer periods. There was only one problem. On the older winding

machines workers were forced to carefully monitor the machines, almost constantly in order to prevent tears from becoming tangles. Tangles entailed more work and if there was one thing machine operators worked hard to avoid, it was more work. This ensured that workers at MIDIA stayed close to their machines. Ironically, because the vacuums at Misr Textiles prevented many tears from becoming tangles, they also enabled workers to wander away from their machines for longer periods of time. Workers at Misr Textiles often left their machines running while they took extended tea and cigarette breaks far away. Needless to say, this had negative consequences. Although the vacuums prevented tears from becoming tangles, tears still developed, which went unnoticed and unrepaired for relatively long periods of time (as machine operators were nowhere to be found). Ironically, the vacuums on the newer machines, which did indeed function as they were designed, allowed workers to leave their machines while they were running and generated considerable waste in the process.

This is an interesting commentary on technology, engineers, and machine design. The German engineers who designed the vacuums were obviously operating with the simple assumption, seemingly logical, that tears are bad. Thus eliminating tears, and the tangles that result, was assumed to be an unmitigated good, saving wool and cotton and allowing machines to run uninterrupted for longer periods of time. What they did not take into account, however, was that the older machines (without vacuums) actually forced winding machine operators to stay close by, tending their machines, looking for tears and tangles. This had significant positive consequences for production and for reducing waste.

Fathy and "Output Restriction"

One of my most unforgettable experiences in the factory directly relates to the subject of resistance. Although I do not recall exactly how the situation began, it was never intended, by myself nor anyone else. In the ensuing drama I made one of the worst mistakes an ethnographer can make, becoming directly involved in a serious conflict with a fellow worker.

Unfortunately, this was no ordinary conflict. It was passionate and intense, the talk of the department for an entire day. At the time, in the heat of the moment, it seemed quite serious; serious enough to make me forget, if only momentarily, that my presence in the factory was primarily as a participant-observer and not as a worker. Tempers flared and insults flew and the conflict quickly became too personal for dispassion or restraint, on either of our parts. There was simply

too much on the line. What eventually transpired, however, thoroughly informed my understanding of resistance on the shop floor.

The incident occurred after I had been at MIDIA for nine months and had grown quite comfortable on the shop floor. I knew everyone in the department and was close with many workers, several of whom had become genuine friends. After working in two factories on two different types of winding machines, I also knew how to operate the machine quite well, better than most auxiliary workers. I had begun to take my presence on the shop floor for granted, at least as a social scientist.

That day, Fathy and I were sitting in front of the winding machine when Mohamed, an auxiliary worker, walked by and decided to join our conversation. His news was that he had worked on the winding machine the previous day. This was somewhat unusual and definitely worth recounting. For although Mohamed knew how to operate the machine, he usually worked on either pulling or combing machines. Apparently, a winding machine operator on another shift had been sick and Mohamed was assigned to replace him.

In the course of our conversation, Mohamed mentioned that he completed five spindle changes the previous day *and* had left the spindles on the machine full, ready to be replaced. Without attempting to brag or boast, the implication was clear. Mohamed could have finished another change, for a total of six spindle changes in a single shift.

After being in the factory for some time, I did not find this particularly surprising. Mohamed was honest and had no reason to lie. Although we were never required to perform six changes, I knew it was possible. On many days, the work assignment was five spindle changes and no one found this particularly difficult. Those days were like any other and we certainly never strained ourselves to fulfill production requirements.

Fathy's reaction, however, was immediate and harsh.[30] He said that although Mohamed might have completed five changes, it was *impossible* that the spindles left on the machine were near completion. Fathy's objection and his skepticism were directed at both Mohamed's claim as well as his general level of skill. After all, he reminded us, Mohamed was not a winding machine worker and although he knew the basics, he was not as experienced as the regular operators.

Fathy's comments quickly became uncomfortably personal and even disparaging. Although one of the regular winding machine operators, he said, including himself, *might* have been able to complete six changes in a single shift, Mohamed was incapable of this.

Mohamed became visibly offended and tried to respond. Fathy, however, refused to listen. He raised his voice, constantly interrupted,

and did not allow Mohamed to get a word in edgewise. Although Fathy was older and had significantly more experience than Mohamed, he was usually not a bully. Mohamed, by contrast, was the youngest worker in the department. He was a short, chubby fellow in his early thirties, with a round, boyish face. And he was clearly intimidated.

Fathy's attitude infuriated me. Not only had he insulted poor Mohamed, I fundamentally disagreed with his claim. So much, that I told Fathy that I believed Mohamed and moreover, that I thought it *was* possible to finish six spindle changes in a single shift.

A smile came over Mohamed's face, realizing that I was on his side. This only made matters worse, however, as Fathy became even more angry and hotheaded. He maintained, in an even more obnoxious tone, that it was impossible for an auxiliary worker, and "*especially Mohamed*" ("*khussusan* Mohamed"), to complete six changes in a single shift. Mohamed again desperately tried to argue but to no avail, and then encouraged me to intervene.

In a moment of outrage and frustration, without thinking about what I was about to say, I told Fathy that not only did I believe Mohamed could perform six changes in one shift, I told him I could perform seven! The words came out of my mouth before I realized their implication. And when Fathy laughed and refused to back down, I soon found Mohamed encouraging me to bet Fathy on my claim.

I did just that. In the heat of the moment, with tempers flaring, I challenged Fathy, betting him that I could perform seven spindle changes in a single shift. The question was no longer theoretical or abstract. It had become highly charged and a direct challenge. Our names and our words were on the line, and Fathy quickly accepted.

Sheikh Darwish had seen the commotion and was now on the scene. He heard the last words exchanged. The challenge was now public and there was no turning back.

Darwish told Fathy that he believed it could be done and declared that he would help. Hearing this, Fathy stood up, walked ceremoniously to the wooden platform in front of the winding machine and said, in a raised voice, as if to declare to the entire shop floor, that I could get anyone and everyone to help but would still be unable to complete seven spindle changes in a single shift.

Making the bet brought about a temporary peace and we were all in better spirits as a result, at least for the moment. But this turned out to be the calm before the storm. We finalized the wager during the remainder of the shift. The bet, we decided, would take place the very next day. No time could be lost; this was serious business and we were not going to delay. The loser would buy the winner break-

fast, we agreed, which would consist of *fiteer*, traditional Egyptian stuffed pizza.[31] This would be a special treat since breakfast on the shop floor usually consisted of *fuul* (fava beans) and *falafel* or white cheese and vegetables.

In all the excitement, sheikh Darwish somehow managed to include himself, and his stomach, in the wager. The loser would buy him breakfast as well. After all, he had helped broker the deal.

While agreeing on the terms, several co-workers walked by, and each was ready to offer an opinion about whether seven spindle changes could be completed in a single shift and whether I could do it. By the end of the day, the entire department had heard about the challenge. The shift supervisor himself came by and told me, in front of Fathy, that he thought it could be done and was prepared to help.

When I got home that day I was still excited and began thinking about what had happened and the challenge that lay ahead. Needless to say, I was more than a little nervous. The situation was both personal and complex. Could Fathy afford to lose, I thought? Not that I was certain I was going to win, but what exactly was on the line? At one level, there was the question of money. How much would breakfast cost and how much would this set Fathy back if he lost?

Like most workers, Fathy was not financially comfortable, by any stretch of the imagination. He earned less than three hundred pounds a month from the factory and held a second job in the wholesale market hauling crates of fruits and vegetables on his back, six days a week, for a few extra pounds. Fathy was married and had five children, the youngest of whom was only a few months old. The seven of them lived in a rented room, four meters by four meters, in a poor district of town, and shared a bathroom with several other apartments in the building. Even if Fathy could afford to buy us breakfast, I thought, it certainly was not going to help his finances.

There was also another issue, however, at the symbolic level: the challenge itself. It was Fathy's word against mine and someone was going to lose. Our skills and knowledge of the machine were on the line. Would losing bring humiliation or disgrace? After all, Fathy was a seasoned winding machine operator. I, on the other hand, had only recently come to the factory and had little experience. One of us was bound to lose more than just money.

Although I did not have answers to these concerns, I felt could not back down. I could only think of doing one thing to potentially alleviate the situation. That evening, I purchased the fiteer and decided I was not going to accept payment, even if Fathy lost. This would at least partially resolve the issue of expense. Walking into the factory

with breakfast for Fathy, sheikh Darwish and myself, I hoped, would also be a kind of good will gesture on my part.

The next morning, I got up especially early, had a large cup of coffee and prepared myself for the day. It was around 6:40 A.M. when I arrived in the factory, nervous and anxious, and found the workers on the previous shift dressed and ready to leave. Sheikh Darwish had already arrived and had changed into his work clothes, as was his custom. He was sitting with several others, in the back by the pulling machines. I was extremely disappointed when I saw the winding machine, however. Nabil, who had worked the previous shift, had left the spindles on the machine nearly empty. This would make my task even more difficult.[32]

After exchanging greetings with everyone present, I returned to the machine and decided to begin working, although it still was not 7:00 A.M. I had my work cut out for me and needed all the help I could get. Seeing this, one of the workers on the previous shift who was waiting for the bell and knew nothing about the wager looked at me as if I was crazy. He yelled out, "did you just come? . . . Why don't you eat first?" Although I had no interest in eating, my conscience got the better of me and I turned the machine off and sat down. It would not be fair to start the machine before the beginning of the shift, I thought.

Ten minutes later, the shift supervisor marched onto the shop floor and saw me sitting by the side of the machine. What was I was waiting for, he asked. When I told him it was a few minutes before 7:00 A.M., he laughed and gave me the go ahead to begin working. I started the machine and the race had officially begun. Fathy arrived ten minutes after 7:00 A.M. and found me working furiously.

I worked extremely hard that day, constantly monitoring the machine, never averting my eyes from it for more than a few seconds. I remained standing the entire time. When the machine ran smoothly, I found other things to do: preparing for the next change, checking the barrels in the back, trouble shooting potential problems, etc.

The intensity paid off and I completed the first two spindle changes in record time, at 7:55 A.M. and 9:09 A.M. respectively.[33] What happened that day, however, was quite unexpected, truly surprising. From the beginning, Fathy was tense and his behavior was extremely unusual. Although I took the challenge seriously, he seemed to be taking it *too* seriously. Fathy simply became unbearable, childish and petty, and deliberately tried to annoy me, quite successfully I might add.

Fathy hovered around me and the machine the entire morning, refusing to let me work unencumbered. He purposely got in my way and constantly tried to engage me in ridiculous conversation. The whole

morning Fathy would not shut up, repeating the same lines over and over, "take a break, take a break . . . sit down and eat breakfast."

From the beginning, he complained about everything he could think of, from the amount of yarn on the spindles I changed, to the tension of the wool rope, and the quality of the repairs I made. Not only were these complaints groundless, these were things Fathy never took seriously about his own work. In this context, they were simply excuses.

His actions quickly became mean-spirited. When Fathy thought I was not paying attention, he walked to the back of the machine and pressed the automatic turn-off switch. The spindles came to an immediate halt. Seeing what he had done, I quickly restarted the machine and angrily told him to stay away from both me and the machine for the rest of the shift.

Moments later, Fathy snuck behind the machine again, this time to the hydraulic mechanism. This regulated the tension of the wool rope and as soon as he began tinkering with it, tears and tangles developed on the front of the machine.

Sheikh Darwish had seen Fathy bending down behind the machine, supposedly "adjusting" the hydraulic mechanism. Darwish was the mechanic responsible for the tension of the wool tape and technically was the only person allowed to make adjustments. In practice, however, winding machine operators often made minor adjustments themselves. But Fathy was not interested in adjusting the tension of the tape; he only wanted to stop the machine and disrupt production and was willing to do almost anything to achieve this.

Seeing what he had done, sheikh Darwish became furious. I had never seen him so upset. Darwish was livid and yelled at Fathy at the top of his lungs. The two men exchanged angry words. Fathy had purposely made the tension of the wool tape too tight in order to disrupt production. Darwish was so outraged that he went directly to the shift supervisor to complain about what Fathy had done. Fathy stayed by me and the machine attempting to justify his actions.

When Darwish returned with Sayid Rizq (the shift supervisor) all hell broke lose. The yelling erupted. Fathy claimed that the tension of the fatla was not tight enough. This, he said, allowed me to fill the spindles in less time. If this were true, it would have had negative consequences for the production process (and eventually for the finished product). Darwish and I were fuming. I had not touched the hydraulic regulator (and would not know how to if I tried). As I recounted the morning's events to the shift supervisor, including Fathy's annoying behavior, Darwish and Fathy began exchanging heated words, now on the raised wooden platform directly in front of the machine. Both

men were enraged and Fathy snapped, shoving Darwish, the smaller of the two, off the platform. Sheikh Darwish was fifty-four years old, frail, suffered from diabetes, and had a bad leg.[34] He stumbled off the platform and almost fell to the ground. He could easily have been hurt. This should never have happened, I thought.

The situation had gotten out of control.[35] Darwish, Fathy, and I were all close friends. The bet, however, had gotten the better of us. Seeing Fathy push Darwish and hearing the lies he told the shift supervisor, I simply could not take it any longer. I exploded, yelling at Fathy and storming off the shop floor. The bet was over.

Darwish immediately went to the back of the shop floor and I spent the next thirty minutes cooling down, by myself, upstairs in the workers' bathroom. Neither of us spoke to Fathy the rest of the shift and at the time, I felt like I never wanted to see or speak to him again. I was extremely upset. After regaining my composure, I returned and sat with Darwish and the other mechanics in the back of the work hall. Darwish and I were so angry, so outraged, that we could not even discuss what had happened and spent the rest of the shift in silence. Our co-workers occasionally walked by and asked about the incident. By the end of the shift everyone in the department had heard one version or another of the day's events.

At the time, of course, I was not thinking about this drama as a "neutral observer" or a "detached social scientist." Nor was I thinking of myself as an ethnographer. This was not about social research. It was about Fathy's claim, what I believed, who was right, and whether I could complete seven spindle changes in a single shift. We had all become caught up in the challenge.

Only that evening, when I was by myself, and the following day, was I able to begin thinking systematically about what had happened. What could have gotten into Fathy, I thought? There was surely more to his behavior than competitiveness. Both of us had taken the challenge seriously, but for Fathy it was clearly not just about winning. His behavior was truly bizarre and demonstrated a willingness to do anything, including angering me, fighting with Darwish, disrupting production, and getting into trouble with the shift supervisor, to ensure that I did not complete seven spindle changes that shift. Why had he behaved so strangely?

One explanation, too simple to be entirely accurate, was the issue of money and expense. Even though I had purchased breakfast and made it clear that I was not going to accept payment regardless of the outcome, the cost of breakfast had been the original wager. Was Fathy so worried about the price of three fiteer that he was prepared to win

the bet, or more accurately, end the wager, by any means necessary? This was not convincing. There must have been something else going on.

This had turned into more than just a simple wager. Fathy and the other winding machine operators were quicker to realize this than I was. From their perspective, it seemed, I was a potential rate-buster.[36] For if I managed to finish seven spindle changes, this might have been interpreted by many in the factory (e.g., the shift supervisor, the department head, and the work study department) as proof that the present production requirements were much too low—that it was possible to produce more on these machines each shift.

The danger of this for Fathy and his colleagues was obvious. More than just pride, reputation, machismo, or the price of a meal was on the line. Fathy and his colleagues feared that if I managed to perform seven spindle changes in a single shift, this information might eventually get to the work study department. As a consequence, production requirements could change, resulting in potentially heavier workloads for winding machine workers. If I won the bet, in the eyes of the winding machine operators, it could mean more work for them—for the rest of their working lives.

This was not a simple wager after all. The possibility of heavier work assignments was on the line. Although work assignments are light, winding machine workers (and every other worker in the factory) must not appear as if they are obviously underworked. This is their continuing dilemma. The challenge had turned out to be much more important than the price of breakfast and Fathy, therefore, was willing to do anything to see to it that I did not complete seven changes that shift, even if this entailed upsetting his friends and getting into trouble in the process.

When I arrived at work the next day, Darwish and I could talk about nothing else. But before I said anything, Darwish and Ramadan, the head mechanic in our department, announced that there had been a fully coordinated effort on the part of the winding machine operators to ensure that I did not complete seven spindle changes. What had happened, they said, was that Fathy had mentioned the wager in passing to one of the other winding machine workers. On hearing about the challenge, the worker realized the potential danger of the situation and informed his colleagues.[37] The other machine operators then told Fathy that it was his responsibility to make sure I lost, by any means necessary. In fact, Darwish speculated that the reason the spindles on the machine were close to empty when I arrived the previous morning was that Nabil, the operator who had worked the night shift, had purposely left them that way. He too was trying to make my task impossible.

Fathy succeeded in preventing me from completing seven spindle changes. But the situation between Fathy and myself was more complicated. In addition to stopping a potential rate-buster—albeit, an unintentional and unknowing one—for Fathy there was also the question of the challenge itself, which had already become highly charged. He had a personal interest, above and beyond the interests of other winding machine operators, in preventing me from completing seven spindle changes. This too undoubtedly plays a partial role in explaining his behavior.

The irony of the situation is that even if I had managed to complete seven spindle changes, absolutely nothing would have changed. Production requirements on the winding machine would not have increased. This, in fact, is one reason why I never imagined the challenge would become a problem from the outset.

Before working on the shop floor, I spent weeks exploring the internal structure of the firm, visiting various departments (including the work study department), interviewing management and learning about the company. It was apparent to me, and I believed quite obvious to everyone, that work study had long since become an ossified, overly bureaucratic division, which now served only one function: to record production. The department employees never left their offices. These were not engineers sneaking around the factory armed with stopwatches and obsessed with efficiency, always looking to increase output. They had become paper pushers who never ventured beyond the administration cafeteria. In fact, during the entire period of my research I never saw or heard about a work study employee on any shop floor in the entire factory.

A remnant of the company's past, the department had been established by the original owner in the early 1950s, a Greek businessman who was influenced by English management techniques.[38] The department had seen significant activity at various times in its history. In the early years, work study played an active role first determining, and then recalculating, production requirements on all new machines. After the company was nationalized in 1961, the department again witnessed a period of heightened activity as many production requirements were recalculated. Of course, whenever new machinery was acquired, employees from work study were called into action to establish production requirements. This, however, was always done with the active involvement of shift supervisors and production workers.

The simple fact, however, was that there had been no new machines in the factory for close to a decade. The department was also incapable and uninterested in increasing production requirements on

this or any other machine. Much of the factory's machinery consisted of Platt thirty-spindle winding machines made in 1973, including the one in the wool preparations department. Production requirements had been established in 1973 and had not changed since that time. Moreover, changing production requirements on the winding machine would have inevitably been a long, complicated, and exceedingly bureaucratic process involving several department heads and possibly even the chief executive officer. It was more than unlikely. Efficiency was not particularly valued and there was also no external demand for increased production. Although profitable, the administration did not feel the company had to produce more. Who, after all, would buy the additional output? Even if I had completed seven spindle changes that day—and assuming work study heard about this—they would have been neither interested nor able to increase the production requirements on the winding machine.

Although I knew this, it was apparently not so obvious to Fathy and his colleagues. They also might not have wanted to take any chances. Increased production requirements for every winding machine operator in the entire factory, after all, was too important to risk or take lightly.

Spindle changes or hanks completed are only two methods of measuring production on the winding machine. There are, of course, others. At a blanket factory owned by MIDIA in another section of Alexandria, production was measured differently.

This was one of the company's first manufacturing facilities and was located on the Mahmoudia canal in an old, industrial part of town. The factory used scrap and excess wool to produce coarse wool blankets and other generally lesser grade products. Instead of measuring production by the number of spindle changes or hanks completed, however, at this factory, production on the winding machine was measured by weight.

At the end of each shift, winding machine operators loaded the spindles they produced onto a cart and took it to the *wazan*,[39] a production department employee permanently stationed on the shop floor. The wazan, seated behind an old wooden desk in the center of the work hall, measured each worker's output with the help of an industrial scale. In classic bureaucratic fashion, he recorded how much each worker produced twice, by hand, in two large bound volumes that were the property of the production and control departments respectively.

Measuring production by weight would seem to have many advantages. Unlike other methods (i.e., spindle changes or hanks), when production is measured by weight it does not matter how early (MIDIA) or late (Misr Textiles) machine operators replace the spindles.

Measuring production by hanks, by contrast, measures spindle revolutions, whether wool is wound or not, rather than the amount of wool wound onto spindles. When workers at Misr Textiles were having tea and cigarettes far away from the machines and tears developed (which were removed by the vacuums), the spindles continued to revolve. This was recorded as output despite the fact that only waste was being produced. Measuring production by weight avoided these and similar problems.

MIDIA's blanket factory, where production was measured by weight, was downsizing. Instead of three eight-hour shifts, the factory now only operated two shifts. Many workers were transferred to other facilities, including the wool factory where I worked. Abdel Aziz was one such worker. A young, unmarried man of thirty-five, Abdel Aziz was remarkably vulgar and had a penchant for telling dirty jokes. He also appeared to be hyperactive, yet determined that none of his energy be directed toward work.

Abdel Aziz frequently complained about work on our shop floor. Things were much easier in the blanket factory, he told us. There, he had been a winding machine operator and rarely worked more than three hours a day. After finishing his production requirement, Abdel Aziz spent time in the bathroom smoking cigarettes and talking with friends.

How did he finish his production quota so quickly each day? Abdel Aziz and the other winding machine operators in the blanket factory regularly sprayed water on the spindles, making them considerably heavier. Wool is remarkably absorbent and since production was measured by weight, the scale measured the weight of the finished wool spindles as well as the water.

Only after completing my fieldwork did I come across Herbert Heaton's classic account of the history of textile manufacturing. In *The Yorkshire Woolen and Worsted Industries*, first published in 1920, Heaton describes the "difficulties" of eighteenth-century domestic production:

> The domestic system lent itself easily to those practices which arise from lack of supervision. When raw materials were handed out to a workman, and work was done out of sight of the master, it was not difficult for the employee to practice any number of fraudulent tricks on his employer.

> Embezzlement of material, exchange of poor wool for good, *the wetting of wool in order to make it weigh heavier*, imperfect or inaccurate spinning, &c., all these things might be practices with a fair chance of success, since the eye of the master or foreman was not ever on the workman.[40]

Textile workers had apparently been using Abdel Aziz's technique for years. Egyptian workers, however, managed to do in factories, albeit public sector ones, what their eighteenth-century English counterparts could only do at home.[41]

Table 3.1. The different systems of measuring production on the winding machine and the corresponding Workers' Resistance Practices

	MIDIA	*Misr Textiles*	*Blanket Factory (MIDIA)*
How is Production Measured? (metric)	Number of spindle changes	Number of spindle rotations ("hanks")	Weight
Workers' Resistance Practices	Removing spindles early	Removing spindles late (less frequently)	Pouring water on wool (making it heavier)
Benefit to Workers	Less work time ("fulfilling" production requirements early)	Fewer spindle changes and less work time ("fulfilling" production requirements early). Spindle changes are the hardest part of the job, requiring the most physical effort	Less work time
Consequences for Production/Company	Lower worker productivity/ None at MIDIA	Bottlenecks further down the production process (i.e., not enough spindles for the spinning machines)	Damaged wool (and lower worker productivity)

Conclusion

Nabil, 'Awad, Fathy, and Abdel Aziz engaged in different types of resistance. Their stories, however, are not simply individual tales or independent occurrences. What I have described are patterns of resistance, microtechniques, and generalized strategies that extend well beyond the individual characters and cases I document.

Fathy, Nabil, and the other winding machine operators at MIDIA were engaged in one form of "output restriction."[42] The restriction of output, also called "systematic soldiering" and "goldbricking," is usually said to occur only when workers are paid by the piece. In such situations, output restriction is understood as workers' systematic attempts to limit production despite the fact that more could be produced (and more could be earned).[43] In piece-rate systems, workers have an incentive to restrict output because producing more often brings increased effort as well as (temporary) increased earnings. Because piece-rates are variable, if workers consistently produce more the rates are likely to change in their disfavor, meaning they will have to produce more and work harder in order to receive the same compensation. The paradox of output restriction is that by limiting production, workers will earn more while working less.

Despite not being paid by the piece, MIDIA's winding machine operators systematically produced less than what they could have—much less.[44] The reasons for this are clear. First, workers were not subject to pressure to produce more. This was, after all, a public sector firm, albeit a profitable one, and the logic of profit (and ever increasing profit) either did not operate or did not operate with the same intensity as in the private sector. Second, workers feared that if they produced more on any given day (or demonstrated that it was easily possible to produce more) they might be required to produce more every day (e.g., Fathy and the other winding machine operators' fear of more work). Third, workers believed that increased output would not have translated into increased pay for the reasons mentioned above.

The discussion of Nabil and 'Awad also sheds light on the subtle ways winding machine operators regulate their work, detailing the different techniques they use to control effort and pace production. These subtle forms of resistance were enmeshed within work practices and established routines. Because they were so well-woven into the fabric of daily life, they were almost imperceptible, and for this reason they were also highly effective. Workers at MIDIA and Misr Textiles not only restricted output, they also systematically cut corners, did less than what was required, and "cheated" in order to expend less effort and

time. And they had an arsenal of strategies at their disposal. Rather than emphasize either management domination or workers' resistance, however, the extraction of effort and the intensity of work in the factory are outcomes of a continuing negotiation between workers, supervisors, and management within institutional systems that are, more often than not, themselves the outcomes of previous battles.[45]

Many economists and management theorists claim that incentive systems linking effort and reward are the key to efficient production. Nabil, Fathy, 'Awad, and Abdel Aziz suggest that the situation is much more complicated. Any attempt to effectively link effort and reward is susceptible to manipulation. The issue is not one of finding a better metric, that is, finding and instituting a better, more accurate system of measuring a worker's output. It is also not one of devising a better incentive system, that is, creating a system that more effectively links effort with reward. Workers can always attempt to subvert incentive systems through cheating, chiseling, and other possible means—and they are often successful.[46] This suggests that all wage-incentive systems will produce suboptimal results, at least theoretically.

Altering the method of measurement is not the fundamental issue. The problem lies in the character of the wage-labor relation. Any system that involves the extraction of labor power or alienated labor will face similar dilemmas.

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Chapter 4

Indiscipline and Unruly Practices

"If a worker wants to *yiksar shughl* (break work), he knows how."

—sheikh Darwish[1]

"The pay is bad, but the work is easy."[2]

—Fathy

When a co-worker asked me whether American workers got lunch breaks and if so, for how long—I told him that most workers in the U.S. got between thirty and forty five minutes for lunch. Grinning, his response was, "We also take an hour, but *kutaymi*, *min wara* (without anyone knowing, from behind)."[3]

Sabotage

Sitting in the back of the work hall one day, sheikh Ramadan, the Head Mechanic, began recounting cases of sabotage he had witnessed in the department. The reason for Ramadan's sudden and quite unexpected interest in sabotage was that I had come from where I normally worked—in the front of the shop floor by the winding machine—to the back of the work hall, where the mechanics, including Ramadan, would often congregate, chat, and waste time. From this location one had a clear view of the entire work hall. Yet, the position of the three pulling machines and the placement of other machines made it difficult for anyone else on the floor to see the mechanics or whoever happened to be sitting here. The vantage point was unique. It was from this spot, Ramadan said, that he had witnessed sabotage.[4]

One afternoon, Ramadan noticed a winding machine operator surreptitiously pull a fuse from the back of the machine he was working on. The worker hadn't seen Ramadan sitting in the back of the shop floor. The effect of removing the fuse was immediate. The machine came to a sudden stop. Not only was it no longer running, however, removing the fuse effectively disabled the machine in a manner that made it difficult for anyone who hadn't seen what had happened to accurately diagnose the problem and get it running again. This, of course, was the intention. It was, Ramadan declared, a clear and deliberate attempt by the worker to stop the machine without anyone noticing. The objective was to stage a mechanical failure that would enable the worker to stop working and take a break.

Examining the fuse box wouldn't be the first place a mechanic would look when attempting to figure out why the machine stopped "by itself." The saboteur knew this. He not only wanted to turn the machine off; he wanted to disable it for as long as possible, drawing out the length of time he wouldn't have to work.[5]

If chapter 3 was primarily about subtle forms of resistance *within* the labor process, this chapter examines how workers avoided labor altogether, in addition to other transgressions at work. Workers had a range of strategies and techniques they employed to avoid work or at least work less hard, and they spent a great deal of time and energy doing so. Sabotage was only one such strategy.

As was often the case with Ramadan and other employees, especially those who had worked in the factory most of their lives (in Ramadan's case this was thirty-five years), one story of sabotage naturally led to another. Ramadan recounted a similar incident that occurred under slightly different circumstances. This incident involved two people whom, it turned out, I knew quite well: Nabil and '*Am* Sayid Rizq. Nabil was a forty-five-year-old winding machine operator I had worked with on a number of occasions. He was an attractive man with a boyish face that contrasted with his increasingly white hair. He was also painfully irritating. Although well intentioned and essentially harmless, Nabil talked too much, to the point of being unbearable. He simply didn't know when to stop talking and his reputation for annoying verbosity went well beyond our department.[6] The other man was '*Am* Sayid Rizq, the oldest shift supervisor in the department. Rizq was fifty-nine years old but looked to be a decade older. A balding man with a round, wrinkled face that gave away his age, Rizq had

worked in the company for forty-one years, ever since he was a young lad of eighteen. He was a serious man of few words who was often described by workers as being *bitaeʿ shughl* ("about work"—meaning he was serious about work).[7]

Although both men worked on the same shop floor and knew one other, they worked different shifts and weren't accustomed to working together. On the day in question, however, Nabil's usual shift supervisor, Salah, was absent and Rizq was called in as his replacement. Both Rizq and Nabil were to work together.

Rizq arrived early that morning, as was his custom, before almost everyone else. Being an industrious fellow, as soon as he stepped onto the floor he walked to the winding machine and fired it up. When Nabil arrived, a good ten minutes later, he was surprised to see his machine running and Rizq standing by its side. Annoyed by what he saw, Nabil subtly hit the hydraulic regulator, which controls the tension at which the wool tape gets wound, as he walked by the far end of the machine. Changing the tension while the machine is running causes the wool to either slacken excessively or tear—and this is exactly what happened. The wool slackened, piling up on the front of the machine, tangling, and tearing in several places. The machine eventually shut down automatically, but not before causing a terrible mess (white, fluffy wool tape accumulated above many of the machine's thirty spindles). Each spindle would have to be readjusted manually; a time-consuming process that Nabil would inevitably have to do himself.

Although Nabil had intentionally caused the problem, Rizq had no idea what had transpired. He hadn't seen Nabil touch the lever, which was located at the opposite end from where Rizq was standing. After helplessly examining the front of the machine trying to figure out what had happened, Rizq summoned a mechanic.

Nabil's sabotage was spontaneous. He reacted in the manner that he did because someone other than himself, even if it happened to be his superior, had turned the machine on before the shift officially began. Both points are important. As far as Nabil was concerned, this was his machine and he was responsible for its output. Only he determined when it was turned on and off, at least as much as informal arrangements allowed. Nabil had worked at MIDIA for more than thirty years, and had been in this factory and on this particular shop floor from the first day of production in 1973.[8]

Walking on the floor and finding his machine running was, therefore, highly unusual and Nabil reacted to what he believed was unfair and illegitimate. His goal was to stop the machine. It was an act of sabotage, and although a small act, an act of sabotage nonetheless.[9]

Thorstein Veblen and Sabotage

Industrial sabotage is often understood as the deliberate destruction of machinery.[10] The term, however, has a much wider meaning, both historically and etymologically. In one of the classic treatments of the subject, Thorstein Veblen defined sabotage as "any maneuver of slowing-down, inefficiency, bungling, obstruction . . . deliberate malingering, confusion, and misdirection of work."[11] Rather than the narrow, sinister definition of destroying property, sabotage, Veblen writes, is a kind of "passive resistance" and includes any activity that is marked by the "conscientious withdrawal of efficiency" on the part of the worker.[12]

The cases presented above clearly illustrate this. Neither the unnamed worker in the first example nor Nabil intended to cause permanent damage to the machines. They did, however, manage to temporarily halt production by disabling the machines they worked on. Disabling machinery without destroying it is probably the most common form of industrial sabotage.

In Nabil's case we can discern the motivation behind his action. Clearly, he had not planned sabotage. This was not part of a wider strategy to disrupt production. Nabil's behavior was spontaneous. He reacted to the fact that *his* machine had been turned on by someone other than himself, before he arrived at work. In a moment of outrage and without forethought, he pulled the hydraulic lever causing the wool to tangle and the machine to stop. Ironically, it would be Nabil who would have to clean the considerable mess that resulted. He would have to reconnect the wool tape to each of the thirty spindles, adjusting for the proper tension. Nabil knew this but undertook the action nonetheless.

The motivation for sabotage, Veblen noted, "commonly has to do with something in the nature of a vested right, which one or another of the parties in the case aims to secure or defend . . . workmen have resorted to such measures to secure improved conditions of work, or increased wages, or shorter hours, or to maintain their habitual standards, to all of which they have claimed to have some sort of vested right."[13] Nabil was furious that just such a "right" and "habitual standard," albeit customary and informal, had been violated. Sabotage was his response.

Although disabling machinery was much more common than destroying it, the deliberate destruction of property did take place at the factory. I was told about a number of such incidents, including one involving ongoing sabotage, directly from the saboteur himself.

Mohsen worked upstairs in weaving and was good friends with a few of the men on my floor. He was about forty, muscular, and had a round face. Several times a week Mohsen would end up in our department at the end of the day, talking with friends while waiting for the shift to end. A group of us would sit down, usually on a work cart, chat, and wait for the bell to ring. Mohsen was always good fun. He liked to talk, tell stories, and was generally a pleasant character. When it came to the company, however, Mohsen only held ill feelings and resentment.

Mohsen described how he sometimes came across spare parts, a mechanic's tool, or a piece from a machine lying on the floor; parts that had either come loose or were dropped or left mistakenly by the mechanics. Mohsen delighted in finding such things. Instead of informing his supervisor or returning them to the mechanics, whenever he found such items he immediately destroyed them. "If I see a fiber pipe on the ground . . . Ibrahim Hassan (head of the Wool Department) says the company imports them for four dollars each . . . I don't pick it up. If I can get away with it, I step on it and crush it. . . . I don't pick it up, I break it." If stepping on it with all his weight didn't break it, Mohsen told us he would smash it against the ground. Both methods worked well. And from his tone as well as the way his face contorted when he described how he broke things, it was clear that he took pleasure in destroying company property.

"This shouldn't be how workers feel about their employer or the company they work for," he added. But Mohsen couldn't help feeling this way. The company, in his view, treated him and others unfairly. "Why should I look out for the company's interests?" he asked rhetorically. Not only was he underpaid, mistreated, unjustly overlooked when it came to promotions, bonuses, or scheduled pay increases, the company was poorly managed. Mohsen claimed he would have liked to work hard and give it his all, if only he was fairly compensated.[14] This was not the case, however. Mohsen described how he had conveyed several ideas about increasing efficiency to his superiors. He wasn't taken seriously and his ideas were immediately disregarded. He was bitter and felt justified destroying property. Mohsen wished things were different. He hoped for a situation in which he and other workers looked out for the company and its interests, a situation in which he was fairly paid for his time and effort. If this were the case, he said, he wouldn't break the expensive parts. He would pick them up and return them to where they belonged. This, Mohsen proclaimed, "was what the relationship between one's employer and

oneself should be."[15] Explaining his hostility toward the company further, he added

> I can't go out with my kids. If my kid sees something in a store, I can't get it for him. I swear sheikh Ramadan that my father would get me whatever I wanted. He would take me to a store and say 'pick what you want.' He would tell the person to give it [the toy] to me and would go in and pay for it. He was a trader in the wholesale market. We had an apartment and some [enough] money . . . we had an apartment in front of the Pepsi Cola company. But my salary isn't enough to cover our food [Mohsen made £240 a month]. I can't [afford to] put a bathroom in my apartment. . . . This shouldn't be the way things are.

Mohsen became upset and visibly emotional. He was on the verge of tears. Sheikh Ramadan, sitting with us, attempted to comfort him. "God gives us health," Ramadan said. "The big person in the company (who makes a lot of money) spends £50 every *muda* (pay period) on medicine. Thank God you have your health. That is the most important thing." As Mohsen got up and walked away, Ramadan whispered in my ear, "he is about to explode, people are about to explode."

Resistance: Michel Foucault and James Scott

More recently, the concept of resistance has eclipsed sabotage in the contemporary discussion of how "subaltern groups" respond to exploitation, injustice, and domination. Unlike sabotage, which has traditionally been reserved for the activities of industrial laborers, resistance is much broader and includes practices not specific to workers. Anyone who experiences domination, it is claimed, can resist. Surprisingly, many contemporary accounts of resistance turn out to be similar to Veblen's broad notion of sabotage.

Studies of resistance have become extremely popular, one could even say fashionable, and the concept has received considerable attention, especially from historians and anthropologists.[16] Many writing about resistance have been influenced by Michel Foucault, particularly his analysis of power and its relationship to subjectivity. For Foucault, power is diffuse, disciplining bodies, normalizing individuals and constructing subjectivities. Power is, at least in part, constitutive of all relationships.

Power, however, is also never fully complete. Its corollary, resistance, is always on the horizon. In a famous and often cited passage in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault writes, "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."[17] Discussing power as a "sphere of force relations," Foucault notes that there are always "a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network."[18]

James Scott's *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* has arguably been as influential as Foucault's work in generating interest in the concept of resistance. Scott's analysis of resistance comes in the form of a finely grained political ethnography of class relations in rural Malaysia.[19]

Scott's point of departure is the realization that historians and political scientists who study peasants, including himself, have traditionally focused on rebellion and revolution. These cataclysmic events, while overly dramatic and often fascinating, are quite infrequent. More often, Scott claims, peasants use other more effective methods to resist domination and exploitation. He calls these "everyday forms of peasant resistance." These are the "ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups" and include "foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage."[20] According to Scott, this type of resistance is even more important than the handful of revolutions and infrequent rebellions that have received a disproportionate amount of scholarly attention. These quotidian practices are highly effective and take place between uprisings. They are the stuff of everyday peasant life and politics—the "small arms fire in the class war."[21] If historians and social scientists limit their attention to open conflict and collective protest, Scott warns, they will surely miss much of the peasantry's day-to-day struggles. Scott uses the example of factory workers to make his point.

> A history of the peasantry which only focused on uprisings would be much like a history of factory workers devoted entirely to major strikes and riots. Important and diagnostic as these exceptional events may be, they tell us little about the most durable arena of class conflict and resistance: the vital, day-to-day struggle on the factory floor over the pace of work, over leisure, wages, autonomy, privileges, and respect. For workers operating, by definition, at a structural disadvantage and subject to repression, such forms of quotidian

> struggle may be the only option available. Resistance of this kind does not throw up the manifestos, demonstrations, and pitched battles that normally compel attention, but vital territory is being won and lost here too.[22]

Scott was not the first to realize this. Michael Burawoy, Richard Edwards, and Harry Braverman, among others, have long since recognized the significance of activities that take place on the shop floor. Of course, Marx himself noted the importance of "the hidden abode of production."[23] It was here, inside the factory at the point of production that the constant, face-to-face battle between labor and capital is fought. Marx realized that getting workers inside the factory was not the same as getting them to work. (If only moneybags were so lucky, as Marx was fond of saying).[24] The real difficulty for capital, according to Marx, comes in the effort to convert abstract labor power into concrete labor: the challenge of getting workers to actually work. Capital and its representatives not only want workers to work, however, they want them to work hard(er) and this constant struggle provides the running backdrop to production—capital's incessant efforts to squeeze as much surplus-value out of workers as (in)humanly possible.

Scott's work has great affinity with this tradition and focuses attention on the quotidian strategies and practices that disadvantaged groups use to further their interests. These practices and the small struggles that surround them are a form of politics—the politics of everyday life.[25]

Peasants, of course, are not the only ones who resist. Workers, as well as other "subalterns," employ many if not all the tactics Scott observed in rural Malaysia. In the factories where I worked, for example, going slow, foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance (as well as noncompliance), pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, forgery, and sabotage were regular facets of life—as regular as the daily tea ritual and the bell that marked the end of the shift. These were only some of the ways workers resisted factory discipline, pursued their interests, and made their time at work more bearable. So common were these practices, so woven into the fabric of factory life, that at times they were imperceptible.[26]

Whether we call these activities sabotage, following Veblen, or "resistance," like Scott, these practices occur with both frequency and regularity. They deserve our attention for a number of reasons.

First, resistance practices constitute "the primary means by which employees can *voice discontent and dissatisfaction* about workplace processes that otherwise seem to be out of their control and through

which they may continue to be subordinated."[27] Acts of resistance are an important form of conflict *inside* the factory—class struggle at the point of production. These practices constitute politics at the level of the workplace, often the only type of political activity available to workers.[28]

Scott has also demonstrated how small, "individual," seemingly insignificant acts, taken together, can have tremendous aggregate consequences.[29] Noting the impact of military desertion, pilfering, squatting on public land, and other supposedly "trivial" acts, he writes, "each of these small events may be beneath notice. . . . Collectively, however, these small events may add up almost surreptitiously to a large event: an army too short of conscripts to fight, a workforce whose foot dragging bankrupts the enterprise, a landholding gentry driven from the countryside to the towns by arson and assault, tracts of state land fully occupied by squatters, a tax claim of the state gradually transformed into a dead letter by evasion."[30] Closer to our concerns, Jeffrey Kopstein has argued quite convincingly that years of "everyday resistance" by Eastern European workers "chipped away at the long-term capacity of communist regimes to meet the demands of society" and in this manner directly contributed to the collapse of communism.[31] "Powerless workers," through everyday forms of resistance, turn out to be quite powerful.[32]

Focusing on resistance also allows us to emphasize how individuals actively negotiate work and their working environments.[33] Resistance practices can subvert "regimes of control" and challenge managerial authority; they can help workers accommodate themselves to industrial discipline and survive exploitative employment relationships.

> Resistance practices constitute a means by which employees may create some space and autonomy in order to exercise a degree of control over various aspects of the work process and its rules, norms and environment. The examination of such processes can highlight the active and skillful agency of employees as an important empirical and theoretical issue for any critical analysis of the workplace. Equally, by engaging in resistance, employees often begin to construct an alternative, more positive sense of self, dignity and identity to that provided, prescribed or circumscribed by the organization.[34]

Examining workplace resistance, therefore, necessitates taking workers' agency seriously. For no matter how asymmetrical power relations may seem, the fact that they are social relations means that

they entail some degree of interdependence and reciprocity; making resistance an ever-present possibility.[35]

Resistance is not only important for workers, however. It is and has always been important for management.[36] Firms, after all, are organizations supposedly dedicated to maximizing profits and efficient production. Maintaining industrial discipline, labor control, and managerial authority are considered essential. Firms simply cannot tolerate workers consistently disobeying orders, pilfering materials, subverting authority, disabling machinery, and destroying property. From management's perspective, resistance practices are potentially disastrous; a matter of "efficiency and productivity" that can quickly translate into dollars and cents (or in our case, pounds and piasters) and ultimately, profits and losses.[37]

For Egyptian workers, everyday forms of resistance are especially important, possibly more so than for many other subaltern groups. Often, this form of resistance is the only option available. In addition to the obstacles subaltern groups face organizing and acting collectively over and above the usual difficulties associated with collective action, Egyptian workers, it might be argued, find themselves in an even more precarious situation for a number of reasons. First, until quite recently, strikes were illegal in Egypt. And under a new labor law that came into effect in 2003, although technically legal, the conditions under which strikes can occur are severely limited.[38] When strikes do occur, labor leaders and organizers (and to a lesser extent striking workers) are often imprisoned, harassed by the police, prosecuted, and in some cases, dismissed from their jobs.[39] The Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), the corporatist body ostensibly representing workers, is actually more interested in controlling them and coopting their leadership than in representing, let alone, fighting for their interests. In fact, the ETUF has condemned many instances of working class protest.[40] When independent labor action occurs, including strikes, it is despite and not because of the union.

In addition to these already significant impediments to independent organization and collective action, a large percentage of Egyptian workers employed in large-scale industry work in public sector companies. This too is not without consequence. Workers in public sector companies are state employees. In such situations, as Michael Burawoy has demonstrated, "struggles at the point of production are always potentially struggles against the state."[41] In Egypt, strikes and labor militancy are considered threats to public order and the regime. In the context of an authoritarian state willing to use the security apparatus to maintain order, brute, physical violence against workers is

an ever-present possibility. When the obstacles to open, organized, and collective protest are so significant, alternative forms of struggle (e.g., everyday forms of resistance) take on even greater importance. Small, subtle, everyday forms of resistance can be extremely "rational" and possibly more effective than organized and collective confrontation. This is not to say that strikes and other forms of collective labor protest do not occur in Egypt. They do. But even when they occur, they are structured by these conditions.[42]

In order to document and analyze Egyptian workers' everyday resistance practices we must carefully explore the crevices of factory life, the seemingly trivial and mundane. Only through a detailed analysis of how work is actually performed as opposed to how it is supposed to be done, will we come to understand the nature of power relations inside the factory.[43]

In addition to analyzing resistance practices, this chapter provides a feel for work and the intensity of effort exerted on a daily basis. How was work performed? What could workers get away with and how did they make their time on the shop floor more bearable? By describing resistance practices, I also describe the level of management control, the extent of (in)discipline, and the relations of power between management, shift supervisors, and workers. To this end, I survey some of the many forms resistance took at MIDIA and Misr Textiles. In addition to sabotage, these practices included pilfering, evasion and escape, shirking, forgery, subversive speech, generalized indiscipline, and the violation of factory rules.

Theft—or—Pilfering

Smaller, less dramatic acts that were easier to pull off were even more common than sabotage. Theft, or pilfering, was one such activity.

In chapter 2 I described Safwat, the mechanic caught trying to steal a machine-counter while leaving work one afternoon. From that day onward Safwat became universally known as Safwat *al-harami* (Safwat the thief). The belief that employees, and particularly workers, would steal company property if given the opportunity was institutionalized in the form of mandatory physical searches for workers before they left the factory grounds. Although the factory had several entrances, all guarded, we were required to enter and exit from the main entrance, where several security guards always stood on duty, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.[44] The chance that someone could make it off the grounds with something of significant size or value was unlikely.

More importantly, however, searches served as a deterrent, discouraging such action.

Opportunities for theft were, therefore, limited. What, after all, could a textile worker steal? The rolls of woven fabric we produced would never fit into one's pocket or bag. Removing large machinery was also out of the question.

This is not to say that workers did not attempt or even succeed in removing company property. Although Safwat failed, at least on one occasion, others have surely succeeded. More common than removing bulky items like machine counters or spare parts, however, was pilfering smaller items of lesser value. Although just as illegal, walking off with something small and of relatively little value was easier and less risky. In chapter 2 I described how workers made multipurpose instruments out of both scrap metal and old worn-out blades they found in the factory.[45] These instruments were useful at work for cleaning the machines, cutting vegetables, or stirring a touch of salt and pepper into one's breakfast. As well as making tools for use inside the factory, however, workers also produced useful objects to take home.

Kitchen utensils for home use were made much the same way as multipurpose instruments for work. Scrap metal was taken to either the machine shop next door or the repair station in the back of the shop floor. There, with the help of a drill, lathe, and a few tools, scrap metal was fashioned into small, flat utensils with sharp, thin, and pointed ends. These "homemade" kitchen utensils were used by workers—or more accurately, their wives—to cut out and remove the insides of vegetables. Eggplant, potatoes, tomatoes, zucchini, onions, and other vegetables could then be stuffed with rice and spices, a delicacy in Egypt and throughout much of the Mediterranean. Although I witnessed a number of co-workers make these items during the day shift, making kitchen utensils took place more often during the afternoon and evening shifts, when fewer people were around, and more importantly, fewer management types.

Not everything pilfered from the factory had to be made, however. Some items came readymade and therefore ready to be removed. The most common thing workers and other employees pilfered was woven material that did not make it past the quality control department. Although our factory was popularly known as "the wool factory," an entire floor of the nine-story structure was devoted to manufacturing cotton and cotton/polyester bedding. High-quality bed linens were produced primarily for export to Europe. Much of the finished material that failed the stringent quality standards never made it outside the building. The defective fabric was cut into small square pieces about

half the size of a handkerchief and almost all employees managed to secure some of this material for themselves. The material was used for all sorts of purposes, both in and outside the factory. Upstairs in the administration cafeteria, for example, small pieces of material were handed out in place of napkins, which were not available. In the workers' bathroom, workers used the cotton fabric as washcloths. And on the shop floor, many used the material in place of handkerchiefs. The woven fabric circulated throughout the company. Once, when I was visiting a young accountant in the central planning department I noticed that he had hundreds of small pieces of the material stuffed in his desk drawer.

Of course, this practice was against the rules. Material that did not pass inspection should have been recycled and used as raw material in another production facility also owned by MIDIA, or sold as "seconds" or "remainders" on the local market.[46]

Company calendars were another item that both workers and nonworkers removed from the factory. Many Egyptian companies produce business calendars, which they distribute as a form of advertising. MIDIA was no exception. Every year thousands of calendars bearing the company logo were printed and distributed to suppliers, retailers, textile companies, and large, well-known manufacturing firms throughout the country. A great many of these calendars, however, wound up going home with employees. While every employee was allowed to take one calendar each year, many walked off with more; often six, seven, and eight calendars apiece. Although not everyone participated in the "advertisement" scheme, many took full advantage of the program.

Employees who took many calendars were obviously not using all of them in their homes. But they were not selling them either. Another kind of political economy, one not altogether specific to Egypt, was taking place. Employees gave calendars to friends, neighbors, relatives, and potential patrons as "gifts," sometimes in exchange for future services. In some cases, people requested calendars from employees whom they knew had access to them.

These transactions were part of a vibrant informal political economy of favors and social debt in Egypt. This partially invisible economy, where everyone specializes on the basis of comparative advantage, is based on barter: the exchange of goods and services for other goods and services.[47] Invisible in the sense that most items exchanged are intangible (e.g., connections [*wasta* or *kussa*]; contacts [*mae'riffa*]; facilitation, providing access, and the ability to "get things done," to expedite slow bureaucratic procedures), this type of political economy is extremely important in everyday Egyptian life.[48]

Despite the absence of formal, written records—at least with pen and paper—everyone involved in these transactions knows exactly where they stand; knowing whom they can potentially call upon for favors and who might ask them for something one day. Thus, by giving company calendars as gifts, employees were either paying off old debts or accumulating new credit for future use. The exchange of calendars was just one, very small part of a much larger political economy involving the circulation of favors and access, power and privilege; a political economy involving patrons and clients as well as equals.[49]

Pilfering, of course, is not limited to Egypt's public sector factories. The production managers and the chief executive officer at a private textile company where I also conducted research told me that they too had a serious problem with employee theft. The company specialized in high-end cotton apparel (e.g., polo shirts, T-shirts, sweatshirts, and sweat pants) and was located in Borg El-Arab, one of Egypt's new industrial cities west of Alexandria. Most of the firm's manufacturing consisted of subcontracting for international clothing companies, including well-known European and American brand names (e.g., Fruit of the Loom and Greg Norman). I spent one week at the facility interviewing managers and observing production.

The company's workforce primarily consisted of young, unmarried women bussed in daily from Alexandria, 50 kilometers to the east. The young women workers, the CEO explained, stuffed shirts and other finished goods into their own clothing (inside their bras and in their underwear) before leaving the factory. Theft was a regular occurrence. The problem became so serious that the company instituted a policy of regular searches, including occasional strip searches, and added a new clause stipulating this in the employment agreement. Contracts now stated that workers agreed to be searched at management's discretion and workers were informed of the policy when they applied for employment. When two young women objected—refusing to sign the contract, claiming to be from "good families" and therefore "not thieves"—they were refused employment.[50]

Safwat's attempt to pocket a machine counter, the thousands of calendars appropriated by employees, the kitchen utensils manufactured at work only to be taken home by workers, the small pieces of cotton material that were never recycled and the articles of clothing "pilfered" by workers at the private textile company are all significant occurrences, in themselves, and for what they imply about resistance and the character of these employment relationships.

Much of the literature on employee theft considers the phenomenon a direct response to perceived injustice.[51] Dissatisfied employees are likely

to react in a number of different ways. "Taking property is one way employees express grievances against their employers."[52] If grievances and dissatisfaction result primarily from feeling underpaid or exploited, pilfering is often viewed as a form of compensation. Employee theft becomes a kind of justice.[53] In such a situation "pilferage is . . . seen as a morally justified addition to wages; indeed, as an entitlement due from exploiting employers."[54] Not a crime, but a form of self-help, pilfering becomes an informal means of increasing one's wages, receiving payment in kind and making certain one gets what one deserves.[55] Like sabotage, slander, and other forms of resistance, pilfering "is a way of hitting out at the boss, the company, the system, or the state."[56]

Moving beyond this general characterization of pilfering as resistance, however, the work of Gerald Mars and Donald Horning can potentially contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the examples of pilfering presented above. After studying Canadian longshoremen and English hotel workers, Mars, an anthropologist, concluded that pilfering "was not the anarchic behavior of a lawless rabble, but was subject to rules. People *never* just grabbed what they could from whomsoever they could. There were *always* rules that governed limits and amounts, rules about who could be fiddled and who not; and rules about who could be incorporated and who must be excluded."[57]

Horning arrived at similar conclusions.[58] In a study of blue-collar theft in a factory, he found that workers subtly but consistently differentiated between three types of property; "company property, personal property, and property of uncertain ownership." Moreover, the boundaries between different types of property were neither clear nor stable. "When viewed from the workers' perspective," Horning comments, "the boundaries are much more obscure, because personal property also includes certain forms of company property which the workers have appropriated for their own use."[59] Rather than clear boundaries, property fell on a continuum that varied based on the "degree of certainty of ownership." "The hard core of the uncertain category actually consists of those items about which there is a legitimate question of ownership: scrap and waste material; nonreturnable, broken, or defective components; broken tools, etc."[60] Within this normative framework, pilfering property of uncertain ownership was seen as being acceptable and having no victim, "falling within the conventional morality."[61] Like Mars, Horning concluded that "the work group subculture includes a set of norms which prescribe the types of property which are pilferable, the conditions under which pilfering should occur, as well as the conditions under which the workers can expect the tacit, if not overt, support of the work group."[62]

Could the examples of pilfering I describe above also have been normatively regulated; that is, behavior governed by informal systems or subcultures? Horning's analysis proves particularly useful in addressing this question.[63] The majority of items that fell within the "uncertain category of ownership" and therefore could "legitimately" be pilfered, according to Horning, consisted of "scrap and waste material," "nonreturnable, broken, or defective components," and "broken tools." Not surprisingly, most of the objects pilfered from MIDIA consisted of similar items. For example, the small pieces of woven cotton fabric taken by employees had previously been deemed defective by the company's own quality control department. The fact that the material was declared inappropriate for export could easily have shifted it into the "uncertain category."[64] And as far as I know, only material that did not pass quality control was regularly cut up and taken by employees. Similarly, the tools and instruments workers fashioned were made from old, worn-out metal blades removed from the combing machines.[65] The old blades were considered scrap and, following Horning, could easily have been regarded as being of "uncertain ownership."

Taking the analysis further, how would one explain the widespread pilfering of calendars, Safwat's attempt to walk off with a machine counter, or "employee theft" at the private textile company? These are certainly more egregious "crimes." The calendars, for example, do not qualify as scrap material, while the actions of the young women workers appear to be altogether different—clear criminal activity. Although I am not claiming that each of these cases of pilfering was normatively regulated, the possibility that many were is not unreasonable.

It is not difficult to imagine, for example, how workers at MIDIA might have understood and rationalized "stealing" company calendars. Because each employee was allowed to take one calendar, removing additional calendars could have been considered stretching rather than breaking the rules. And there were simply so many calendars printed and available for the taking. In addition, the company was not in the business of selling calendars, money was not involved in their distribution, and employees could easily have believed that taking extra calendars would not involve direct financial losses for the firm.

Although Safwat's case is somewhat unique, it is also not impossible to comprehend. Like the majority of machine counters, the one Safwat had his eye on was broken. Most machines in the factory were quite old, and naturally, so were the machine counters. The winding machine I worked on, for example, was made in 1973 and the counter had stopped

working long ago. So many counters were broken, in fact, that the production department instituted an entirely different system of measuring production, a system that did not rely on machine counters.[66]

As a mechanic, Safwat undoubtedly intended to take the counter home, repair it, and sell it on the open market. Justifying his actions, at least to himself, would not have been difficult. After all, the counter was broken and was not being used. Taking it, therefore, would neither affect the company nor production (no victim = no crime). And Safwat could certainly have benefited from the money.

Although Safwat could easily have justified the "crime" to himself, it is not clear that his co-workers felt the same way or condoned his behavior. In fact, Safwat's nickname—a name bestowed upon him by the other men in the department and one he did not particularly appreciate—could be interpreted as a kind of collective punishment imposed by the other workers for going beyond the acceptable pilfering practices of the group. In this reading, referring to Safwat as *al-harami* was punishment for violating the informal rules governing what could and could not be taken.[67]

We can also speculate about the possible causes, motivations, and meanings surrounding employee theft at the private textile company. Unlike the defective cotton material or the kitchen utensils made at work, the pilfered articles of clothing were neither "scrap or waste material" nor of "uncertain ownership." They constituted the firm's finished product, what was manufactured and exported, the very basis of the company's existence.

How can we explain this type of pilfering? A combination of factors is likely to have played a role in motivating this behavior. First, the young women workers were required to work extremely hard but received very low wages.[68] They were conscious of being exploited. And unlike public sector workers, they received neither additional benefits (pension, medical coverage, and in some cases subsidized housing) nor job security. Despite Egypt's labor law at the time, they could be fired at the company's discretion. Turnover was high.[69] And like other young, unmarried Egyptian women in low and unskilled jobs, many viewed their positions as temporary, short-term employment before marriage.[70] Because the employment relationship was viewed as temporary (in contrast to public sector employment), social relations extending beyond purely economic exchange (between employer and employee) were less likely to develop.[71] And unlike employees at MIDIA, most women workers at the private textile firm were not the primary income earners in their households. Rather, they provided additional

or supplementary income to their families. Thus, the consequences of getting caught pilfering and being fired were much less significant than for public sector workers.[72] In this context, pilfering was most likely viewed as a "legitimate means of redressing an exploitative contractual situation."[73] It was a form of resistance.

Evasion and Escape: The Art of Getting Lost

Stealing property was not the only type of theft that took place at MIDIA. Stealing time was even more common. There are, of course, endless ways workers can "waste" time depending on the particular type of work and their creativity. Escape from the shop floor was the easiest and most common form of wasting time. Everyone occasionally did it. What differed among workers, however, was the frequency, skill, and method of escape.

Although many were skilled in these arts, Safwat and Wagdi were exceptional. They were a regular Laurel and Hardy. Safwat was slim, of medium height, and hardly said a word. He was remarkably unexceptional. Wagdi, on the other hand, was exactly the opposite. He was immense, especially in comparison to Safwat, weighing more than 150 kilograms, and was known everywhere in the factory as *al-winch* (the tow truck). While Safwat barely spoke, to the point that some thought him dimwitted, Wagdi could hardly stay quiet; always telling jokes, playing pranks, and recounting stories. Superficially dissimilar, they were close friends and always took meals together.

Safwat was the mechanic with the least seniority in the department, and it was rumored, the least skill. Wagdi had been a machine operator until relatively recently. Five years ago, the machine he operated was replaced and he was reassigned to maintenance. Different jobs, of course, came with different responsibilities, as well as different opportunities for getting out of work. Both men were fortunate in that their positions provided ample opportunity for "getting lost."

As a mechanic and a maintenance worker, Safwat and Wagdi were not obliged to work in the same location every day. And because neither one worked on a machine, they did not have to meet output or production requirements.[74] Their incentive pay was constant and less than that of machine operators. Thus, the opportunities for evasion were almost limitless and both men were skilled at taking full advantage of their situation. Although both Safwat and Wagdi regularly escaped from the shop floor, they did so with distinct styles and different methods, reflecting their particular jobs and respective personalities.

As a maintenance worker, Wagdi had to help the mechanics with the upkeep of the equipment. Although machines were routinely serviced, this was done infrequently, about once every three months. Performing a thorough maintenance took a long time, sometimes more than an entire shift, depending on the machine and the extent of its problems. It was only on these days, however, that Wagdi actually worked a complete shift, tiring himself in the process. Machine maintenance was to some extent neglected. Most shift supervisors, managers, and engineers were more interested in production than in quality. As long as the machines ran and the finished product didn't look too bad, things were acceptable. The fact that Wagdi was not a trained mechanic and had limited technical skills also meant that he wasn't much help with day-to-day breakdowns. Nor was he interested. All in all, Wagdi had one of the easiest jobs in the department.[75]

This meant that Wagdi found himself with free time. But he also actively created time for himself. His superiors were supposed to keep him busy but he had no interest in doing anything he didn't have to. And with his wages, who could blame him? Although he wasn't supposed to spend long periods away from our department, this is often what happened. Wagdi was popular and had friends in other parts of the factory. After eating breakfast and having tea—and sometimes doing a minimum of work—he would often leave the department and begin making the rounds.[76] His favorite places to waste time and socialize were the machine shop next door (where he had a good friend named *Filfil*, pepper) and the maintenance department located by the main factory entrance and the security guards. There, Wagdi and his friends would sit on a little patch of grass, out of sight under the company water tower. He always made it back in time to wash up, change his clothes, and chat a bit before the shift bell rang.

Safwat's work was more demanding. Mechanics were responsible for regular maintenance as well as day-to-day breakdowns. And with many old machines, the latter were a common occurrence. Although our department had three mechanics, Safwat was at the bottom of the totem pole. This meant that the most unpleasant work was often left for him. Sheikh Ramadan, the head mechanic, didn't balk at ordering Safwat around. In fact, he seemed to enjoy it.

But Safwat's position also provided significant opportunities to waste time. Being a mechanic meant he had to repair whichever machine was down, wherever it happened to be. Naturally, between two shop floors this entailed quite a bit of walking around. Tools had to be brought and spare parts had to be found. This provided ample opportunity to spend much of the day simply idling, walking from

place to place, essentially doing nothing. And Safwat didn't just walk; he moped around at a snail's pace, his head hung down, grudgingly moving his body as if his feet were glued to the factory floor.

If more than one machine was down, each mechanic would work alone, leaving Safwat unsupervised. It was often said that Safwat was a slow worker who was not particularly skilled. What is certain, however, is that when he repaired a machine by himself it took a considerable amount of time before it was up and running again. So much time, in fact, that the other mechanics occasionally complained.[77]

The pace of Safwat's work wasn't the only thing that allowed him to take it easy a bit. He also found ways to escape from the shop floor. Many of Safwat's tools were located by a large door, often left open, which led to an internal company street and other factory buildings. The street was relatively quiet. Only when deliveries were made or when workers piled in and out between shifts did it become busy. The street provided a perfect place for Safwat to spend a few moments in peace, by himself. And because he was quiet and kept to himself, his absence was hardly noticed. Not leaving much of an impression helped when it came to "getting lost." For unlike Wagdi, Safwat was never really missed.

Except, of course, by the other mechanics. Safwat's regular disappearing act left more work for them. Sheikh Darwish, for the most part, didn't complain, except for the occasional grumble under his breath. Sheikh Ramadan, on the other hand, was a different story. Ramadan enjoyed being the senior mechanic and relished ordering Safwat around. At times, their relationship was quite tense.

The door Safwat used to "escape" was an unending source of conflict between the two men. Ramadan realized that it allowed Safwat to leave unnoticed. It was his preferred escape route. One day in early October with temperatures still warm outside, Ramadan decided to close the door and lock it shut. Safwat and a few other men immediately complained—and complained quite bitterly—to the shift supervisor, who was technically Ramadan's boss. The shift super didn't want any part in the conflict and decided not to intervene.

Safwat decided to take matters into his own hands and go over the shift supervisor's head. He went directly to Ibrahim Hassan, the head of the wool department. Safwat claimed the open door allowed air to circulate, keeping temperatures on the shop floor down. In Egypt, even October could be blistering and the argument was not inherently implausible.

The next day, early in the morning, Ibrahim Hassan and an advisor from the spinning department came down to check out the situation for

themselves. Their visit was unexpected and caught most of us off guard, sitting down, enjoying breakfast. We jumped to attention and quickly put our food away, out of sight—temporarily of course. Much of the talk the day before had been about the door, and we knew what the two men were up to. After shaking hands and exchanging greetings, Hassan and the other man began examining the door and the layout of the floor while conversing with the shift supervisor. Then, they spoke with Safwat and sheikh Ramadan separately. Before leaving the department, Ibrahim opened the door. The battle was over. Safwat had won.[78]

Ramadan was furious.[79] He spoke with me later that day and complained bitterly. "Safwat *escapes* (*bi yihrab*) from the door . . . and walks around the building and then comes back into the hall through the other door . . . and when we can't find him and when we need him, he says, 'I've been here the whole time.' "

The door incident was the talk of the afternoon and the following day. Gamal, an older worker with a heart condition with only a few months until retirement had quite a different opinion. Gamal worked on a pulling machine in the area where the door was located. For him there was another issue more serious than air circulation. With the door open, Gamal said, *mas'ulin* (higher-ups) can walk in at any time without being noticed. They could potentially see people sitting down, wasting time, or not working. What was important for Gamal was not air circulation or how easily Safwat could escape, but the increased likelihood of getting into trouble with the door open.[80] For him the open door was a liability and not an advantage.

Without question, Wagdi *al-winch* and Safwat *al-harami* were the undisputed masters of evasion and escape, not to mention other forms of indiscipline. For Wagdi, escape meant getting outside in the fresh air and feeling the sun and the breeze. For Safwat, evasion was a means of getting away from sheikh Ramadan and the machines. Although these partners in crime were particularly skilled, everyone partook in this activity. Everyone practiced the easier and more mundane tactic of simply taking longer breaks. For Karim and Fathy, this meant more time smoking cigarettes in the bathroom. For Omar Sa'ad, it meant, visiting friends on the fourth floor after delivering carts there. And if the shift supervisor sent you to get something or deliver a message, it was easy enough to take a few extra minutes, to come back a little late, extending one's time off the floor and away from work.

Wasting time was a form of "passive resistance" that enabled workers to get out of work and away from the shop floor. Evasion provided relief from the shift supervisor's gaze, the noise, dirt, and grime of the machines and the monotony of work. Mundane and seem-

ingly trivial, escape was one way workers temporarily relieved their boredom; wandering around, chatting with friends, catching up on the latest factory gossip. These banal transgressions provided workers with a modicum of leisure and freedom *during* the workday, before the shift bell rang.

Subversive Discourse and Narratives of Resistance

Criticism and complaint were the most common forms of discursive resistance—what workers used most often to strike out at management injustice. Complaint was cheap and less dangerous than sabotage, pilfering, or evasion and criticism often accompanied other forms of resistance. So widespread, in fact, so ordinary, criticism and complaint seemed constant. Like the sound of the machines, they were always in the background of factory life. After all, workers had much to complain about. And most weren't shy of doing so.

Ridicule, insult, slander, and mockery were also among the favorite weapons workers had at their disposal. Workers belittled incompetent shift supervisors, made fun of unpopular administrators, and criticized company policies. Criticism of the government was endless from both workers and management. No one was spared and nothing was sacred.

Although less dangerous than other forms of resistance, risks were involved and workers were, quite obviously, careful not to insult superiors in their presence. The large space of the factory floor and the cacophony of the machines made things easier. One didn't need to whisper in order not to be overheard. A supervisor could be fifteen feet away and wouldn't have a clue as to what you were saying. It was always important, however, to *appear* respectful; to stand up when an engineer walked in (if you weren't already standing), to seem attentive (in terms of body language), and look deferential (in terms of posture).[81]

Discursive resistance allowed workers to vent frustrations and get back at those with more power than themselves. Contemptuous talk, ridicule, bad-mouthing, or belittling someone was one strategy available in the otherwise terribly unequal relationships of the workplace. Randy Hodson has characterized these practices as ways workers "deflect abuse" and "vent frustration." The physical and psychological abuse workers sometimes experience at the hands of their superiors is degrading. Venting frustration can be empowering, producing feelings of self-efficacy.[82]

Criticism could also be personal and derisive. Certain shift supervisors were singled out for abuse, given insulting nicknames, or made the butt of jokes. Salah was one such supervisor. Several men only referred to him as *al-magnuun* (the crazy one) and others made fun of his particularly large head, calling him *raas* (head). He was unpopular with some, not because he was tough, particularly strict, or difficult to get along with, but because he was considered excessively lazy and not particularly knowledgeable about the machines or the production process.[83] Some workers believed Salah was just plain incompetent and others mocked him behind his back. The head mechanic, for example, delighted in getting my attention whenever he saw Salah with one worker in particular, whom he referred to as *al-'abeet* (the stupid one). With a smirk, sheikh Ramadan would come to me and say, *"buss . . . al-'abeet wa al-magnun—mae'bae'd"* ("look . . . the stupid and the crazy one—together").

Salah's bonus was a particularly sore point with a few of the men. Shift supervisors and management personal directly involved in production (i.e., production engineers, central planning administrators, who had reached a certain level of seniority) received bonuses every two months. The *bonus*, as it was called, could reach as much as four hundred pounds, a tremendous sum of money in comparison to a worker's wage. Understandably, many were envious and resentful, particularly the old-timers who had put in just as many years at the company or, *khidma li al-shirka* (service to the company).

Darwish and Ramadan were two such men. Darwish had worked at MIDIA for thirty-nine years, beginning when he was fifteen. When he started, the company was still in the hands of the original founder, a Greek-Egyptian businessman. He lived through the nationalization of 1961 and witnessed the change of ownership. And in an ironic twist of fate he will probably also experience the firm's privatization in the coming years. To see Salah, who had worked fewer years and was less knowledgeable regarding production, receive a hefty bonus every two months (more than Darwish's monthly wages) was painful and irritating, to say the least. Darwish wasn't the only one who felt this way.

Thus, when the opportunity presented itself, many couldn't resist harassing supervisors about the bonus. One day in particular Sayid Rizq, another supervisor, got his fair share of abuse. Rizq was working the second shift, from 3:00 P.M. until 11:00 P.M., and showed up a little early. Those of us on the morning shift had already packed up for the day. We were seated on a work cart in the middle of the hall, waiting for the bell to ring. When Rizq arrived and learned that Salah had collected his own bonus but forgot to collect his (Rizq's), which

was their custom, he became furious, raising his voice and yelling at his colleague. Realizing that it was still before 3:00 P.M. and that the employee in charge of disbursing funds still hadn't left the building, Rizq made a frantic run for the door. Those of us who were sitting down waiting for the bell to ring so we could go home had nothing better to do than watch the drama unfold. It was a curious sight. Rizq was only fifty-nine years old but he looked like he was seventy—factory work did this to many. He never ran around the shop floor or exerted as much effort working as he did that afternoon trying to get his bonus. We laughed at the sight of Rizq galloping furiously toward the exit on his way to the payment office. Sheikh Darwish and Safwat *al-harami* provided the running commentary. *"Mid, mid!"* (quicker, quicker!), Darwish shouted. *"Hob, hob, . . . hob, hob,"* Safwat yelled, in a deep voice, imitating the sound of heavy steps.[84] There was more than a little spite and envy in the mockery as everyone had a good laugh at the old shift supervisor's expense.

Minutes later Rizq returned, head down, disappointed, and empty handed, walking onto the floor at his normal pace. He hadn't gotten there in time. The office had closed. As he passed directly in front of the men sitting on the cart, Fathy jokingly offered to lend his boss some money. "Take something until the pay man comes," he said. We all started laughing. Even Sayid Rizq couldn't hold back a smile. Fathy's facetiousness was hilarious.

Fathy was in no shape to be lending anyone money, particularly the shift supervisor. He was among the worst off in the department and everyone knew it. Fathy had borrowed money from Mahrus, another worker, and was slowly repaying him in installments every *muda* (pay period). The very idea that he would lend his shift supervisor money was preposterous, outrageous. It was the impossibility of the offer that made it subversive. In making us laugh, Fathy was also laughing at his own plight. But in doing so he scathingly pointed out the reality of the situation; shift supervisors received bonuses and workers did not.[85] Many believed the bonus system was unfair.[86] But there were many other things about work and the company that were equally unfair.

Workers sometimes derived as much pleasure from recounting tales of resistance as from the acts themselves. This was certainly true of Abdel Aziz, a young combing machine operator in my department. Aziz was a thin, foul-mouthed, tough guy of sorts with a tremendous amount of nervous energy. He spoke quickly, always moving his arms and hands and walked around the shop at an unnecessarily hurried pace. Aziz had so much energy, in fact, that I thought he might be medically hyperactive. He was particularly fond of telling dirty jokes,

talking about sex, and clowning around (*hizar*), especially when it involved physical horseplay.[87]

Aziz had recently been transferred to our department. He previously worked in one of the company's other factories in another district of Alexandria and often spoke of his old factory and what life there was like. Aziz was especially fond of repeating one particular story involving a conflict between him and his old shift supervisor.

The story went as follows: Aziz arrived at work one day and found that his shift supervisor had assigned him to work on a different machine. Not only was this not his regular machine, however, it was a different type of machine altogether. Despite knowing how to operate it, Aziz was not comfortable doing so. Two weeks earlier he had injured himself on the very same machine. He had cut himself and the stitches in his hand had not yet been removed.

Aziz told his boss to forget it. "I'm not working on the machine," he said. The supervisor responded by threatening him, telling Aziz that if he did not do what he was told he would get a *mudeer* (director) to deal with him. Believing this to be an empty threat, Aziz called his supervisor's bluff, and told him to "go ahead and get him." This only made matters worse, however, and sure enough, a few minutes later the shift supervisor returned with one of the company's directors.

Standing in the middle of the work hall, addressing everyone, but with his comments clearly intended for Aziz, the director said, "Anyone who doesn't want to work should get out! Leave now!" He then walked over to Aziz and ordered him to operate the machine. Aziz desperately tried to explain to both the director and his boss why he didn't want to work on this particular machine but neither man was interested in listening. His efforts were futile.

> The director wouldn't even let him begin—despite Aziz's repeated efforts to explain why he didn't want to work on the machine (on this particular machine). Finally, when Aziz couldn't take it any longer—the yelling . . . not letting him explain or even talk—he exploded and picked up a metal rod and ran behind the director trying to hit him with it. "I was going to hit him with it on his head and kill him. That's it—I couldn't take it!"

Aziz ran after the director until his co-workers eventually restrained him. As a result of the incident, Aziz was sent to the legal affairs department (*sha'uun al-qanuwniyya*). The company employee assigned to the case could not believe that something like this could happen;

that someone would actually chase a director around with a metal bar, brandishing it like a weapon. In disbelief, he asked Aziz whether this had actually occurred. When Aziz admitted that it had happened, the shocked legal affairs officer immediately produced a letter of resignation and asked him to sign it. "I don't sign resignation letters!" was Aziz's response.

It was at this point that the legal affairs officer, according to Aziz, noticed the wound on his finger and asked him about it. Aziz finally had his chance to explain the entire story. After listening attentively, the legal affairs officer became sympathetic and told Aziz he would try to see *al-Basha* (the CEO) himself to explain the situation and work something out. In the end, after the meeting with *al-Basha*, Aziz received a £15 fine and went back to work on his old machine. At this point in the story, the way Aziz recounts it, he laughs a great big laugh and with tremendous delight and a mischievous grin exclaims, "Great—£15 pounds and I chased the director around with a metal bar! It was worth it!"

Aziz's story is interesting for several reasons. First, it illustrates how material and discursive acts of resistance are often interrelated. Aziz relished telling the story, and I heard him recount it on several occasions.[88] In fact, whether the incident is entirely true is not particularly important. What is noteworthy is that the act of telling and retelling the tale itself became a form of discursive and symbolic resistance.

In the story Aziz openly challenges the power of his shift supervisor and the director, calling the legitimacy of their authority into question. He dramatically inverses the power relationship by picking up a metal bar and threatening to clobber his superior, without fear of the potential consequences. Aziz's retelling of the tale is a discursive celebration of resistance. The fact that he didn't mind paying the fine—fifteen pounds—for the chance to chase the director with a metal bar in front of his co-workers is also noteworthy. Aziz had no regrets and was completely satisfied with what happened. From his perspective—he had won.

The story also reveals something about Aziz and by extension workers' conceptions of masculinity (*rugula*). The hierarchy of authority in the factory directly impinges on workers' sense of themselves and their dignity. The exercise of power by superiors can potentially threaten one's masculinity.

Aziz thought of himself as a tough character capable of sticking up for himself, not someone who could easily be pushed around, not even by his superiors. Recounting the incident was important for both his conception of self and for the image he wished to convey to others

(in Erving Goffman's sense, "his presentation of self").[89] Retelling the tale was one way Aziz (re)presented his *rugula*; as someone who was tough and not afraid of authority, capable of defending himself, and defying his superiors.

Conclusion

Lila Abu-Lughod has noted that "the relationship of resistance to power" has become "one of the central problematics in the human sciences."[90] Others have lamented the widespread use of the resistance concept, claiming that "resistance, as well as its myriad refinements and mutations (such as 'subversion,' 'transgression,' and so forth)," have "become a central, perhaps even a dominant, theme in the study of social life."[91] One reason for the interest in resistance has been the tremendous influence of Michel Foucault's work on the humanities and social sciences, particularly his analysis of power.

Foucault has been the point of departure for many writing about power and resistance. Rejecting what he calls the juridical, liberal, and Marxist conceptions of power—power as law, power as right, power as commodity—he presents a theory of power that is "less institutionalized, more pervasive, and more everyday."[92] Power is no longer modeled on the commodity—something that "one possesses, acquires, cedes through force or contract, that one alienates and recovers,"[93]—nor is it modeled on the state.[94] Power is diffuse, subtle, and minute; it is exercised and exists only in action.[95]

Power is not only negative according to Foucault, it is also positive. It "doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no,"[96] that is, as prohibition, "by denying, restricting, . . . or repressing. It also works by producing forms of pleasure, systems of knowledge, goods, and discourses."[97] Just as it limits, confines, and silences, therefore, power also produces, constituting subjectivities, shaping individuals, and articulating truths.

For Foucault, power has no center—no ultimate, single source. It is omnipresent and infinitesimal, pervasive and impersonal, a "productive network which runs through the whole social body."[98] "Never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth," power is something that circulates and is constitutive of all relationships.[99] "In the wake of Foucault," Jean and John Comaroff write, power "has diffused and proliferated into hitherto uncharted terrains. . . . It saturates all the planes of human existence. Now everywhere, it is no where in particular."[100]

Herein lies the problem. If power *is* everywhere and if resistance is present wherever there is power (as Foucault writes, "where there is power there is resistance") than resistance must also be everywhere. If power lurks within the text, under the table, and behind the tree, than resistance must be there as well.[101]

On some accounts, resistance is said to include everything from conscious revolutionary activity to passing gas in the presence of powerful people.[102] But if resistance is so broad, if it can include such diverse practices, than what analytical utility does the category retain? Where does resistance begin and where does it end?[103]

Many have attempted to overcome this conceptual slippage. Brian Fegan, for example, holds that "the intention of the actor" and the "moral and political evaluation of his class-mates" are necessary for an act to be considered resistance. In a passage about peasants, Fegan writes that "the pursuit of household interest . . . even at the expense of the landowner, and even when the action might on detection incur sanctions, does not seem sufficient to constitute 'resistance.' " "What makes tenants' stratagems into resistance is the *conscious intent* of some to cheat the system on the ground that a particular landlord or the tenancy system is unjust, plus concurrence by most of their fellows that it is right to evade unjust claims."[104]

Jeffrey Rubin goes even further. Concerned that defining resistance too broadly risks "uncritically equating forms of collective mobilization with linguistic, artistic, and ritual expression," Rubin argues that our understanding of resistance be limited to "actions that have some degree of consciousness and collectivity about them, as well as some explicit attention to broad structures of domination."[105]

These proposed solutions, however, are not without their own difficulties. If consciousness is deemed necessary for an act to constitute resistance (let alone collectivity and "explicit attention to broad structures of domination"), then how are we to understand practices that are not consciously understood as resistance by their practitioners but are nevertheless viewed as such by others? Workers, for example, did not consider many of the activities I describe above as "resistance." Yet in many cases management, shift supervisors, and company administration had no doubt that these practices were, in fact, acts of resistance. To those who propose consciousness and intention as the solution to the conceptual ambiguity of resistance, the question remains—consciousness on the part of whom?[106]

An example from Misr Textiles illustrates this point. There, the factory director and management personnel described the resistance they encountered when the factory first opened in the early 1980s.[107] Located

in a new industrial zone thirty-five kilometers outside Alexandria, many of the workers came from the surrounding rural and semi-rural areas. As first-generation factory workers, many continued to engage in farming, owning small tracts of land, or working as agricultural laborers in the afternoon. During the first year of the company's operation, some of these workers attempted to hold collective meals in the factory, sitting on the floor, sharing food, and eating out of the same plates as their co-workers (many of whom were from the same villages)—using *aaysh falahi* (homemade peasant bread).[108]

Management considered this to be a serious problem. The new 500 million-pound facility was state-of-the-art and this sort of behavior from "peasant workers" was considered inefficient, backward, and unacceptable. Consequently, during the first year of operation, management personnel were directed to stop collective meals. They accomplished this by walking around the factory and kicking the plates "peasant workers" ate from out from in front of them. The factory director, a tall, slim, highly educated man with a PhD in engineering, took great pleasure recounting how he too participated in this activity. He described regularly leaving his air-conditioned office and walking around the shop floor kicking plates of food positioned in front of sitting workers. It was effective, he said. With great satisfaction, the director, who had worked abroad, traveled extensively and was fluent in English, told me that "today workers no longer eat together, sitting on the ground, with *aaysh falahi* (peasant bread)." Instead, "they bring sandwiches in *aaysh fino* (longer European style bread) and eat by themselves, standing up, next to their machines."[109]

The example demonstrates the problem with consciousness-based understandings of resistance. In their minds, the "peasant workers" were not engaging in resistance. In fact, workers from Alexandria regarded them as overly passive, docile, and less confrontational toward management. By contrast, the Alexandrian workers were better educated, had previous industrial experience, and were more conscious of their rights as employees. Eating collective meals on the floor with peasant bread simply came naturally to "peasant workers."[110] From management's perspective, however, the practice was a violation of company policy. Group meals were said to decrease efficiency, disrupt production, and threaten management authority. The practice was considered resistance.[111]

The example is interesting for yet another reason. The director took great pride in having stopped this practice and viewed his accomplishment as a momentous victory in a war of position, saving the factory from the ways of "peasant workers." Ironically, peasant bread (*aaysh falahi*) was at the center of the conflict. The entire battle revolved, in

one sense, around the kind of bread workers ate. Peasant bread was simply not conducive to industrial discipline. It took more time to eat with as one had to tear a piece and use it to scoop up food from a plate or bowl and it was conducive to sitting down, usually on the floor, with others.

The director's victory consisted, in part, in changing workers' eating habits, forcing them to eat *aaysh fino* ("fino" bread) instead of *aaysh falahi*.[112] *Aaysh fino*, by contrast, is long and thin, European-inspired bread that is perfect for sandwiches and would be difficult to eat any other way. More expensive than both *aaysh arabi* (Arabic or pita bread) and homemade *aaysh falahi*, it is not what farmers and rural people prefer, however, and must be purchased from a bakery. Much to the delight of the director, with *aaysh fino* workers ate sandwiches individually, standing up by the sides of their machines.

Thus, even if consciousness is introduced into the definition of resistance, the ambiguity of the concept does not disappear. Peasant workers at Misr Textiles were not consciously resisting management dictates or industrial discipline. From management's perspective, however, the practice was an infraction of policy and was dealt with accordingly.

The question of informality further highlights the ambiguity of the resistance concept. Many informal practices in the factory (as in other organizations) are tolerated despite violating company policies and official procedures. What then, is the relationship between informality and resistance? Do all informal practices constitute resistance?

Another example from Misr Textiles illustrates this point. There, winding machine operators were supposed to use flexible plastic devices during one segment of the labor process, to pull cotton tape from the bottom to the top of the metal rods (that each spindle sat on) so as to tie or reconnect the yarn around the spindles.[113]

Threading the wiry plastic device through the metal rod, maneuvering it to catch the cotton yarn at the bottom and then pulling it out, however, was a bothersome and time-consuming process. Instead, workers devised a simpler and equally effective method for accomplishing the same task. By placing one's lips firmly around the opening on the top of the spindle and forcefully inhaling, the yarn would, in no time at all, rise to the top—to one's lips. One had to suck hard. But if you weren't careful, the yarn could easily end up in your throat instead of by your lips, which is what happened to me the first few times I tried this.

A co-worker taught me the trick my first day on the job. A startled *mubashir* (supervisor) walked by and saw the demonstration

in progress. While not reproachful, he told the worker that he should not have shown me how to do this and quickly added that the practice was not allowed.

By the end of the week, however, I had become quite skilled at this time-saving if thoroughly unhygienic work routine. For although it was against the rules, it was tolerated by directors and shift supervisors.[114] It was understood, however, that in front of engineers, factory managers, and management types we were to use the plastic devices. In their presence, we followed the rules.[115]

The problem of informality further highlights the ambiguity of resistance. Anyone familiar with the actual workings of organizations, whether in New York or New Delhi, knows that things do not always work the way they are supposed to. Rules are often broken and in certain situations, organizations function (efficiently or at all) because individuals either ignore or get around the rules. None of this is particularly unusual.[116] The point, however, is that there is often a significant gap between how things are supposed to work (according to formal rules) and how they work in practice (informally).

The danger, especially pronounced as a result of the current allure of the resistance concept, is to see resistance everywhere. The infatuation with the concept could easily lead to the spurious conclusion that every instance of informality is, in fact, an act of resistance. What I have tried to demonstrate, however, is that the situation is more complicated.[117] Not only is this not the case, sometimes practices are considered resistance by some while viewed differently by others.

So far I have been mainly concerned with understanding what I have termed indiscipline and unruly practices, analyzing the significance of these activities partially through the concepts of sabotage and resistance. As a result of the previous discussion, the reader will hopefully have gained some sense of what sabotage, pilfering, evasion, escape, and discursive resistance were like in the factory. I hope the discussion has also produced a heightened awareness of the ambiguities and limitations of the resistance concept itself.

But what motivated these practices? What was behind indiscipline, resistance, and the withdrawal of effort? Although this is not the place for a full discussion of this issue, the beginnings of an answer can be briefly laid out.

Most everyone in the factory felt they were not being fairly compensated. This was most clearly and explicitly articulated by Mohsen, the saboteur we met at the beginning of the chapter. Not only were wages grossly insufficient in his view, he felt, like many others, that

he was being mistreated and under-appreciated. "Why should I look out for the company's interests?" he asked. Although he was the only saboteur I knew, many shared his sentiments.

E.P. Thompson has written that a moral economy based on "traditional views of social norms and obligations" ("custom" and "traditional rights") existed in eighteenth-century England. This moral economy informed certain market transactions, most notably the sale of bread. Thompson argues that eighteenth-century English food riots were not spasmodic, unruly events, but rather "highly-complex form[s] of direct popular action, disciplined and with clear objectives."[118]

Whereas Thompson describes a "moral economy of provision," what we see in the factory is a moral economy surrounding the exchange of labor power for a wage; ideas, sometimes explicitly formulated but most often implicitly held, about equivalency, fairness, reciprocity, and justice in the wage-labor relation. This moral economy of exchange informed many of the resistance practices I describe. Like Mohsen, many workers made it clear that they were not satisfied with the employment relationship. They were neither well-treated nor were their wages fair, in their view. As one manager who understood this remarked about workers: "they give you (in return) what you give them, one pound equals one pound's worth (of effort) . . . you give him two pounds and he will give you two pounds . . . '*ala ad filushum*" (what the money they get is worth).[119]

Chapter 5

In the *Basha's* House

"Ihna hina fi bayt al-Basha"
(Here, we're in the Basha's House)
—Wagdi *al-winch* (maintenance worker)

"Fi diktaturiyya wa dimukratiyya fi al-masan' kaman"
(There's dictatorship and democracy in factories as well)
—'Adil (director)

"*Ihna dawla dakhil dawla*." (We are a state within a state.)
—Salah (shift supervisor)

Each chapter has addressed a particular aspect of the work experience at MIDIA and Misr Textiles, the factories where I worked. Chapter 2 described what it meant to be a worker and how those in the company understood this identity. Chapter 3 took up what work actually entailed for winding machine operators in terms of physical labor, effort, and activity while also highlighting the differences between how work was supposed to be accomplished and how it often actually got done. Chapter 4 explored how workers controlled their time and work in the factory through a variety of measures I called indiscipline and unruly practices.

This chapter extends our discussion by analyzing the organizational culture(s) of these firms. Work never takes place outside of a context, a concrete setting, and a particular location. This chapter,

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therefore, describes *where* work took place—in this case, MIDIA and Misr Textiles. What was it like to work in these companies? How was authority exercised and what was the character of relations between superiors and subordinates? What kind of organizational cultures existed in both firms and how did this affect the work experience as well as the performance, efficiency, and productivity of these firms?

By organizational culture I mean the shared meanings, understandings, and norms—including managerial ideology and practices—found within organizations. Organizational cultures are often said to include—but also go beyond—formal structures, capturing the implicit and ineffable, the unstated operating logics of organizations—in order to get at, in Linda Smircich's phrase, how organizations work.[1]

Admittedly, the concept of organizational culture is vague and can include a wide range of characteristics from a firm's internal structure to its self-understanding.[2] Despite the variety of definitions and debate surrounding how organizational cultures should be studied, however, the concept remains valuable because it focuses attention on at least two important points, that firms can have or produce cultures, and, further, that different types of cultures (e.g., high versus low trust, centralized versus decentralized decision making) can significantly affect firm performance and the quality of organizational life.

Beyond our interest in MIDIA and Misr Textiles, the organizational cultures of the firms I worked in are worth examining for several reasons. As I noted in chapter 1, despite the emergence of a considerable literature on Egyptian workers since the mid-1980s, we still know remarkably little about what goes on inside factories in Egypt—both public and private. Examining MIDIA and Misr Textiles, therefore, will hopefully contribute to a deeper understanding of Egyptian public sector factories.

Well over one million workers were employed in public sector firms from the 1960s until the 1990s.[3] Until quite recently, the vast majority of large manufacturing in Egypt took place in such firms. After more than fifteen years of privatization, more than 100 public sector firms remain employing more than 370,000 workers.[4] How these organizations function(ed) and what their employees experience(d) each day is of tremendous importance.

Second, the organizational culture of Egyptian public sector firms is significant for those interested in economic reform and privatization more specifically. Part of the culture of public sector enterprise undoubtedly resulted from public ownership.[5] Hence, privatization will bring change. But it would be foolhardy to imagine that privatization alone—the simple legal transfer of ownership from public to private—will

either automatically or immediately lead to the emergence of organizational cultures focused on efficiency, productivity, and performance. Successful privatization will entail more than the transfer of ownership. Organizational cultures will also have to change. Thus, an account of the culture of Egyptian public sector enterprise is the necessary foundation for future studies concerned with change within firms as a result of privatization. Although a substantial literature has emerged analyzing the effects of privatization on firms in Eastern Europe, no similar literature exists for the Middle East or Egypt.

One of the first things that struck me about both MIDIA and Misr Textiles was how incredibly hierarchical and authoritarian they were. Relations of inequality and power between superiors and subordinates were not limited to the formal roles and official duties associated with work but extended to all aspects of social interaction. Most firms, of course, consist of a set of positions arranged hierarchically, or a chain of command. Inequality and power exist throughout the hierarchy. What was remarkable about both firms, however, was the extent to which superiors dominated those beneath them. The exercise of power was arbitrary and seemingly unlimited. Employees of different rank were intensely conscious of their respective positions and inequality; how they were treated depended entirely on where they stood within the hierarchy.

Formal organizations like firms are characterized by explicit rules and procedures that ostensibly limit the arbitrary exercise of power. But despite the existence of bureaucratic rules and established procedures governing all aspects of organizational life, social relations at MIDIA and Misr Textiles remained authoritarian. This manifested itself in both large and small ways—in the person of the CEO as well as in the daily interactions between engineers and shift supervisors and shift supervisors and workers. As in any organization, many employees occupied positions of superiority and subordination simultaneously. Within the matrix of authority relations they found themselves below some while above others. The senior engineer, for example, was subordinate to the CEO while being superior to the shift supervisor. But at every level of the organization, superiors thoroughly dominated those beneath them. By analyzing how power is generated, maintained, and exercised by those who hold positions of institutional authority—shift supervisors, engineers, and most notably, the chief executive officer—and describing the culture this generates, I hope to shed light on the political culture of authoritarianism in the firm.

The CEO as Leviathan

Standing above all others, without equal, wielding absolute power and administering "justice" as he saw fit, the CEO was the Leviathan. He was the incarnation of state power—the living, breathing representative of government inside the firm. At MIDIA, the CEO was appointed by the Minister of Public Enterprise and at Misr Textiles, he was appointed directly by the president.[6] Ultimately, this was the basis of his authority.[7]

The extent of the CEO's power was apparent the first time I met him, during an interview to determine whether he would allow me to conduct research at MIDIA. After agreeing to my research, he picked up the intercom and told his secretary to send each of the department heads to his office. Within minutes, seven men, several dressed in suits and ties, marched in, one by one, and stood in a row behind us. Each man greeted the CEO as he entered, while Ali Bey responded with only a slight nod of his head.

The heads of personnel, production, administration, engineering, planning, maintenance, and sales now stood behind me, lined up like schoolchildren, nervous, and looking straight ahead. Ali Bey did not explain my presence; he merely stated that I would be doing research in the company and told them to be as cooperative as possible. He then ordered each man to give me his business card and unexpectedly turned to me and asked which part of Alexandria I lived in. I responded, without knowing why he was asking. Then, looking at one of the department heads, he said, "Mohamed, don't you live close to there?" When Mohamed, in his late fifties, said that he did, the CEO told him to write his home phone number on the back of his card because he would be picking me up each morning on his way to work. Mohamed turned out to be the head of administration.

My research was intended to be primarily about workers, however, and I did not want to come and go with the administration, let alone a department head. So I spoke up, hesitatingly, saying that I would prefer to take the bus with the workers each morning. Ali Bey was clearly not accustomed to someone refusing his commands or challenging his orders. A moment of silence followed. Then, addressing himself to the department heads, he said, even more forcefully than before and also in the way of an order, "You heard him; he wants to go with the workers on the buses. Someone arrange it." Several of the men looked blankly at each other until one man feebly stepped forward and informed the CEO that there were no buses for workers, only for the administration and white-collar staff. Ali Bey's response was now addressed to me.

Dismissively, he said that it was "the same thing" and that I was sure to learn something on those buses, as well.

The extent of the CEO's power was apparent from this first meeting. He infantalized the company's top executives (standing at attention, nervous, and deferential, no one speaking or asking a question unless they were addressed). Further, he agreed to my request in less than thirty minutes and without seeing a single document—something I had not been able to obtain even after months of applying for official government research clearance, negotiating with the relevant ministries, submitting the necessary documents in triplicate, and working through the official procedures.

Presidential Visits

Although Ali Bey spent most of his time in high-level meetings, negotiating sales, and finalizing contracts, he occasionally visited the factories. Three facilities are located near company headquarters, within walking distance of his office. Meetings with factory heads and senior engineers are sometimes held on the shop floor. On several occasions Ali Bey came to where I worked to look into specific problems related to production. He was also fond of inspecting the finished products on-site. Most often, however, his visits came unannounced or with little warning, leading delegations of ministers or other VIPs around the production facilities.

And when Ali Bey shows up all hell breaks loose. The factory is transformed in a flurry of frenzied activity. Normal work routines stop. Company policies are enforced. Department heads emerge from their offices. Maintenance crews scramble. Anxiety overcomes the top administrators and engineers, and chaos descends on the factory as everyone prepares for his arrival.

I was amazed the first time I witnessed this. No one had to tell me that something out of the ordinary was taking place. First, the factory head, Dr. Watash, was on the shop floor talking to the senior engineer and the shift supervisor. He seemed in no rush to leave and this itself was unusual. We were lucky when Dr. Watash graced the hot, humid, grimy work hall once a week, and then it was usually on his way somewhere else. A few minutes later I noticed the shift supervisor and *mubashir*[8] (director; supervisory personnel directly under the shift supervisor) looking awfully serious, inspecting the machines and barking orders at workers. When they got to me, they let me in on the secret—what everyone else must have already figured out: the CEO was on his way with a delegation of ministers.

The director declared a *halat tawar'* (an emergency situation). The orders began, one after the other. No one was to sit down and we were all told to put our food away. In no time, two maintenance workers appeared whom I had never seen before and began polishing the fire extinguishers. Before the director left he told me to clean my machine and everything around it. It was standard practice to wipe the machines off at the end of the shift but no one ever cleaned them in the middle of the day.

The same order must have been given to everyone because soon afterward Abdel-Rahman, the pulling machine operator beside me, walked over and started complaining. "What? Are we sleeping?" he said. "What's different? We're working. What is this? A chocolate factory? Of course there's dirt here . . . of course the machines get dirty. And after five minutes they'll be dirty again!" He told me that the minister of public enterprise was rumored to be in the day's delegation.[9]

Before walking away, Abdel-Rahman laughed at the sight of the factory head dressed in a suit, clearly uncomfortable, nervously pacing the shop floor and sweating profusely. "He's usually calm," Abdel-Rahman said, "and he's usually in his air-conditioned office, but today he's running around himself (*biliff hawalayn nafsu*)." He added "Everyone is afraid of the person above them. Everyone wants to go home with his day's pay (*yawmiyyatu*—day's wages). . . . If *al-Basha*[10] sees something (wrong), who's he going to speak to? He'll speak to Dr. Watash (not to me). Dr. Watash will talk to Engineer Muhamed. Engineer Muhamed will tell the shift supervisor (*rayyis* Siba'i), who will tell the director who will tell the worker."

The last time the CEO showed up he docked the shift supervisor's incentive pay for two months. This was a considerable sum and no one had forgotten the incident. The CEO had been touring the factory with a delegation, when one of the workers began paying more attention to the visitors than to his work. The CEO punished the worker's supervisor.[11] Abdel-Rahman compared the situation to what he experienced in Lebanon, where he worked in a large private-sector textile factory. There, he said, the owner often walked around the floor and occasionally found workers sitting down. But this was never a problem as long as work got done and the quality of the finished product was good.

Soon, two more maintenance workers appeared with a large, extendable ladder and a cart full of fluorescent lights. The production engineer supervised as one of them climbed to the top and began installing additional light bulbs, "so the delegation can see." Ironically, it was the CEO who had ordered half of the factory's lights removed

as a cost-cutting measure, which made working conditions much more difficult.[12]

Making the factory presentable didn't stop here. Dr. Watash and one of the engineers ordered the maintenance crew to sweep the floors. This seemed to do more harm than good, however. The factory floor was rough and uneven, partially eaten away, and one could make out the small stones in the concrete. It was rumored that the contractors had skimped on raw materials, pocketing the extra money, resulting in substandard concrete.[13] The old wood brooms managed to collect large cotton balls, but they also lifted a cloud of dirt, cotton, and polyester fibers into the air. As the sweeping continued the cloud slowly rose higher, spreading throughout the area.

When the maintenance crew passed the shift supervisor, he noticed the problem and ordered the men to spray water on the ground before sweeping, to prevent the dirt, grime, and fibers from rising. This seemed to work. But when Dr. Watash returned and saw this, he went crazy and yelled at the workers to stop. The water and the increased humidity that resulted, he explained, could damage the yarn and interfere with production.[14] The moisture attached to the tiny fibers, making them heavier and fluffier. Just as important, however, the delegation could arrive at any moment and Dr. Watash did not want them to walk in and find a wet floor.[15]

Thirty minutes later, when Raghab (the director) walked by, I told him that one of the pulling machines wasn't running. I was only trying to help, as I didn't want the CEO to see the machine sitting idle. Raghab said the production engineer had ordered it turned off. Raw material for this particular machine was in short supply and it wasn't certain when more would become available.[16] Because the engineer wanted to ensure the machine was running *while* the delegation was inside the factory, his solution was to order it turned off until the moment they arrived.[17]

The entire afternoon, everyone anxiously anticipated the CEO's arrival. Information regarding his whereabouts was constantly relayed among and within factories. Occasionally workers ran the length of the floor carrying messages between Dr. Watash and the engineers or between the shift supervisor and the director. At one point we were told the delegation was in one of the weaving factories. Then we heard they were in readymade garments. No one seemed certain where the group was or whether and when it would come. But the possibility that the CEO might show up, however slim, was enough to disrupt normal work routines and wreak havoc on the factory, instilling fear in

Dr. Watash, engineer Muhamed, and the shift supervisor, and putting the rest of us on red alert.

So much was happening around me that I could no longer hide my amazement. The next time Muhamed walked by, I asked him whether the same thing happened every time the CEO came to the factory. Sensing my surprise, he remarked, "This is normal. . . . Any time the president of a country goes someplace, they clean before he comes. You should see Cairo when the president goes anywhere—it sparkles. We, here, are like a country . . . but on a smaller scale."[18]

An hour or so passed, still with no sign of the delegation. It was getting late, and several workers concluded that the ministers were not coming. At first, the preparations for the visit were a pleasant disruption, a change from the normal work routine and the monotony of the every day.[19] The commotion, movement, and chaos were exciting. Everyone enjoyed watching Dr. Watash and the engineers scramble. After several hours, however, it had become tiresome. It was no longer pleasant having the factory head or the engineers on the floor, nervous and tense, constantly pacing, monitoring everything that transpired. Everyone wanted to appear excessively diligent, and for the workers this meant no shortcuts or two-minute breaks. We had also grown tired of waiting, not knowing what was in store.

Then, without warning and after most of us had let our guard down, we saw Raghab, the director, running furiously down the middle of the floor, between the machines, clapping loudly to get our attention. He was making the hand signal that a "higher-up" had been spotted, and danger was on the way. Raghab's right arm was raised high in the air, and he was making a circular motion with one finger pointed upward (like the siren of an ambulance or a police car). He alternated between this and another sign—tapping his fingers on one of his shoulders—as if to indicate the rank of a military officer.[20]

Everyone immediately scrambled, trying to look as busy as possible. It was the moment we had waited for, the moment we had prepared for—at least that's what we thought. The director, we believed, had spotted the CEO, and within no time the delegation would be on the shop floor. But Raghab was a heavy smoker and rather chubby, so by the time he ran by my machine he was panting and laughing simultaneously—uncontrollably—his potbelly bouncing up and down with each breath. He admitted that the signal had been a practical joke. Raghab had not seen anyone and did not know when or even if the CEO was coming. He just wanted to scare us and laugh at our expense. At this, he succeeded.

In the end, no one came to our factory that day.[21] And no one informed Dr. Watash or the senior engineers that the delegation was not coming. They later learned that the delegation had visited the main administration building, a weaving factory, and the readymade garments facility. Atef Sidki, the former prime minister, and Anis Mansour, a prominent writer, were among those present.

The factory had been on red alert for most of the day. The news of the delegation turned the entire company upside down, as it did whenever the CEO was scheduled or rumored to visit. The factory became chaotic with conflicting orders, confusion, and employees frantically rushing around. The visits were not only disruptive; they decreased efficiency and hampered production—and not only on the shop floor, but also for the administration. Dr. Watash and the engineers, for example, spent most of the day preparing for the delegation, instead of in their offices carrying out their normal duties. Time, effort, and considerable resources were spent making the factory presentable. And the same thing happened every time the CEO was scheduled or rumored to visit.

More often than not, waiting for the CEO was like waiting for Godot. The difference was that waiting for Godot took less preparation. He was also more merciful. When we heard the CEO was coming—"possibly coming," "probably coming," or even "most definitely coming"—nine times out of ten he did not show up. When he did come, it was unlikely that he would end up where you worked. Despite these odds, every shop floor, department, and office in the entire company went on red alert each time the rumor circulated that he might drop in.[22] The transformations were tremendous—from noticeable changes like Dr. Watash's presence on the shop floor, the installation of additional lighting, and the tension in the air—to smaller, otherwise unnoticeable measures. In the administration cafeteria, for example, the white tablecloths were replaced with more formal red ones whenever the staff heard the CEO might visit. The changes on the shop floor could be just as subtle. At Misr Textiles, the only time winding machine operators followed the rules when making repairs were on the days we heard the CEO was coming. On those occasions, work rules were enforced and the maintenance crew came out of hibernation.[23]

This was the system at both MIDIA and Misr Textiles.[24] It was taken for granted and considered normal.[25] And this was understandable. The CEO's power was extraordinary. He demanded respect and every possible consideration. Factory heads and engineers were expected to prepare for his arrival. Not doing so, in fact, would constitute a

breech of established practice and could be considered an affront to the power and prestige of his position.

For many in the factory, the CEO's visits were terrifying. And people had good reason to fear. He was known to be tough and unrelenting, and he could also be ruthless and vindictive. For example, during one such visit, Youssef, the shift supervisor in the department next door, differed with the CEO about a matter relating to production.[26] The next day, without explanation, Youssef was absent. He was transferred to one of the company's other factories, an old, run-down facility on the outskirts of town. Located in al-Suyuf, it was the production facility farthest away from central Alexandria. The factory was known universally by employees as the company's own *mu'takal* (prison camp).[27] If you lived in Alexandria, as the shift supervisor did, it was a hassle to get to, requiring a long and tiresome commute.[28]

Youssef ended up spending six months in al-Suyuf. He attempted to meet the CEO after three months, repeatedly calling his secretary, writing letters, and visiting his office. After his requests were denied he finally managed to see the CEO in front of company headquarters, where Ali Bey had his office. But this was no chance encounter. Twice a week, early in the morning, a number of employees gathered on the steps in front of company headquarters.[29] Those with special requests or particular problems came in the hope of talking to the CEO about their situations. Two senior officials, Mohamed Minyawi (head of the personnel department) and another man, also stood outside. The two men screened employees, tried to solve small problems themselves, and made sure everyone stayed orderly.[30] As soon as Ali Bey stepped out of his chauffeured-driven car, employees approached, one by one, with the assistants always standing between him and the employees, keeping everyone in line.

It was by no means guaranteed that you would even get this far. If Minyawi and his sidekick decided not to let you meet the CEO after hearing your story, you were out of luck. You had to go through them first. It was also well-known that Ali Bey did not like *kalam kitir* (a lot of talk). He had neither time nor interest in small talk, details, emotional pleas, or beating around the bush. You had to make your case quickly to stand a chance. But if you told him your story and he was sympathetic, he would tell his assistant to "look into the matter" and your problem was solved. It was as simple as that. If he thought otherwise, however, he was not afraid of raising his voice and telling you that you were out of line, often insulting you in the process.

The whole thing was unstructured, informal, almost feudal. Employees waited on the steps outside the building to plead their cases

and have their fates determined, very much as serfs had waited on the manor-house steps for an audience with the feudal lord. In fact, the CEO's power came close to that of a lord—at least, inside the factory. He was addressed as such, as well. Every employee, regardless of rank, referred to him as *al-Basha* (the lord).[31] Only the CEO was referred to as *al*-Basha.[32]

Meeting employees on the steps was one method of solving their problems, and for many it was a last resort that sometimes worked. However, the manner in which the meetings took place, their location, the language employees used in their appeals, what they had to suffer through to get this far, and the absolute discretion of Ali Bey—everything about the interaction reflected the arbitrary and authoritarian power of the CEO.[33]

The meetings were a ritual of authority, an exercise of power, one way the CEO displayed his majesty and magnanimity.[34] There was nothing formal about them. It was not even established how long the CEO would stand outside listening to requests. If he felt like staying, he would. But if he had more pressing things to do or simply ran out of patience, he abruptly walked into the building, regardless of how many people were left waiting. Some days he canceled the meetings altogether. But there were always more people and problems than he had time for and inevitably employees were left standing outside, without having had the privilege of speaking to him.

The fact that the CEO could solve problems with such ease and immediacy—especially compared with an inefficient bureaucracy and impotent union leaders—had serious implications. Such power made one conscious of what one said and how one acted, making it less likely that one would ever challenge the CEO or his authority. It also made alternative methods of pursuing one's concerns less attractive. Why invest time and energy in formal procedures and official channels when a personal appeal to the benevolence of the CEO was more likely to solve your problem quickly?

Even when this brought results, however, problems were solved on the basis of individual appeal and were not the result of formal procedures intended to safeguard established rights. This was a system without rights and devoid of "industrial citizenship."[35] Instead, it placed in front of employees the possibility of addressing their concerns in an individual manner. By incorporating employees as individuals (not as members of a larger collectivity), the system individualized problems and, in the process, made the possibility of collective action (on the part of any group—workers, engineers, administrators, or employees more generally) that much less likely. The company, after all, was in

Wagdi *al-winch*'s inimitable phrase, "*bayt al-Basha . . . ihna hina fi bayt al-Basha*" (the lord's house . . . we're here in the lord's house).

The CEO's power was truly awesome and seemingly unlimited. For obvious reasons, not everyone was willing to speak openly about him. Shohdy was no exception. He never criticized the CEO; he simply told it like it was. A realist of sorts, Shohdy was a social operator convinced that he understood the world, including the firm, and the way it worked. Because of this, he decided to run for a position in the union.

We often spoke about the union elections and his candidacy, campaign strategy, and tactics. Naturally, the CEO came up in our conversations. On one such occasion, when explaining the relationship between the union and the CEO, Shohdy became unusually serious. He lowered his voice and slowed his speech, as if he was about to say something terribly profound.

> [I]n the present system, when anyone needs anything or has a request or something, including things they should be entitled to, the union doesn't do what it should do, which is to serve the workers and the employees, and the *mas'ulin* [responsible people, i.e., high-level department heads] also don't finish (*mish bikhallasu*) these things. Therefore, you're forced to go to the CEO himself to get these things done. . . . Do you think that whenever anyone wants anything done, with all due respect to Eng. Abdo Farag [the senior engineer] and the department heads, things get accomplished? No. If you want something done you must go yourself and see *al-ragil* (the man).[36] But not everyone can do this. A regular worker can't do this [he implied this was the case more out of fear than anything else]. And do you think that if you were to see "the man," you could talk to him the way we're talking to each other? Of course not! *One good word from him and you're set. One bad word and.* . . . Putting a worker in front of him is like putting him [the worker] in front of a canon.

In case I thought there was something peculiar about Ali Bey—that he was unlike other company heads—Shohdy quickly added, "and don't think he's the only one this way. All chairmen of the boards of directors are like this."[37]

Shohdy spoke from experience. His father had worked at MIDIA for more than thirty-five years, and Shohdy knew about the company, its politics, the union, how things got done, and who held all the cards.

The company bureaucracy was slow and inefficient. High-level officials, for their part, were as afraid of the CEO as the little guy. Even when they tried to help—to intervene on someone's behalf for example—they eventually found themselves in front of Ali Bey.[38] Decision-making was centralized and power was concentrated in the office and the person of the CEO.[39]

For all practical purposes, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), the national umbrella organization which includes all factory-level unions, was an extension of the state. As a corporatist entity, it was administered like any other government agency. It was large, bureaucratically incompetent, self-serving, and intellectually bankrupt.[40] It mustered very little if any confidence in the workers it ostensibly served.[41] As an institution, it is used to control and co-opt workers, disseminate propaganda, provide the appearance of representation, and occasionally channel limited services to public-sector employees, workers and nonworkers alike.[42] Although many have described the ETUF as corporatist, this term arguably conceals more than it reveals.[43]

At both MIDIA and Misr Textiles, the union neither defended workers' rights nor addressed their concerns. It did not investigate grievances or management misconduct, collective bargaining and contract negotiations were unheard of and strikes and independent organization were illegal.[44]

Al-Sayyid Rashid was the head of the ETUF while I was at MIDIA. Rashid also held the position of deputy speaker of Parliament and was a visible, senior figure in the government's ruling National Democratic Party. Originally a textile worker from Alexandria, Rashid had made his way through the ranks of the union bureaucracy and the Textile Workers Federation. Out of sheer coincidence Rashid had worked for many years at the very same company in which I conducted my research. Almost everyone on my shop floor knew him personally and many had worked alongside him when he was just a regular worker, before he made it big.[45] Rashid was universally despised.[46]

If at the national level the union was an extension of the state, it played a similar role at the local level; it was an extension of the firm.[47] The elected union representatives were a group of disparate individuals with extremely limited powers, although with more power and status than the average worker.[48] The union's single most important function was organizing an annual *ma'rad* (exhibition) where employees could purchase commodities, mostly consumer durables such as televisions and video recorders, at subsidized prices or on credit.[49] Of course, the union was supposed to look after workers' interests and into their complaints, but this rarely happened.[50]

Who made up the union? Because of compulsory membership, the union included all employees except the highest echelons of management—the CEO and his immediate cronies. Workers, administrators, accountants, engineers, and even department heads were part of the union. Although both white and blue-collar employees were legally members, there was no sense of belonging.[51]

The union was known to be corrupt throughout. Everyone knew it to be a fraud. "As soon as people win in the election," sheikh Darwish remarked, "even if they are free, he [the CEO] calls them in to his office and asks them what level [of seniority] they are. He has the power to change their level and this directly affects their wages. . . . If the person is at level 5, he will make him level 4, and if he is at level 4 he will make him level 3. . . . Then, if they actually try to do or say anything independently or do anything at all, the CEO will say, 'What more do you want?' " The carrot of co-optation was one of the CEO's many methods of intervention.[52]

Strikes and other forms of collective action were almost always led by individuals who were not affiliated with the union. What was worse, however, was that local unions rarely if ever supported such actions, often condemning them at their outbreak. Worst of all, it was not unknown for the local unions to tell the security forces about an imminent protest.[53]

Co-optation was even more effective with elected members of the board of directors. Although the CEO was also chairman of the board, the law stipulated that all boards would consist of up to nine members (including the chairman who was appointed). The chairman appointed four members, and the remaining four were elected from the ranks of the company's employees. Thus, the appointed members were usually in complete agreement with the CEO. And like elected union representatives, they were easily corrupted, co-opted, or neutralized. Expressing the sentiments of the company's entire population, Darwish added, "The candidates say they will make these demands but they can't do anything. The CEO's word is what goes. He has all the power. The people on the Board are supposed to give advice, have an opinion, etc. It could work so that the majority's views get implemented, but no. He [the CEO] gets you [and] holds you where it hurts—your hands."[54]

Law 203 of 1991, which redefined the relationship between the state and the public sector and was intended to promote efficiency and profitability by providing greater freedom of maneuver at the firm level, also provided the CEO with more discretionary power vis-à-vis the labor force, certainly at MIDIA and Misr Textiles.[55] In addition to giving pubic-sector firms the ability to make significant decisions

regarding production and marketing, the law provided more leeway for management to "determine wages, salary increases, allowances, and leave policies."[56] Naturally, this made the CEO even more powerful. It cemented his grip and provided more carrots and sticks with which to control and co-opt union representatives and board members.[57]

At Misr Textiles, Ali Bey had even greater powers. Because the firm was hemorrhaging considerable amounts of money at the time of his appointment, he had asked to be made *mufawid 'am* ("general negotiator") instead of simply CEO and chairman of the board. He argued that he needed the extra powers the position provided to take quick and decisive action to remedy the situation.[58] The position brought with it greater power and even less accountability, dispensing with the idea of a board of directors altogether.

An active and functioning board of directors is even more important than a union in providing a mechanism for checking the potentially arbitrary powers of management. But at both MIDIA and Misr Textiles, the board was a mere fiction. In state-owned firms operating in noncompetitive markets (where price does not provide a mechanism of accountability), a well-functioning board of directors is even more important.[59] First, boards provide accountability (or "answerability"), which is "but another aspect of the problem of the exercise of authority."[60] Discussing this idea in the context of public sector enterprise in India, Ratan Kumar Jain writes,

> Strictly speaking, accountability involves the rendering of accounts, statistics, and reports. But if it is not to be an empty formality, it involves control and judgements, in order to prescribe the standards of expectation—legal, administrative, customary, or moral—with which to compare what is being done and how control . . . is to be exercised in carrying out particular schemes of an organization or enterprise. . . . The primary purpose of accountability is to define the relationship between the various authorities so as to focus responsibility; to facilitate co-ordination with related programmes; to ensure consistency in the implementation of policy . . . to conduct operations with maximum efficiency and economy and in accordance with law; to provide sufficient information so as to enable appropriate authorities and the public at large to appraise the effectiveness of operations; and . . . to apply . . . the pressures and sanctions to remove inertia, friction, impediments, or obstacles in the way of the fulfillment of the tasks of an organization or enterprise.[61]

After discussing the importance of accountability, Jain writes,

> All of the above matters generally come within the orbit of responsibility of the Board of Directors . . . and it is the function of a self-respecting Board to approve, decide and supervise these matters much in the same way as the proper control of the rudder is necessary to guide a ship in a definite direction. These tasks also suggest that right choice of the members of the Board of Directors is imperative for the success of enterprise in the public sector.[62]

In theory, the role of the board of directors at Egyptian public-sector companies is no different. Describing the legal statutes governing their activities, Ali El Salem writes, "The board of directors in a public sector enterprise is the most important level of decision making. However, the actual performance of this decision-making authority varies according to the personal characteristics of the chairman of the board on one hand and the qualities of its members on the other. *In some cases, the chairman acts in a unilateral form with all authority centered on him*. In others, the board carries out its legal authority in practice."[63] MIDIA and Misr Textiles (as well as the majority of state-owned-enterprises in Egypt) were closer to the former model, with all authority centered on the CEO. As a result, inside the organization the CEO was accountable to no one.

An impotent union and an ineffective board were not the only factors that contributed to the CEO's tremendous powers. Ali Bey found other ways to consolidate his control. When Salah, the shift supervisor, remarked that MIDIA "was a state within a state," he was not simply referring to the large number of people within one organization, under one command, in a delimited space with clearly defined boundaries. Neither was Salah merely referring to the firm's vast resources, bureaucratic structures, administrative departments, or legal frameworks—or even to the fact that MIDIA had its own prison camp. He was also referring to the existence of a quasi-police force and an intelligence agency.

It was well-known that the public relations department was little more than an intelligence network with close ties to *mabahith amn al-dawla* (State Security Intelligence).[64] While the security guards functioned as the everyday police force, the public relations department handled

special situations. They were in charge of monitoring the industrial populace and rooting out potential troublemakers. Along with spies and informants, the security guards and the public relations department made up the firm's own repressive state apparatus.

I witnessed this firsthand when Khamis, a mechanic in the weaving department next door, was hauled in for questioning. Weeks earlier, in a discussion with several workers on my shop floor, Khamis had criticized the company's pension system—*sanduq al-ta'min* (insurance fund).[65] The fund became a regular topic of conversation when it was discovered that several million pounds had been stolen. Khamis's comments, however, had nothing to do with the scandal. He was complaining about the regulations governing the fund and why he thought the system was unfair.[66]

Khamis took his criticisms to the people responsible for the insurance fund, but his ideas were ignored. In conversations in our department, by contrast, his criticisms fell on receptive ears. Everyone present, about nine workers, agreed with him, and Khamis suggested writing a letter for all of them to sign. The idea was to address the letter—more like a petition—to a prominent cabinet minister and mail it to one of the national newspapers, which is done with some frequency in Egypt. If it were published, it would surely get the minister's attention.

The security people somehow got word of Khamis's intention and he was immediately called in for questioning. Luckily, the informant got part of the story wrong. He told security that the letter had already been written and mailed. When Khamis was confronted with the charge, he denied it and asked that the letter, as well as the snitch be produced. He told the security personnel what had actually happened: he had conveyed his ideas directly to the people in charge of the fund. Khamis provided the names of the individuals he spoke with and insisted that this was all that he had done.

Sure enough, the security personnel investigated and confirmed his story. Several committee members remembered Khamis and his suggestions. When he finished describing his encounter with the security officials, Khamis laughed and told us that, when he was being interrogated in the public relations department, the letter in question happened to be in his pocket, typed but unsigned.

MIDIA's repressive state apparatus attempted to squelch dissent before a scandal erupted and the company was openly criticized in the papers. A letter addressed to a cabinet minister and published in a major newspaper was sure to draw attention, but not the kind of publicity the CEO wanted. The security and public relations departments were charged with investigating the matter and locating and neutralizing

the guilty party or parties. Fear and intimidation are the hallmarks of authoritarian regimes.

Violence, both symbolic and material, is also characteristic of authoritarian rule. While the security personnel could only intimidate, the CEO was capable of much more. If anyone had a monopoly on the use of violence inside the firm it was *al-Basha*.[67] *Al-khawf wa al-kurbag* (fear and the whip) were essential components of his management style.

It was not surprising, therefore, to hear stories—story after story in fact—about the CEO verbally abusing a department head, humiliating an engineer, or insulting a shift supervisor, often in public. At both MIDIA and Misr Textiles, yelling was the norm and I became accustomed to hearing and seeing all kinds of verbal abuse and insulting behavior on the part of superiors toward subordinates, whether it involved a department head and a junior administrator, an engineer and a shift supervisor, or, most frequently in my case, a supervisor and a worker. What was disturbing, however, were the stories I heard—and on a few occasions, actually witnessed—of physical abuse.

It was not unknown for the CEO to lose his temper and then strike someone—pushing, punching, slapping, or even kicking the person in front of him. It all happened, and with alarming frequency. Without trying, I heard many such stories and spoke with a number of people who themselves had been the objects of the CEO's physical hostility. For example, the CEO once chased a shift supervisor in my department down the street in front of company headquarters attempting to kick him. Like so many others, Salah had come to the steps of the administration building to speak with *al-Basha*. "Salah said something wrong or inappropriate," the story went, and the CEO "ran all the way to the school after him, trying to hit him." Seeming disrespectful or overstepping one's bounds were sure ways to infuriate the CEO.[68]

But there were other ways to raise *al-Basha's* ire, like appearing to lack the requisite technical knowledge or being unable to answer his questions. Ayman, a young chemical engineer in the dying department, experienced his fury firsthand. His first encounter with the CEO was a memorable one:

> There was a problem with one of the machines in the *masbagha* (Dye department) and the CEO came to take a look, ask questions, etc. Ayman had asked his colleagues and superiors earlier what the problem was and what [temperature] setting this machine should be on, and they told him. When the CEO came he went to the shop floor with the

> head of the dye department and some of the engineers etc. All of a sudden, someone came over to Ayman—it was his first year in the factory (he has been here seven now)—and told him that the CEO wanted him. He went over to where the CEO was standing [with his superiors already there] and addressed him with *Effendim* (sir), since the CEO was looking at him while Ayman was walking toward him. The CEO yelled, "*Ikhras*!" (shut up!). The CEO started speaking to all of them, which apparently is his manner, and at the end he asked a question about the setting of the machine while looking at Ayman. Ayman answered with what he was told before from the others, who were present with him. The CEO started yelling at him, calling him a *humar* (ass) and said he did not know anything . . . and then lunged forward and made a quick motion [as if he was going] to punch him! I stepped back several steps and then walked away and out of the hall.[69]

After this incident Ayman always tried to avoid the CEO whenever he came to the dye department.

Despite the CEO's unique position and extraordinary power, certain aspects of his relationships with department heads, engineers, and administrative staff mirrored other relationships of power and authority between superiors and subordinates in the firm.

Engineers and Shift Supervisors

In addition to the power of the CEO discussed above, I observed two other relationships of authority at MIDIA and Misr Textiles: relations between engineers and shift supervisors, and those between shift supervisors and workers. Although each has its own peculiarities, they share many similarities—so many, in fact, that one can think of them as three modal relationships of power and authority inside the firm.

The exercise of power takes many forms in the factory. It is not limited to social dramas such as Youssef's transfer or Khamis's run-in with the public relations department. Smaller and more subtle and easily overlooked aspects of social interaction are just as much a product of hierarchy, inequality, and the distribution of power. These seemingly trivial practices can provide insight into the structure and ideology of social relations and the extent of hierarchy within the organization.

Small gestures, for example, often convey significant social meaning. Who greets whom, terms of address, body language, comportment, and demeanor all reflect, in part, larger relations of power and domination. Rather than merely reflecting inequality, these innumerable small acts, habitually repeated and taken together, are one of the ways systems of domination are naturalized and reproduced. The taken-for-granted practices of everyday life make up the bricks and mortar—the architecture—of authority relations.

The gulf separating engineers and shift supervisors, for example, was apparent every time engineer Abdo Farag marched onto the shop floor. Even if we did not see him approaching, we knew he was coming because the shift supervisor, whomever it happened to be, immediately jumped from his desk and scurried toward the door. It was the shift supervisor who greeted the engineer and extended his hand rather than the other way around. Salah, '*Am* Sayid Rizq and Mohamed, the three supervisors on my floor, always addressed Abdo Farag as "*ya bash muhandis*," "*ya bey*," or "*ya basha*," while he referred to them by their first names.

Illustration 5.1. Abdo Farag, the head engineer, speaks with the shift supervisor.

What was fascinating about ordinary interactions such as these was that I had seen these men behave quite differently in different circumstances. Abdo Farag had been one of the first people I met at MIDIA. I spent several weeks with him at the beginning of my fieldwork learning about the company, the different departments, and the production process involved in manufacturing fabric from raw wool and cotton. During this time I got to know him well and saw him interact with administrators, engineers, and the CEO.

Despite Abdo Farag's experience and position, he was a modest, soft-spoken person. With engineers and administrators he was always polite and exceedingly friendly. He had given his whole life to the public sector, and although he was underpaid, he took pride and care in his work. In addition to being devoted to the company, he was a gentleman and a thoroughly humane person.

None of this came out, however, when he was on the shop floor. So different was Abdo Farag, in fact, that for some time I found his interactions with shift supervisors and workers disconcerting. It was difficult to reconcile the image of the man I admired with the harsh and sometimes callous and indifferent engineer I saw on the shop floor.

The shift supervisor was also remarkably different in the engineer's presence. Rizq was usually gruff and did not mince words. With the workers there were no pleasantries and yelling was his standard mode of speech. When Abdo Farag was around, however, Rizq was on his best behavior. He became polite and all smiles; he lowered his voice and refrained from using vulgar language. Rizq strained to transform himself, and the only words that seemed to come out of his mouth were "*taht amrak*," (under your command or at your service) "*hadir*," (certainly) and "*awamrak ya basha*" (your orders lord).

Musical Chairs

The situation at Misr Textiles was no different. The extent and importance of hierarchy became apparent at the end of my first week in the factory. Raghab, the director, called me to his desk and invited me to sit down. The old wooden desk looked out of place in the middle of the factory. It was the only one on the shop floor and stood in an empty space between two winding machines, immediately adjacent to a support beam. A chair with a proper back and a rickety stool that had clearly been repaired sat at either end.[70]

I had just begun at Misr Textiles and was still something of a curiosity for Raghab. As I approached, he stood up and insisted that I

take the nicer chair. Both seats, of course, were off-limits to workers, but I was an exception. Raghab wanted to spend the few remaining minutes of the shift conversing and seemed curious about the time I had spent at MIDIA (where I previously worked). He asked me to compare the factories and seemed eager to recount his experiences working in another textile factory in Kafr El-Dawar. No sooner had I started talking, however, than the shift supervisor appeared. Siba'i, in his mid-fifties, was Raghab's immediate superior. He had come to check the factory's logbook before the shift ended. The book, which sat prominently on the desk, recorded each shift's production by machine.

Even before Siba'i arrived, Raghab jumped up to greet him. Naturally, I followed and offered the shift supervisor the chair I was sitting on. After a moment's hesitation he sat down and I found myself sitting on the broken stool in Raghab's place. Raghab was now standing by the side of the desk, facing us. At this point I did not think much of what was happening. But minutes later, when engineers Mohamed and Nagi appeared, things became more interesting. Mohamed was the factory's senior engineer, and Nagi was the production engineer immediately beneath him.

Just as Raghab had done before, the shift supervisor and I stood up even before the two engineers arrived at the desk. The usual greetings were exchanged, with the engineers showing only slight interest in Raghab. The problem now was that there were not enough chairs for all of us. Siba'i and I invited both men to sit down. And after a brief exchange, Mohamed took the nice chair and Nagi tried to persuade me to sit on the stool. There was never a question about the shift supervisor or Raghab being offered a seat. It was at this point that the shift supervisor told Raghab to bring chairs from another section of the factory. He went running and a few minutes later appeared with two wooden stools. Nagi, the shift supervisor, and I sat down and the conversation continued.

Only afterward did I realize the significance of the interaction. It was already obvious that the desk and two chairs were off-limits to workers. The only people who sat there during the day (except when a shift supervisor or engineer was around) were Raghab and Khalaf, a *mulahiz*.[71] As the director, Raghab was Khalaf's superior. Raghab and Khalaf had their own system of determining who sat where, depending on who was present. When Khalaf was alone at the desk, he always sat on the nice chair—the chair with the back. But when the director and the foreman were there together, it was Raghab (the superior) who always got the nicer chair. And on those occasions when the shift supervisor came to check the logbook or make the rounds, he inevitably got the chair, Raghab took the broken stool and Khalaf stood close by.

What I had witnessed that Thursday afternoon, therefore, was an extension of an established, if informal, system recognized by all, governing who got to sit where and when—a kind of musical chairs on the shop floor. With so many people present that day, the interaction resembled an elaborate, highly choreographed dance in which all of the participants knew their parts perfectly. Musical chairs not only reflected the importance of factory hierarchies and symbolic subordination, however; it also demonstrated the extent to which these had become internalized, penetrating all aspects of life on the shop floor.[72] Hierarchy manifested itself through subtle practices of distinction and differentiation such as these. Who got to sit where had everything to do with one's position in the factory.

Shift Supervisors and Workers

Despite the often-discussed awkward position of shift supervisors, being neither workers nor white-collar management, their relationship with workers resembled other relationships of power and authority in the factory. As a result of my position on the shop floor, it was this relationship that I witnessed most frequently and most closely. Although shift supervisors could at times be quite friendly with workers, their superiority was never in question and their power was always considerable. By analyzing the sources of this power, above and beyond the formal position of shift supervisor, we might learn something about the nature of authority relations in the factory more generally.

Shift supervisor's power vis-à-vis workers manifested itself in both small and large ways. For instance, similar to the relationship between shift supervisors and engineers, it was the responsibility of workers to greet their supervisors and not the other way around. And whereas workers most often referred to supervisors as *ya rayyis* (boss), shift supers referred to workers either as *ya wala* (boy) or by their first names.

Other small aspects of daily interaction also reflected this inequality. At MIDIA, for example, one group of workers organized a division of labor for purchasing food and preparing meals. Each day these responsibilities rotated among the workers. Although the shift supervisor always sat down and ate with the group, he was never required to buy or prepare food.[73]

In addition to these seemingly innocuous examples, the shift supervisor's power could also be quite brutal. The most horrific example of this occurred in an altercation I witnessed between Mohamed, the youngest supervisor in the department, and a worker named Said. Mohamed entered the work hall one morning and walked briskly past

Illustration 5.2. Salah, the shift supervisor, sitting at his desk.

me. This itself was unusual as he was a heavyset man, and his stride usually reflected this. He headed straight toward Said and then, for no apparent reason and without exchanging a word, started punching him. The first blow landed on Said's shoulder, knocking him backward and causing him to lose balance. Said's immediate reaction was to defend himself. Startled, he threw a punch that landed on Mohamed's chest.

Apparently, Mohamed was not expecting any resistance from his subordinate, and the blow seemed only to infuriate him further. He exploded. His face contorted, and he began pummeling Said, relentlessly throwing blows at the much smaller figure in front of him. Mohamed was a giant in comparison, and his punches landed on Said's shoulders and chest.

At this point, Said only attempted to block the attack. Whether realizing he could not match his shift supervisor's strength or calculating that fighting would not be wise, Said simply tried to stop the punches from landing. In this he failed miserably. There was a look of terror on Said's face, and his efforts were meek and pathetic as he bent down, desperately trying to move out of the way of Mohamed's fists. I could not help but feel sorry for him.

Twenty minutes later, I learned the reason for the attack in the workers' bathroom, where I found Said and two other workers from our department. Said, visibly shaken, was doing most of the talking. In the morning, Mohamed had asked him to deliver a note to a manager

upstairs in the administration. Mohamed had just returned from meeting the manager and learned that nothing had been delivered. Furious that Said had not done what he was told, Mohamed started hitting him.

Said had simply forgotten to deliver the message. The note, which was still in his pocket, explained why Mohamed had been late for work several days earlier and had nothing to do with production or our department. It was something that Mohamed should have done himself, Said claimed. Karim, one of the workers present, agreed, rhetorically interjecting, "What? Do you work for him?"

Although physical violence between shift supervisors and workers was infrequent, it was not unknown. Mohamed assaulted Said simply because he had not obeyed his command, even though the order fell outside Said's official work duties. And the shift supervisor's behavior was unlikely to get him in trouble. Although Mohamed could not physically abuse and humiliate all the workers on his shop floor, such as older workers or sheikhs, he could get away with abusing many others. Why were shift supervisors so powerful, and what were the sources of their power?

Assigning work duties and controlling schedules turned out to be significant sources of power. Shift supervisors assigned work daily to "miscellaneous workers," and certain assignments were much more difficult than others. In addition, all workers needed the shift supervisor's approval before they could change their schedules. Thus, if a worker had to take care of an unexpected errand, such as dealing with a government agency or bank during the day or attending a wedding or funeral during the evening, he needed his supervisor's permission before he could approach other workers in order to switch work assignments. This happened rather frequently. Being flexible, however, was the shift supervisor's prerogative.

These were not the only sources of the shift supervisor's power. If a worker did not show up for work, it was up to the supervisor to record the absence. Being absent without first obtaining approval was considered a *ghiyab* (absence). Receiving too many of these, especially in a short period of time, was a sure way to get in trouble. At Misr Textiles, for example, workers who were absent twice within one month lost their incentive pay (*hawafiz*) for the entire month. In many cases, incentive pay equaled or came close to a worker's regular monthly wages. Losing this, therefore, could be disastrous. Similarly, at MIDIA, if workers received too many absences they were sent to the legal-affairs department. At both firms, a number of unexcused absences could constitute grounds for dismissal.

There were several different ways an absence could be recorded, however. In addition to a *ghiyab*, supervisors could record absences as

either a *sanawiyya* (planned vacation day) or a *maradiyya* (sick day). As long as workers did not go over the number of vacation and sick days they were allowed each year, there were no negative consequences for these types of absences. It was up to the shift supervisor, however, to determine how the absence should be recorded. If workers were on good terms with their supervisors, unplanned absences were often recorded as planned vacation days or sick days.

The same principle applied to arriving late to the factory. If workers came after the beginning of the shift and managed to make it past the security guards (after the front gate closed, it was up to security to let you in), it was up to the shift supervisor to decide what to do with them. He could refuse to let them work, record their tardiness as a late arrival (which affected their wages), or ignore the fact that they were late altogether.

Shift supervisors were also responsible for evaluating work performance. They had the power to give out fines (*giza*) and recommend bonuses (*mukaf'aat*). If the factory needed to operate on Fridays, it was the shift super who decided which workers to ask to come in. Although some were not interested in working on their only day off, for many it was an easy way to make extra money, as they were paid one-and-a-quarter times their normal wages.[74]

Although the sources of the shift supervisor's power varied, they centered on decision-making and the manipulation of existing rules. Rules functioned as resources rather than as limitations to action and power. It was the supervisor who determined whether and when rules should be applied, as well as how to apply them. In some cases, he determined which rules to apply. Power came from the little spaces of arbitrary decision-making, discretion, and choice.

The Ideology of Authoritarian Social Relations

An ideology justifying inequality and authoritarian social relations existed within the factory. Managers as well as many workers believed that superiors needed to be tough and distant and, in some cases, abusive and condescending, in order to be respected. If superiors became too close to their subordinates, the thinking went, subordinates would lose respect for them and would be unwilling to follow their orders. Control would be lost; the chain of command would deteriorate, and nothing would get done. Domination and inequality were thought to be functionally necessary for respect, authority, and ultimately production.[75] Emad, a young engineer, summarized the idea quite well:

> *Al-ta'atif ma' al-'amil wihish, wihish, wihish*. (sympathizing with the worker is bad, bad, bad). It is a bad thing about Egyptians. All of them are like this. If you are a shift super, for example, and you get close to a worker who is under you—treat him well, . . . put your head with his [meaning, treat him like an equal]—he will turn on you. . . . If you let him go once to the bathroom without asking you and he does it again and again—forget it. It's over. He will go anytime.

This thinking was present at every level of the organization, and some even justified the CEO's methods on this basis. If one appeared weak in front of subordinates (being overly kind and considerate qualified), it was said, they would walk all over you. Unless one was strict and harsh, subordinates would *yidhaku 'alayk* (take advantage of you).[76]

Ramzi, a young administrator who first worked in the company as a shift supervisor, told me about the potential "dangers" of becoming too friendly with one's subordinates. At first, unlike most supervisors, Ramzi did not insist that his workers address him formally on the shop floor.[77] As a warning of what this might lead to, however, he recounted an interaction he had with one of his workers outside the factory:

> I was walking in the street with my wife, and a worker saw me, and she said "Hello ya Ramzi. How are you?" My wife asked me who this was. Of course, I couldn't tell her she was a worker. I said, "She's a colleague." But the next day, I told her [the worker]. "It's ok to call me Ramzi here [at work], but respect outside is important."

Ramzi echoed the importance of maintaining distance between oneself and one's subordinates.[78] He and his wife had internalized the system of rigid hierarchy and inequality (and the importance of position, prestige, and so on) to such a degree that he was threatened by a worker addressing him informally in public, in front of his wife. Ramzi did not even need to ask his wife what she thought. He knew that she would find it awkward, if not unacceptable, for his subordinate to address him by his first name.

In association with the institutional foundations of authoritarian social relations outlined in the preceding sections, this ideology could very well have played a generative role in these relations. In addition to legitimating rigid hierarchy and excessive power, such an ideology could partially explain why authoritarian social relations existed at every level

of the organization (e.g., between CEO and engineer, engineer and shift supervisor, and shift supervisor and worker). If superiors do not treat their subordinates with respect and dignity, why should people treat those below themselves any differently? This becomes the norm—the expected and the acceptable. An ideology emerges that justifies this type of behavior. In such a system, being authoritarian becomes an assertion of one's dignity, equality, and power.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide an organizational ethnography of MIDIA and Misr Textiles focusing on hierarchy, authority, power, and trust. Aside from questions of efficiency and firm performance, it is obvious that both companies provided working environments for their employees that were far from ideal.[79] Workers and other employees regularly suffered from the arbitrary and capricious authority of superiors and lacked functioning institutional mechanisms to redress their grievances.[80] Rigid hierarchy and authoritarian social relations were the norm, and they came across not only in obvious ways such as the CEO's power or the shift supervisor's physical abuse of workers, but also in smaller, more subtle practices, mannerisms, and codes of behavior. Relations of superiority and subordination had become so internalized that they appeared natural and were taken for granted.

A number of conclusions about the foundations of this culture can be drawn from this analysis of authority relations. Institutions that were intended to limit power and provide some measure of accountability—specifically, the board of directors and the union—did not function. The absence of countervailing powers or checks on the CEO allowed him to become the leviathan. Power became centralized and concentrated in his person.

The analysis of shift supervisor-worker relations demonstrated that rules do not necessarily constrain authority. Instead, they can become, in practice and implementation, resources of power. The ability of different people in the hierarchy to be dictatorial came from the discretion they were given in carrying out orders and implementing rules—in practice—or in the spaces of discretionary power and decision-making left to them, regardless of how small and constrained these spaces may have been.

The type of organizational culture that developed had significant consequences. Rigid hierarchy and arbitrary authority led to sycophantism, fear, and obeisance. With so much discretionary power, subor-

dinates were unable to engage with superiors as relative equals and unwilling to question or criticize. In such a system, blindly agreeing with one's superiors and personal loyalty, rather than free expression, thought, and critique are rewarded. For the organization, the results can be quite detrimental.

This became apparent during a meeting I attended to investigate inefficiency and under-production in the sheet department before I began working at MIDIA. A committee of engineers and senior administrators led by engineer Abdo Farag was set up to explore the problem. During the meeting, the group exchanged ideas and openly expressed different opinions. Once discussion ended and a plan of action was proposed, one of the committee members was assigned to put pen to paper and record the group's recommendations. Suddenly, in the middle of transcribing the group's findings, the man stopped writing and placed his pen on the desk. When Abdo Farag asked why he had stopped writing, the man openly declared (to his colleagues and Abdo Farag, whom he trusted) that he did not want to put his name on the document. He knew that the CEO would eventually read it and was afraid that he might react unfavorably to the committee's recommendations. The administrator was genuinely afraid and resumed writing only when the senior engineer personally assured him that he would not get into trouble. *Al khuwf*, as I heard on more than one occasion, *bi 'alim al-kizb* (fear teaches dishonesty).

Overly hierarchical systems of organization prevent the exchange of information that could potentially lead to trouble-shooting and higher levels of productivity and innovation. Even when firms produce "old economy" commodities (in this case, textiles), the efficient processing of information is an essential determinant of their success. These types of organizational cultures also lead to tremendous risk-aversion on the part of subordinates, especially at the level of middle management. Many CEOs and senior managers at other companies where I conducted research complained that subordinates were unwilling to make decisions and take responsibility. Instead, people constantly deferred to their superiors. Organizational cultures characterized by tremendous hierarchy and the concentration of power do not reward risk-taking or independent decision-making. Both MIDIA and Misr Textiles could be characterized as "low-trust" organizations.

In the firm, formal institutions and bureaucratic rules belie unchecked power and arbitrary decision-making. A peculiar organizational culture emerges in which each individual within the rigid hierarchy of authority relations becomes subservient to those above while dominating those below.[81]

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Chapter 6

Ethnography, Identity, and the Production of Knowledge

Or How I Know What I Know About Egyptian Workers and Factories

When I decided to study working class culture and politics in Egypt, the last thing I imagined was writing about myself or my personal experiences. Having done the type of field research usually associated with anthropology (i.e., participant-observation), I soon realized that what interested people most about my research were not the original questions I sought to answer—serious and scholarly concerns regarding class formation, resistance, and the labor process—but much more "personal and subjective matters."

People wanted to know how I was received in the factory. How did workers react? How was I treated and what did people make of my research? Was my presence on the shop floor disruptive or unusual? What everyone seemed most curious about was what "the natives" thought of me.

When I was asked to write a conference paper about identity and research, and more specifically, my identity and research, I realized that the questions people had been asking about "what the natives thought of me" were themselves quite serious and scholarly. Indeed, these were crucial epistemological questions about my research and the character of ethnographic knowledge. Although personal, they were also about method and had to be taken seriously.

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Questions about ethnography are especially important to me because I am not an anthropologist. What some anthropologists take for granted—ethnography as method—I must consciously defend, day in and day out. My colleagues, political scientists, are generally quite wary of ethnography. If taken seriously, it is viewed with suspicion—not as competing method but as pseudo-science.[1]

In the classical ethnography of anthropology, the ethnographer is nowhere to be found; identity and the subjective experience of fieldwork are erased.[2] The traditional monograph, in fact, looks as if it were produced by an "objective machine." A purely scholarly production, the conditions of its birth are noticeably absent. Occasionally, and only occasionally, the ethnographer emerges from the text, usually in the introduction and "arrival story," only to convince the reader that "what they say is a result of their having . . . 'been there.' "[3] This approach to ethnography began to be questioned by the end of the 1960s. For example, Peggy Golde wrote that one of the primary issues that her edited volume, *Women in the Field: Anthropological Experiences,* was meant to address was "how the characteristics of the ethnographer may indirectly and inadvertently affect the process of research."[4] More recently, some of these issues have resurfaced under the guise of reflexivity and postmodernism. In the work of James Clifford, George Marcus, and Clifford Geertz, three highly influential anthropologists, reflexivity has meant an analysis of, in Geertz's phrase, "the anthropologist as author."[5] Rather than examining "the problematics of fieldwork," these anthropologists concentrate on writing, discourse, and authorship; in short, how ethnographic *texts* function and how they convince. The analysis is literary and discursive, focusing on narrative structure, trope, metaphor, language, and rhetorical style.[6] Textual reflexivity seems to be the dominant mode these days.

Reflexivity, however, has also meant the examination of fieldwork as personal and epistemological activity. In this mode, the field encounter is analyzed as a method of knowledge production, and the ethnographer is placed at the center of the drama. Consciously autobiographical and explicitly personal, these works abandon many of the traditional conventions of academic writing. Self-reflexivity is, at times, highly entertaining, revealing aspects of fieldwork that normally would not make it to the printed page. The ethnographer appears not as scientist, but as human. Here, reflexivity means being self-conscious about fieldwork and the role of the ethnographer in the production of knowledge; it is a reflexivity not about writing and textuality (although these concerns are legitimate), but about fieldwork as method and the ethnographer as "positioned subject."[7]

It has become more acceptable to view ethnographers not as "objective machines" but as "positioned subjects"—human, constructed, "natives" somewhere, with emotions, ideas, and agendas.[8] They bring their identities as well as their theories to the field. Ethnographic fieldwork is, in this sense, a thoroughly "subjective" experience, based, as it is, on the personal interaction of the ethnographer in "the field."[9] *Thus, in ethnography, the ethnographer's self becomes a conduit of research and a primary vehicle of knowledge production.* How does this affect the production of knowledge? How does the ethnographer's identity affect the ethnographic encounter? The answers I propose to these difficult questions are tentative and come from a critical examination of my own fieldwork. Reformulated, the questions become: how did my identity affect my fieldwork? What did "the natives" think of me? Which categories did they employ to make sense of me and my research? And ultimately, how does the essentially "personal and subjective" ethnographic encounter affect the ostensibly "scientific" production of "objective" knowledge?

Reflecting critically on my own identity in relation to my fieldwork—how I was perceived and what "the natives" thought of me—has proven especially useful in illuminating the subject of my research: the social world of the factory and the class structure of Egyptian society. I set out to study workers in two textile factories in Egypt, and my fieldwork experiences reflect, in part, my problematic place within the Egyptian class system. I learned about the significance and meaning of social class in Egypt firsthand, in a way I never intended or expected. As an Egyptian-American, a semi-indigenous researcher, and someone who was definitely not a worker, I *experienced* social class. I was thrown into (or more aptly, thrown up against) a rigid class structure, and I experienced the reactions of those within it to my research and identity. How people reacted to what I was doing and their expectations of me were revealing of their attitudes and understandings of what social class in the factory and society is all about. Examining these interactions and reflecting upon them has proven useful for understanding the social world of the factory and the class structure of Egyptian society.

In order to address questions about how my identity—my ethnographic self—worked to generate insights into the Egyptian class structure, I must be somewhat autobiographical. This causes great anxiety for most social scientists, and I am certainly no exception. As a political scientist I feel especially uneasy, guilty, and unprofessional. After all, we are taught that the personal is trivial, uninteresting, and certainly not the serious business of science. However, since my identity proved crucial in shaping my findings, I will briefly outline those features of my identity that my

workmates took to be most salient. Each of these facets of my identity colored my presence and affected my research. (It is important to note that these characteristics, as will become apparent later, are certainly not unproblematic or stable themselves.) Then I will discuss how these characteristics impacted my fieldwork and affected my findings.

Although born in Alexandria, I have lived most of my life outside Egypt, in England and the United States, and fit neatly into the category of the "hyphenated-American." Put differently, I am an Egyptian-American fluent in Arabic. At the time of the research, I was not married. As a social scientist and researcher, I had significantly more formal education than the workers I studied. And except for a few engineers in the highest ranks of the administration, I had more formal education than most in the company. Although I am not terribly connected in Egyptian society, especially compared with others of similar family and class backgrounds living in Egypt, compared with the workers I was *wasil* (connected)—connected enough to gain access to the factory and the shop floor. I also came from a significantly different class background than my co-workers, as well as most of the administrative and engineering staff, for that matter. Moreover, I am male, Muslim, and originally from the region where the research was undertaken. My identity is obviously more complicated than this simple combination of features. These characteristics, however, turned out to be most important for those I worked with and studied.

In the sections that follow, I recount the specifics of a variety of events, encounters, and stories from my field research. These stories might be organized in a variety of ways as they reflect different combinations of the features of my identity. To simplify the explication, I have organized them according to the approximate importance (in my view) workers, management, and engineers accorded different features of my identity. Some stories reveal ways in which "the natives" were able to make sense of me in terms of fairly common categories of region, gender, religion, and organizational membership. As I was thus "pegged" by the people with whom I was working, facets of the setting were either revealed to me (e.g., as a Muslim) or concealed (as a male). In other stories, my identity and my research purposes proved much more disruptive, as "natives" struggled to understand why an educated, connected Egyptian-American would study working class people, much less work alongside them. It was these situations—provoked by my "failure to fit" standard expectations—that proved most revelatory about the functioning of the Egyptian class system. By analyzing all of these interactions and presenting the knowledge I gained from them I

demonstrate how I learned about the social world of the factory and the class structure of Egyptian society, in part, *through* my identity.

Egyptian-American

It seemed like I spent the first month in the factory answering questions. Most Egyptians are both friendly and curious, and it felt like the limits of the personal and private were significantly different from what I was accustomed to. Questions came not only from workmates but from almost everyone with whom I came into contact, including people I had never met, inside the factory and elsewhere. Everything about me was fair game and open for investigation, from my father's occupation, to the exact amount of my research stipend, to the extent of my religious observance. Some of those I worked most closely with occasionally asked even more personal and, at times, embarrassing questions, which would be considered completely off limits in other social contexts and possibly other class contexts.

Of all the questions, however, the two that seemed most frequent and especially important to my questioners were: "Which is better—America or Egypt?" and "Are you going to marry an Egyptian or a foreigner?" Obviously, my identity as an Egyptian-American was at the root of both questions.[10] Despite the difficulty of answering potentially sensitive questions like these, not to mention the problematic nature of the questions themselves, I soon established comfortable answers, which, as well as being true, seemed to satisfy my questioners. I told my questioners that both Egypt and the United States had advantages and drawbacks and "which was better" depended on how one prioritized these qualities. As far as marriage was concerned, I mimicked the classic Egyptian and superficially fatalistic response of "*isma wa nasib*" (meaning, basically, whatever fate had in store for me).

Being Egyptian-American produced a set of responses that smoothed my entrance into the factory. It produced warmth and kindness. Being American produced interest and curiosity. Interest in the United States ("*Amrika*"—as it was called) generated questions that are fascinating in and of themselves for what they reveal in terms of background knowledge, perspective, and orientation. These questions also provided an opportunity for me to ask similar questions and explore related issues. For instance, I was bombarded with inquiries about life in Amrika, which included everything from the particulars of household consumption (i.e., how much milk people drink daily, especially children)

and gender relations, to union activity and perspectives on society and politics more generally.[11] Explicit comparison was made easy and much information was gathered in this manner.

Mohamed, an illiterate co-worker in my department who dropped out of fourth grade and attended an anti-illiteracy program in the evening, was particularly fascinated with my notebook and what I wrote in it. Once, after watching me scribble something by the side of a machine, he approached and asked, "Do all people who know English write from left to right or is it just you?" Our conversation covered a number of topics including life in the United States. After a long, rambling monologue about how great Amrika must be in terms of standard of living, personal and political freedom, and so on, Mohamed ended, without pause and in the same tone of voice, by stating (about Americans), "*Lakin ma 'andahumsh din . . . min al-dar ila al-nar*" ("but they have no religion . . . from home to hell").[12]

Other workers' impressions of the United States (and "the West" more generally) were no less interesting or complex. Many described the U.S. and Europe as having "Islam without Muslims," while Egypt had "Muslims without Islam" ("*Islam bala Muslimeen*" and "*Muslimeen bala Islam*").[13] This was a short but sophisticated, double-edged, ethical, and religious critique of both "the West" and Egypt (in the same breath!). While praising "the West" for having "Islam"—referring to fair and just systems of government, the absence of significant corruption, the seriousness of work, economic development, equality, and high standards of living—they criticized "the West" for not believing in Islam, for not being Muslim. At the very same time, in this short phrase, workers criticized Egyptians for not living by Islamic principles of justice, fairness, order, charity, and so forth, and, thus, of being Muslims in name only—"Muslims without Islam," as it were.

My "Americanness" was significant in another curious and unexpected way. It was how my relation with workers—my willingness to treat workers as equals worthy of respect, my enthusiasm to toil, sweat, and get dirty (in short, my unwillingness to live by the rules governing class interaction)—was understood. Without making a special effort to be humble or modest, I did not accept deference or special treatment. If at first this simplicity and lack of self-importance was not accepted or easily understood, it was certainly appreciated and ingratiated me into the world of the shop floor. Workers understood my behavior as being "American." For Americans, it was said (particularly Americans, but all Westerners in comparison with Egyptians) are infinitely practical, no-nonsense, easygoing, and down to earth. By not living by social conventions governing class relations, I was further proof of this. Being

American, therefore, was one way people in the factory, workers and nonworkers alike, "made sense" of me.

Researcher

As a social scientist studying working class culture and the social organization of production, I experienced reactions of bewilderment, confusion, and respect. Despite my determined efforts to explain exactly what I was doing, for the longest time many workers believed that I was studying the machines on the shop floor and not the social relations of production. The only previous experience of research that workers had were engineers who occasionally marched onto the shop floor, oblivious to the workers, to study some aspect of the machines or a technical matter relating to production.[14] Six weeks into the research, for example, Fathy, a winding machine operator with whom I worked closely, asked whether I would become an English teacher after I finished at the factory. Although I had previously explained to everyone in the department, on a number of different occasions, exactly what I was studying and for what purpose, people were quite genuinely confused. I was the only "social scientist" most had ever met.

The subject of research also caused tremendous confusion, among engineers as well as workers. At first, engineers lectured me for hours about the mechanics of certain machines and the histories of particular technologies. They too had little, if any, direct exposure to social science. In some ways, this complicated my research. If people had previous experience with social science research, or at least some understanding of what social scientists did, my presence might have been less problematic and the task of establishing who I was, what I was doing, and on behalf of whom would not have been as difficult.[15]

Confusion regarding what I meant by "working class culture" was also quite common. One of the ways I translated "working class culture" into Arabic was "*al-thiqafa al-'umalayya*" (a literal translation).[16] For most Egyptians, however, "culture" usually refers to high art, recognized literature and/or a society's classical aesthetic and intellectual products.

This resulted in more than one interesting misunderstanding. Once, after I had been working for several months, an older worker from another factory was transferred into the wool preparations department. Before I had a chance to introduce myself and tell him what I was up to, he struck up a conversation and began asking questions. Thinking that I was a permanent worker on the floor, he asked "'*andak ay?*"

("what do you have?"), referring to the highest educational degree I had attained. When I told him I had a master's degree and began explaining my research, he wasn't sure what to make of me, probably thinking I was either joking or mentally unstable. At the end of our short interchange, after explaining exactly what I was doing (i.e., studying "working class culture"), he left to go to the bathroom. On his way out he passed one of our workmates with whom he had some previous interaction and asked him who I was and what I was doing. When our co-worker confirmed everything I had said, including the fact that I was studying "working class culture," the older man became even more perplexed, stopped in the middle of the shop floor, threw his hands up in the air and shouted "*ana ma 'andish siqafa! ana ma 'andish siqafa!*" ("I don't have any culture! I don't have any culture!").

This reaction, that culture means high art or sophisticated aesthetic productions (i.e., Ahmed Shawqi's poetry or Naguib Mahfouz's novels), was something I encountered outside the factory as well. In one popular usage of the term *thiqaffa* (culture)—workers, like peasants, are thought not to possess culture. After my encounter with the transferred worker I made sure to add "*adat wa taqaleed al-'ummal*" (the traditions and customs of workers) whenever I was asked what I was studying. To many, this seemed to make more sense.[17]

As a university graduate with an advanced degree, I experienced reactions of respect and deference, which varied from what work I could and could not do to where I should sit on the company bus. One of the most memorable incidents regarding my status as a social scientist (with formal education) occurred on my first day of work at my second research site. Misr Textiles, of course, was also a textile firm: a large company, which employed 11,000 people and occupied over 500 *feddans*.[18] Equipped with its own power and water stations, it was located some distance outside the city. All employees were transported to work each day on a fleet of company buses. The previous week, while visiting the factory, I was told to wait for one of the company's buses at a certain location in Alexandria, the closest scheduled stop to where I was living. The company official responsible for my research introduced me to the driver, told me exactly which bus to get on, described the other employee who boarded at this particular stop, and explained when and where to wait.

On my first day I did exactly as I was told, arriving ten minutes early, at 6:00 A.M., on a chilly summer morning. When the bus finally arrived several minutes late, the driver turned out not to be the same person I met previously and the passenger I was told would board was nowhere to be found. Nervous and unsure of myself, I boarded

and walked toward the middle of the bus where I spotted many empty seats. All of a sudden I heard several different voices, including the bus driver's, all speaking loudly and at the same time. It didn't occur to me that they could be speaking to me. After all, I did not know anyone on the bus and had never seen these people before. For a brief moment there was a tremendous ruckus, seeming chaos, and commotion. After attempting to make sense of the different sounds and voices I heard, it seemed as if everyone on the bus was yelling at me!

In fact, they *were* yelling at me. All the passengers were trying to get my attention. People were asking me, in a flurry of raised and overlapping voices incomprehensible together, where I was going and insisting that I sit in a particular seat—"my seat." This included the driver who was now turning around, watching me in the aisle (and not looking at the road), while steering the bus at fifty kilometers an hour! Everyone on board, although only half awake at 6:10 A.M. on the first day of a new workweek, looked on, fixated. I hurriedly made my way to the seat toward the front of the bus where I was ordered to sit. Nervous but in "my seat," sweating and with my heart pounding, I thought, "What had I done? Had I boarded the wrong bus? Had I committed some grievous crime relating to the peculiar culture of the bus? Had I violated a sacred code relating to bus etiquette of which I was unaware?" Doing ethnographic fieldwork, I thought, was not all the fun and games it was purported to be. A few stops later, a middle-aged man boarded and without saying a word sat down beside me. There was hardly a sound or word uttered during the entire ride, and certainly nothing approaching the commotion that I had caused earlier. For the next 45 minutes on the way to the factory, I recounted the incident in my mind over and over again, trying to figure out what had happened and why.[19]

Toward the end of the shift, the production director called me into his office. It was my first day of work, and he wanted to make sure there were no problems and that things were going well with respect to my research. I recounted what had happened during the morning bus ride and after a short outburst of laughter, he explained the company's complicated system of "assigning" seating on all buses. I hadn't boarded the wrong bus. It turned out that as well as providing three different types of buses for different grades of workers and employees (not to mention mini-buses and private cars for the very important people in the company like the production director), seating on all buses was "assigned" based on a combination of seniority and educational attainment. This usually corresponded closely with one's position in the company. Not only were there three different sets of

buses for shift workers, daytime workers, and white-collar employees, and higher level management; the more senior and better educated in each bus had the privilege of sitting closer to the front, in the "first class" section, as it were.[20]

What had happened on the morning bus ride was that I, innocently and unknowingly, attempted to sit somewhere other than my "assigned" seat. Once assignments are made, a person's "place" on the bus is known by all. Not sitting in my assigned seat caused chaos as the driver and others intervened to set the situation right. My designated seat, behind the driver, was the third best on the bus and fitting for someone who had received a master's degree![21] Thus, despite the fact that the bus was never full and there were plenty of empty seats in the middle and back, I had to share a relatively small seat (an undivided padded bench with a back) with someone else. For the rest of my time at the company, I wished, every morning and afternoon, that I could sit on one of the many empty seats in the middle of the bus, where I would have had an entire seat to myself. But no, my status and *brestige* (the Egyptian colloquial rendering of "prestige") would not allow it!

The bus incident revealed the importance of education in determining social status and the extent of practices, which reflected such hierarchy (e.g., the seating system on company buses). The incident also revealed that these hierarchical systems had become accepted and internalized as legitimate by employees (e.g., everyone trying to get me to sit in my proper seat).

My status reflected itself in another, more immediate, form—how I should be addressed. How one is addressed is relatively important in Egypt, as it reflects status and respect. The use of titles and honorifics is quite common. One often notices close friends who are doctors, for instance, address each other as "Doctor so and so." Even within families, one often hears siblings refer to their brothers and sisters who have received medical degrees or PhDs as "Doctor so and so."

Although I was never asked, different people came up with various ways of addressing me. Some insisted on calling me "Doktor" or "Ya doktor Samer," in line with the Egyptian custom of labeling someone a doctor from the moment they finish a master's degree and begin pursuing a doctorate. Needless to say, coming from an academic subculture where titles and formality are looked at disparagingly, I was embarrassed and uncomfortable with this particular title.[22] Other workers chose to call me by the more familiar and common factory title of "*Ya bash muhandis*" (engineer), although I wasn't an engineer and knew nothing about engineering. Addressing engineers as "Engineer So-and-So" is important in the factory. So important, that several petty conflicts

occurred among white-collar staff between those who had engineering degrees and deserved to be addressed as such and those who were not engineers (and had other types of degrees) but were mistakenly referred to by that title by others.[23]

Another, very colloquial and quite *sha'bi* (popular) word for engineer is *handasi*, and several workers referred to me this way ("*Ya handasi*"). Other titles sometimes placed before my name included *Ustaz* (Mr.), *Bey*, and *Basha*. Although many people, after a few months on the job, simply called me by name, several refused and insisted on using some kind of honorific title (Doktor, Ustaz, etc.). This group, incidentally, included Fathy, the co-worker whose sense of honor figures in the next story.

When I finally made it onto the shop floor I received a rather unexpected welcome. After struggling for months to get the necessary approvals to do fieldwork, dealing with various government agencies, interviewing with the relevant authorities, explaining time and again what I wanted to study (and what I would not study)—in short, after getting access to my field site—both shift supervisors and workers did not want me to work.

I was introduced to my shift supervisor by one of the company's head engineers. The engineer explained that I was a *doktor* coming from the United States and would be conducting research in this particular shop floor for the coming months. The shift supervisor was asked to be as cooperative as possible.

When I showed up for work the next morning he was indeed extremely cooperative. His cooperation, however, extended only to a point. He insisted that I not do any work! I literally had to argue and fight for the first week in order to actually work. Out of politeness, courtesy, and respect, feigned or otherwise, or simply people's understanding of the way the Egyptian class system functioned, workers and shift supervisors did not think that performing manual labor was appropriate for me. The first day the shift supervisor stated this in terms of my being a "guest" and it not being appropriate for guests to work. The next day he said that I should not work "so that I would have fond memories of them and the shop floor." After all, to them I was an educated, upper-class doktor coming from the United States, and although it was well and good that I study whatever I liked, especially since this was approved by the "people upstairs," working on a machine, getting my hands dirty, and being ordered around by a shift supervisor simply made no sense.

After struggling to work my first week, the following week a new shift supervisor appeared with a different group of workers who were

just as adamant that I neither work nor "tire myself" in any way. This shift supervisor went so far as to order one of "his" workers to bring me his own chair, the only chair on the shop floor, to sit on. After making it clear to everyone that I wanted to work, that performing manual labor was part of the research, and that I would work despite any and all protestations, things changed and working became less of an issue. Up until the very end of my research, however, Fathy, a co-worker, would not allow me to sweep around my machine with the broom, part of the job assignment for the winding machine I operated. He accepted the fact that I could work, eat, joke, and laugh with him, but I could not be allowed to clean—that wouldn't be right. And on several occasions he literally fought me for the broom, saying, "*May sah hish ya doktor*" ("doctor, it's not right"), while wrestling it out of my hands.

The reactions of white-collar employees and engineers to this aspect of my research were just as interesting. Word spread among some of the younger bureaucrats, administrators, and engineers that I was actually working on a machine, and this seemed to amuse them to no end. Some made silly jokes or references, and a few even came down to the shop floor, something most white-collar employees never did, to see for themselves what the doktor was up to.

All of these examples of workers and shift supervisors not wanting me to work, my co-worker not allowing me to sweep around my machine, and the disbelief of many in management that I was actually working on the shop floor revealed what people in the factory took for granted about appropriate and inappropriate behavior by someone who had received higher education (e.g., a researcher with a master's degree who was pursuing a PhD). These encounters exposed the assumptions and "common sense" understandings of those in the factory—from workers to management—about the proper relationship between educational attainment, status, and appropriate and inappropriate labor.

Trust

One of the reasons for using participant-observation as a research method, aside from the possibility of directly observing the social relations of production, was the hope that actual work alongside other workers would bridge, to some degree, the social distance between myself and my co-workers. This, in fact, happened to a considerable extent. We worked, ate, and joked together, used the same facilities, got searched the same way when we exited the factory, and socialized outside of

work. Nevertheless, caution and calculation did mark some of my interactions, especially with people I did not work with directly.

The idea of the state or the company administration placing spies among workers is by no means farfetched. This has happened and continues to occur in Egypt today. Even more common, however, are certain workers informing on workmates in exchange for favors, easy work routines, and favorable relations with superiors. It was said, in fact, that the public relations department was nothing other than the company's own intelligence-gathering agency. Although I had no relationship to the company administration other than simply asking and being allowed to conduct fieldwork, it took some time before most people felt comfortable enough to talk openly about certain subjects in front of me. On several occasions workers and employees asked directly about my relationship to the top people in the company. Others asked who would be reading my notes. After some time, after I became friendly with many workers and a high degree of trust was established, we joked about what I did and did not write. Some reminded me they had "families to care for and kids to feed" and that I should be careful in terms of what I wrote. "*Ihna 'andani awlad*" ("We've got kids") or "*Shaklina han khush al-sign*" ("Looks like we're going to jail") were often repeated and always produced a great deal of laughter on everyone's part.

On several occasions, particularly at the beginning, certain people were hesitant to speak openly in my presence. Once, while in the cafeteria with a group of young, white-collar employees, conversation turned to a recent scandal in which an administrator was caught embezzling money and was transferred to another department. While the events were being described, an older woman turned to her younger colleague narrating the story and said, "*Limi nafsik*" ("Watch your words" or "Take care"), since, I assume, I was sitting at their table.

I cannot forget feeling outraged that the older, female employee whom I saw frequently in the cafeteria, exchanging polite greetings, would feel this way about me. I, after all, had absolutely no relationship to the administration and would never inform on anyone in any circumstance. I considered confronting her the next day but stopped myself, thinking that this might only make the situation more unpleasant. Moreover, although I would never have informed on anyone, she did not know exactly who I was or what I was doing. If you add to this the almost complete lack of trust between top management and employees (both workers and white-collar staff) and the fact that she was in the firm for life while I would be there for less than a year, her reaction becomes quite understandable.

On another occasion, I approached two workers, only one of whom I knew well, who happened to be discussing privatization and how this might affect them.[24] The person I didn't know suddenly became silent as I got close and only resumed speaking when the other worker (the one I knew) said, "*Huwwa ma'ena*" ("He's with us"). Similar incidents also took place during my interactions with higher level administration and engineers. Several days after a mechanic on my shop floor showed me what he considered to be substandard work produced by the company's machine shop, explaining how this negatively affected production, I heard that someone had recounted the incident to the worried engineer in charge of the machine shop.

Fear and distrust were the *cost of admission* ("entrée") to my research site, a cost I had no choice but to pay. But it was through my interactions and as a result of my perceived relationship to the administration that I witnessed workers' distrust of the company. These interactions also revealed that fear and distrust were not the monopoly of workers or lower level white-collar employees, but also extended to higher level employees and engineers as well.

Class

My status as a researcher, presence in the factory (and what this entailed), and class background are intimately related and only analytically distinct in terms of how they affected my research experience. From the very beginning there was tension, struggle, and negotiation concerning my identity in the factory. Many people, mostly "respectable" upper- and middle-class types, both inside and outside the company, had a difficult time understanding or accepting what I was doing or why I was doing it. They were amused and fascinated by my accounts of life on the shop floor and my knowledge of the working class masses. Even top-level company administration did not, at first, understand what I was up to. In fact, before being allowed to undertake research, I was interviewed by the company's chief executive officer. The purpose of which was not to understand my research project or the effect I would have on production. Neither was the interview intended to determine whether I was potentially a security risk. It was, as I was told directly, so they could try to understand why someone who was *ibn naas* (the son of respectable people) wanted to work in a factory *as a worker*—even if it was research.[25]

In a very significant way, the reactions of high-level company administrators and upper- and middle-class Egyptians paralleled those of workers on the shop floor. To all concerned, my presence in the factory as a "worker" toiling away on a machine was disruptive, in a fundamental sense, of their understanding of the way the Egyptian class system worked. The idea that an upper class doktor who was *ibn naas* would actually work, eat, joke, and socialize with workers was bizarre. The idea that I would become friends with many workers, show them respect, and get to know them as human beings, even as a consequence of research, defied their expectations, as it went directly against what everyone knew and took for granted about the Egyptian class system and the way it functioned.

In fact, I believe that this is one reason why more research of an ethnographic sort has not been done in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East by local academics. When most Egyptian academics and intellectuals study workers (or peasants), it is usually through interviews, questionnaires, or surveys. For academics also occupy a particular position in the rigid Egyptian system of social hierarchy. The idea that after achieving the status and social distinction that comes with a higher degree, they would willingly—even for research—work in a factory on a machine or as an agricultural laborer (for a significant period of time) is almost unimaginable.

The tension and conflict my presence caused extended to the reactions I received from the middle-class white-collar administrators and engineers I interacted with daily. After the research was approved, I was sent to a senior engineer who was made responsible for me from that time onward. After hearing what I intended to do, his reaction was no different from what I described above. Without my having asked for his advice, he immediately suggested, with great seriousness and conviction, that I simply change my research method. During our next meeting he proposed that I work in the quality control department as a supervisor (*muraqib*) instead of working on a machine as a production worker. This way, he explained, I would have all the daily interaction with workers I wanted, but would not have to work or be with "them" constantly. As a supervisor, he explained, I wouldn't get my hands dirty or be exposed to the constant noise of the shop floor.

He thought he was doing me a favor, helping me out. I cannot describe how I felt at that moment. After I had spent months thinking about the project, reading the academic literature on the subject, writing a research proposal for my department, getting it approved, applying for grants, and finally making it through the ridiculously

inept and ossified Egyptian bureaucracy (not to mention the paranoid and hypersensitive security apparatuses), this man was telling me, after meeting me for less than five minutes, to change my research method! It was, in one sense, quite absurd.

Because I was processed in the company bureaucracy as a "new worker," all of my paper work went through the training department (*qism al-tadreeb*). Naturally, I got to know the secretaries and director quite well. My first weeks, I spent many hours in the department completing forms, filing papers, and asking questions. The staff proved to be just as interested in me as I was in my new research setting. When it came time for my company identification card to be issued and my working hours to be finalized, the training department staff tried, quite hard, to persuade me to keep management and not factory hours. Management, including all bureaucrats, administrators, and most, although not all, engineers arrived at work at 8:00 A.M. each morning and left at 2:00 P.M. Workers, by contrast, arrived earlier, at 7:00 A.M., and left later, at 3:00 P.M. For no logical reason other than their feeling that I should come and go with the rest of the administration and white-collar staff, they tried to convince me to keep their hours and not "the difficult factory hours." "Why come and go with the workers?" one of the secretaries asked. "You should come and go with us." What I experienced in the training department was a struggle over who I would identify with (the administration or the workers)—a struggle over my allegiance and identity.[26]

Aside from the difficulties I encountered simply trying to work once I reached the shop floor, the reactions of both workers and supervisors to my presence, and the issue of how I was to be addressed by my workmates, the moment that caused the most upheaval for administrators, engineers, and white-collar staff occurred when I casually mentioned to my young friends in the administration, on a very hot and humid Egyptian summer day, that I was thinking about bringing sandals to work and wearing them on the shop floor—like most workers in the factory. After all, sandals made much sense with the temperature outside over 100 degrees and the humidity unbearable.

The reaction I received was quite fascinating. Each and every one of them was shocked that I could even consider doing such a thing. I had reached, it seemed, the absolute limits of what I could and could not do, and wearing plastic sandals like the other workers was definitely out of the question and impermissible. I was *told*, in no uncertain terms, that it would not be appropriate. Sandals, it turned out, are one of the most important signifiers of one's status in the factory. They are a sign, which says unmistakably, "I am a worker," and

for me to even propose wearing anything other than shoes shook the entire semiotic system of class in the company.[27] I analyze this incident and the importance of sandals for what it means to be a worker in the factory in greater detail in chapter 2.

Gender

One of the goals of the research was to explore working class culture outside the factory, away from production, in the realms of consumption and reproduction. Being an unmarried man, however, was one of the primary reasons I was unable to access the working class home. Although I socialized with many of my workmates, some of whom became genuine friends, this never occurred in their dwellings. Although a week would not pass without someone on my shop floor inviting me to have lunch at his home, for reasons one can barely describe in words, I felt these were formal invitations and not genuine ones. These were the types of invitations one is supposed to politely decline. I did enter the homes of young, middle-class, white-collar employees, however. Wives, unmarried girls, and a gender ideology were some of the reasons why I never managed to make it into working class homes. Cost and convenience were other reasons. Inviting someone into one's home, especially in Egypt, requires a suitable home and suitable things to offer. Embarrassment regarding workers' apartments and living conditions more generally could have been other reasons why I was not invited into the private sphere of working class home and family. If you live in an old, sixty square meter apartment in a poor district of town with your wife, nine kids, and your unmarried sister, as Darwish, my closest friend in the factory, did, there is hardly space for yourself, let alone guests.[28] We did our socializing in public places—coffee shops, downtown, the occasional outdoor wedding, and Alexandria's *corniche*.

Similarly, being male limited access and shaped my interaction with women workers and employees. Many factory shop floors are segregated by sex, and I worked on a floor where there were no women workers. But just as my identity closed certain doors, it opened others. Being male provided access to discourses on women, sex, manliness, and gender relations more generally. I was often told stories, and overheard others, which depicted women, and particularly wives, as only suitable for housework, constantly stirring up trouble, and having limited mental capacities compared to men ("*naqsan 'aqlan wa dinan*"—"lacking in reason and religion")[29]—qualities, incidentally, which were said to be

found in all women. In short, although being male limited access and shaped my interaction with women as employees and wives, it also exposed me to sexism and an ideology of patriarchy, subjects I might otherwise not have encountered.

Religion

Like being male, my identity on the shop floor as a Muslim was not something I actively sought or cultivated. I was cajoled into praying with a shift supervisor and a workmate my second week on the shop floor. Although this was the only time I ever prayed at work, from that moment onward my status as a Muslim was defined for me.[30] Being Muslim exposed me to discourses on religion and politics and was, without any intention on my part, a source of bonding and membership between me and others in the factory, both workers and nonworkers. Just as membership has its privileges, however, it also has disadvantages. As well as engendering solidarity, warmth, trust, and unlimited conversation about things religious, membership was also troubling, as it exposed me to what I found to be offensive discourses about *other*

Illustation 6.1. MIDIA's readymade clothing factory, employing mostly female workers.

people, specifically, Egyptian Copts and Coptic Christianity. In other words, bigotry turned out to be the ugly side of identity, the seemingly inevitable result of the differentiation of oneself from the *other*.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of religion, and more specifically my religion, during fieldwork. Some workers went to great lengths to determine my faith. At my second research site, on my second day on the job, Gamal, a pulling machine operator whose machine was adjacent to mine, started chatting. Barely a minute had passed before his conversation quickly turned into a series of poorly disguised questions. It was clear. Gamal was trying to figure out whether I was Christian or Muslim.

The previous day the shift supervisor had introduced me by my first name. Gamal soon asked about my last name. His was more than a simple question, however. He was doing something quite common in Egypt: trying to make out my religion from my name. Some names clearly indicate one's religion. Someone named Mohamed, Ahmed, Ali, or Mustapha, for example, is obviously Muslim, while someone named Boutros, Gerges, George, or Michael, for example, is clearly Christian.

Unfortunately for Gamal, some names have no religious meaning or connotation (such as Gamal or Samer, for instance) and therefore reveal nothing about their bearer's religion. After being unable to determine anything from my family name, he inquired, undeterred, about my father's name. My full name, however, also reveals nothing about my religion.[31] Thus, poor Gamal was particularly unlucky. After asking about both my last name and then my father's name, he was no closer to his goal than when he began.

A different approach was needed and Gamal proceeded without hesitation. Once again, he attempted to conceal his questions, quite unsuccessfully, as stemming from a general interest in the United States and life there. Gamal asked which day of the week "we" (or I) prayed on in the United States. At this point I became genuinely annoyed at his persistent questioning and insistence on determining my religion, something, I believed, that was neither relevant nor any of his business. Without deliberately attempting to confuse him, I answered the question as accurately as possible. I told him that unlike Egypt, Friday is a workday in the U.S. and that although Friday prayers exist, they are not well attended. Sunday, I proclaimed, is when the largest communal prayers take place. This confused him to no end and he asked me to explain further. For as far as Gamal was concerned, things were quite simple. Muslims prayed on Friday and Christians prayed on Sunday. The idea that Muslims abroad could pray together on Sunday, because of a different work schedule, was not a possibility as far as he was

concerned. He soon left, more confused and unsure of my religion than when he first began.

Immediately afterward, Ayman, another worker in the department and Gamal's close friend, came over and set the record straight. He stated, politely but nevertheless quite bluntly, that Gamal had been trying to determine my religion and my answers had only confused him. I told Ayman I was Muslim, and in less than twenty minutes, it seemed as if the entire shop floor, or at least the Muslims, had been informed of the "good news." At the end of the workday a group of workers gathered by my machine to celebrate the fact that I was Muslim, to welcome me into the club. They spoke generally about religion, praising Islam and comparing it to other religions, and advised me to beware of a certain Christian co-worker who was known to cause trouble. One of the men gathered recounted a story about a conflict that had occurred between this particular Christian worker and a *sheikh* who also worked in the hall. From that moment on, it seemed I had won the lottery in terms of friends: friends who wanted to talk, socialize, and ask and be asked questions.

My Christian workmates also tried to determine my religion. After hearing my three-part name and learning that I was living in the United States, one Coptic co-worker assumed that I was Christian. This led to a series of comments about the way former President Sadat was greeted when he traveled to Washington, DC to visit President Carter. The reference, which seemed out of place and cryptic at the time, concerns a well-known story about Coptic Egyptian-Americans protesting outside the White House during one of Sadat's visits to the United States. They were protesting the condition of Copts in Egypt, the restrictions on building and refurbishing churches, and the generally tense relations between Copts and Muslims at the time. The incident passed into the popular treasure chest of folklore and knowledge about Egyptian politics, and this particular worker was trying to bond with me by recounting it.

Not everyone on the shop floor was bigoted or hateful toward workers who did not share their religion. Unfortunately, it seems that all ethnic, national, and religious groups (and maybe all groups for that matter) have tales they tell about "the other." As Edward Said has so powerfully described in *Orientalism*, racist tales were standard fare in the history of "European scholarship" about the "East" and continued in the form of imperialism and foreign policy. If my religious identity had been different, I would have heard similar things said about "the other," whoever "the other" happened to be. And since the purpose here is not to vilify any particular religion, idea system, or group, it is important to state this explicitly in the hope that exposing bigoted

views and ideology does not, in turn, reproduce other racist and bigoted views.

Regional Background

Being from the same city as some of my workmates was not only a source of bonding; it was also one of the ways I gained the trust of co-workers. Many asked where exactly in the city my family had lived before we emigrated. Sharing this information and recounting the particular urban geography of my origin made me somehow less different and more familiar. Thus, where I was from turned out to be an unexpected source of identity and solidarity. My identity was made less abstract. As with religion and gender, my regional background established a similarity between myself and others based on our common difference from workers from other parts of Egypt. But even for those who were originally from other parts of the country, either Upper Egypt or the Delta, knowing where I was from, I sensed, was reassuring as they now could associate me with a particular place, a place, it turned out, many of them knew firsthand. My familiarity with the city provided another common experience—a concrete experience—that we could share and that made me more familiar.

Regional identity, I determined, remained a distinctive socio-geographic marker for many in the factory, differentiating workers from urban areas from those originally from the rural provinces. And among workers originally from rural areas, regional identity functioned as a source of solidarity and bonding based on the particular province of origin.[32]

Although regional identity was a distinctive socio-geographic marker, it was one that was less obnoxious than religion, less troubling, and seemingly less bigoted. Differences in regional background were less obnoxious and troubling precisely because they did not concern religion and were not taken as seriously as religious differences. Regional differences were important, but they were also something we could joke about. The fact that people were from many different parts of Egypt also meant that the divide was not binary, unlike the religious divide between Muslims and Christians.

Conclusion: Practical Knowledge and Theoretical Insight

My multiple identities produced a variety of reactions in the field. My gender, religion, and regional background produced both common

membership and solidarity (*inclusion*) as well as *exclusion* from certain groups and interactions. My relationship to the company administration produced *fear* and *distrust*. My identity as an Egyptian-American provoked *curiosity* and *interest*. My social position and class background produced, at least outward, *deference*. As a formally educated social scientist studying the working class, I elicited reactions of *bewilderment*, *confusion*, and *respect*.

Reflecting critically on identity in relation to my fieldwork—and more specifically, how I was perceived and what "the natives" thought of me—shaped my understanding of both identity and class, specifically, class identity and structure. In the most general terms, I learned that identity is never singular; like culture, it is forever in the plural. Fieldwork made me acutely aware of the complexities of both my identity *and* the identities of the people I was studying. For just as I am male, Muslim, Egyptian-American, a researcher with a certain class background, and from a particular region in the country, and so on, they too had multiple and overlapping identities. They were Christians and Muslims of varying degrees of religiosity, workers, administrators, and engineers, with differing levels of education and skill, male and female, young and old, from different geographic regions within Egypt, and so forth. At different times and in various contexts, each of these characteristics, as well as others, proved important.

To say that identity is not singular, permanently fixed, or static, however, is not to say that it is completely up for grabs, constructed out of thin air, as some would have us believe, dependent only on what I choose to consume today, for example. I came to my fieldwork with certain, relatively specific features and characteristics that themselves were partially of my own making and that I then chose to, in part, emphasize or deemphasize. The individuals with whom I came into contact then gave me other characteristics and markers. They proceeded to interpret and then react to my identity for themselves. All of this, of course, took place within specific contexts and particular situations.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of *context* for identity. Context, as the philosophers of language have taught us, is, in large part, where meaning comes from.[33] This is certainly the case for language as well as other symbolic systems of meaning. Context is so important and so obvious, in fact, that it often appears invisible. It is the background against which all social action takes place. Although I participated in the shaping of my identity, through my actions and practices (my "presentation of self," in Erving Goffman's sense), my identity was more the outcome of negotiation between myself and others in particular contexts and specific situations than the result of conscious manipulation on my part.[34] Thus, identities are neither com-

pletely given nor completely constructed, neither fixed and unchanging nor arbitrary and up for grabs. Identities are *negotiated*; negotiated within limits—limits that themselves are socially produced, contingent structures (e.g., gender and class), and these structures in turn are themselves the outcomes of human agency.

Some of my most important insights on class identity and structure were products of the aspects of my identity that were most disruptive. Anthropologists have often claimed that one of the primary ways they learn about other cultures and societies is by unknowingly breaking social rules and unspoken conventions. By violating implicit and unacknowledged codes, anthropologists make these codes explicit.[35] My presence on the shop floor as "a worker" did precisely this: it broke the rules and conventions governing social class in Egyptian society. It was thoroughly disruptive of everyone's understanding of the Egyptian class system and the way it functioned, from the production workers to the chief executive officer, as well as those outside the factory gates. As a result, there was a significant amount of tension, struggle, and negotiation about who I was, what social role I would occupy, and whom I would identify with (the workers or the administration). For some people in the company this was genuinely threatening, as their very definition of self is predicated on their daily differentiation from others. Thus, my entry into the social world of the factory and my partial disruption of its operating principles was one of the primary ways I explored and experienced the phenomenon of social class in Egypt.

It was in part through my interactions—and how people reacted to me and my identities—that I learned about the extent of hierarchy (e.g., where I sat on the bus) and the meaning of social class in the factory (e.g., the significance of wearing plastic sandals). Although I did not experience class as a worker at a very deep level—what it means to struggle simply to survive and provide for one's children in a world of unbelievable scarcity and subsistence wages, where everyone works two jobs, and when illness or an unforeseen expense can ruin one financially (and otherwise)—this was not the intention of the fieldwork. I did not and could never have become an Egyptian worker the way a few early anthropologists mistakenly thought they could understand the natives by *becoming* native. Not fitting easily into already established categories and my unwillingness to play by the rules of the game made these categories, and the class structure of which they are a part, more apparent.

How would my understanding of the Egyptian class structure be different if my identity had been different? Obviously, I can only speculate about this. I probably would still have noticed that seating on the bus reflected patterns of social hierarchy within the company and society, for example. Through observation and questioning, I

could have come to understand the basis on which certain people sit in particular seats. Implicit, unstated, almost instinctive understandings of social class, hierarchy, appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and the ideology relating to this (who wears plastic sandals and the struggle over my identity), however, might not have been as easily encountered and explored. Unlike which bus you get on or where you sit, the attitudes, expectations, dispositions, "common sense" understandings, and implicit knowledge involving social class—the *habitus* of class, as it were—cannot be directly observed.[36] But it is the class habitus that structures social practice and produces the seating assignment.

It was this that my various interactions made visible to me. Even if my identity did not affect my research in the most radical way—that is, did not directly determine my findings—it was partially through my identity, how I was perceived, and the attempt to incorporate me, somewhat clumsily, into systems of hierarchy, power, and prestige, that I came to understand the social world of the factory. For instance, the system of seating on the bus was not a result of my presence. It existed independently of me. But it was through my presence—and more particularly the way this system attempted to incorporate me—that I learned about the seating system and what was behind it. My "findings"—my understanding of class, religion, power, hierarchy, and so on—were articulated through my identity and fieldwork encounter.[37]

Finally, through my fieldwork and my reflections on the productive nature of identity in the field, I have come to believe the strengths of ethnography are underestimated at best and misunderstood at worst. Ethnography is best suited to explore things that cannot be observed directly because they do not have a physical presence in the world, and yet they shape it in very real ways: the implicit assumptions, operating principles, relations among concepts, categories of thought and understanding, all of which people take for granted and do not make explicit—in short, the "structuring structures" of daily life.[38] Other methods of research either cannot accomplish such analysis or accomplish it less well. Ethnography is, after all, the most empirical of methods, the most concrete—dependent upon actual observation, with the researcher physically present, taking nothing for granted, using less mediated knowledge than other methods. It is ironic that it is considered the most "subjective." And despite being the most concrete, ethnography is best suited to explore what cannot be seen (or easily measured or counted): culture (meaning, ideas, categories, concepts, narratives, discourse, and so forth). And I mean here "thick culture," not the "thin culture" of values, attitudes, and opinions that much survey research measures.

Reflexivity further strengthens ethnography. Ethnographers need to scrutinize and analyze their interactions with "the natives" for what these interactions—additional "data points" if you will—can reveal about the "natives" and their social world. Through my "subjective experience," I learned about other people's worlds. I found these interactions incredibly revealing and informative; they generated the knowledge I claim to have about Egyptian workers and factories. They left me not just with a set of specific personal experiences but also with knowledge beyond my interactions with workers—knowledge about their social world, priorities, values, understandings, and so on.

Recognizing ethnographer-"native" interactions as significant turns some of the traditional thinking about participant-observation and ethnography on its head. For example, one often hears the charge that the presence of a researcher/outside observer itself somehow changes, alters, distorts, or corrupts the research environment. And although one response to this charge is that this is true of all research, this "problem" is particularly acute and unavoidable with ethnography because the presence of the researcher is obvious and obtrusive, changing the very character of social dynamics. But the opposite is also true—those moments when you are not in the background (observing) but instead are at the center of the action can also be informative (e.g., breaking conventions and learning about the social world of the factory in the process). Rather than bemoaning the idea that the ethnographer's presence somehow "corrupts" or "distorts" the research environment (language that invokes a natural science model, even an experimental model positing a sterile environment), I argue that ethnographers can, and should, reflect on and learn from their "personal, subjective" interactions and encounters with the people they are studying because of what these interactions say about "the natives" and their values, ideas, and social world.

This is what I mean by these interactions being additional "data points" (in the language of positivist social science). Rather than being a drawback, the presence of the ethnographer is a way to actively produce knowledge: he or she both participates and observes that participation itself, and learns from it. This is quite different from the older idea that participation was primarily a means to an end, the end being observation; it was believed that being in "the field" for months and eventually melting into the background of social life, the ethnographer could come to accurately observe the social setting being investigated (without "contaminating" it through one's temporary, short term, disruptive presence). Participation was instrumental—to gain people's trust so that they let you observe them in their "natural" condition.

What I have demonstrated, I hope, is that one should also observe the participation—the interaction itself—and see how people react to you, and that this can also be revealing about their social world, values, and so on.

It was a classic ethnographer, Malinowski, who argued that ethnography's "peculiar character is the production of ostensibly 'scientific' and 'objective' knowledge based on personal interaction and 'subjective' experience." Malinowski's dilemma, after all, was "how 'to convince my readers' that the ethnographic information offered them was 'objectively acquired knowledge' and not simply 'a subjectively formed notion.' "[39] For some, this has been, and continues to be, quite troubling. Rather than being a cause for concern, however, a potential problem or danger, I believe this is ethnography's fundamental strength. The problem lies not with ethnography but with the dominant paradigm of knowledge and the conceptualization of the human sciences. By accepting the natural sciences as *the* model for the human sciences, and more specifically, the idea of the strict separation of the "personal" and "subjective" from the "objective," ethnography as method appears inherently problematic—at least as "science." The complete separation of subject and object, researcher and object of research, however, is illusory and particularly inappropriate for the human sciences.[40] Thus, the problem is not with ethnography or anthropology but with the natural science model and its relevance for the human sciences.[41] The ethnographer, after all, is not an objective machine, but a positioned subject, never outside the field of research and always radically implicated in the production of knowledge. All researchers are implicated in the knowledge they produce. In ethnography, however, this becomes particularly difficult to disguise, in light of the central role of the ethnographic self in the production of claims to knowledge.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

One of the primary goals of this book has been to convey a sense of what work and life in the factory were like: how workers interacted with one another and how they interacted with their superiors, how work was actually performed and not just how it was supposed to be done. I have tried to describe the texture of daily life and the character of social relations in detail, providing an ethnography of class focused on the shop floor, its daily rituals, and occasional dramas. In this text more than most, everything lies in the details. This makes a summary quite impossible.

Throughout this book I have emphasized the importance of the social organization of production in the process of working class formation. By this I mean how work and the factory are organized: not only the technical aspects of production—that is machines, workers, and output—but the *social* aspects of the operation of the factory—everything from how workers and other employees get to work each day to how they leave, and the character of social interaction once inside the firm. By the social organization of production, which I take to be a contingent arrangement, I mean the specific social relations, their range and character, which surround production and provide the social context within which work, production, and output take place, including the formal and informal rules and company policies governing social relations inside the factory.

I have argued that the social organization of production profoundly impacts how individuals come to think of themselves and others and directly affects how workers come to understand their identities and interests. The social organization of production shapes the character and content of what it means to be a worker in a particular firm and this crucial piece in the puzzle of working class formation has too often been neglected in the wider literature on working class formation as well as in the Middle Eastern studies literatures on class, labor, and working class history.

The social organization of production is important because it is not predetermined by considerations of efficiency. There is no technical reason that necessitates that social relations inside factories should be one way as opposed to another, that requires production, for example, to be organized around departments as opposed to work teams, that necessitates that workers eat in one cafeteria while other employees dine in another. Social relations in the factory are never dictated ahead of time or purely determined by the production process. They could always be arranged differently with significantly different consequences for what it means to be a worker, how this identity is understood, and what it entails. Put bluntly, different ways of organizing production can and do lead to profoundly different conceptions of identity and interest, including one's relationship to the firm.

This study has also attempted to integrate political economy and interpretive approaches to the human sciences by demonstrating how "economic relations" are simultaneously relations of signification and meaning and by showing how the production of things (e.g., commodities) is, at the same time, the production of categories of identity, patterns of interacting, and understandings of self and other. In the factory, "worker" emerges as a category of identity whose substantive content is produced daily through both material and discursive practices. Social class turns out to be a system of meaning as well as a system of production. For at the end of the workday, it turned out, the factory produced much more than textiles and readymade garments. It produced workers. The factory was about the production of social class.

One of the implicit arguments in this study has been that everyday life—the taken-for-granted, banal, seemingly trivial realm of face-to-face interaction—is anything but trivial. For where else do social processes take place? Where else does social class happen? Social structures, including class structures, do not exist in another realm, in a separate sphere—behind our backs. Rather, they are produced and reproduced in the course of daily life, in quite ordinary, regular, and often routinized quotidian activity.

Class and class structure, after all, are not simply about "one's relationship to the means of production," where one fits into the division of labor, or a set of quantitative data about income and education, languages that are unfortunately often used but essentially misleading. Class structure is not simply the occupational geography of society. Neither is it about the different positions people occupy within a division of labor. Following Giddens and Bourdieu, I have taken seriously the idea that structures are both constituted through and the outcome of human agency. Thus, class structure should not be understood as a

fixed, definite, rigid set of primarily "economic" relations (e.g., division of labor, level of technology)—independent of the individuals that make up these relations and radically other than human action. Rather, like all structures, the class structure of society has a virtual nonexistence in time and place; it is not a "thing." It must be produced and reproduced continually through the practices and ideas of individuals.

Moreover, practices necessarily include within them the ideas agents give to their actions. It is in this sense that the actions and idea systems (e.g., implicit and explicit understandings, dispositions, habits, taken for granted knowledge, "common sense" in Gramsci's usage) that refer to social class and that individuals in a given society practice and hold make up an important part of a society's class structure. It is precisely through these practices and idea systems that the class structure is, in part, reproduced. Thus, the ideas and practices concerning class I encountered in the factory are one very important part of the class structure of Egyptian society.

It is because social class is *enacted* through practice and in the realm of the everyday that we can characterize it as an accomplished activity, an ongoing accomplishment. This does not make social class any less real or significant. It simply recognizes that we make it ourselves, with our own hands as it were.

Thus, it is to the realm of the everyday that we must look in order to understand social class: how it comes to be and is reproduced, how it is experienced and understood. For it is here that individuals come to understand themselves and their identities (who they are and what they believe in). It is here that they make the world and their place in it. Rather than being trivial or unimportant the everyday is extraordinary.

The factory is one of the more important places where class happens. What it means to be a worker and how others understand this emerges, in part, at the point of production. Small, mundane occurrences and practices that workers experience in common—like plastic sandals, tea, and time, for example, seemingly insignificant in themselves—serve as crucial rituals in a continuous process of class formation. These common experiences and the shared culture they generate are the invisible cement that make collective identity possible.

But social class is not to be found in this activity or that, entirely in the factory (production) or in the home (reproduction), exclusively in economics or in culture. "As in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres."[1]

The title of chapter 2, therefore, does not merely reflect the fundamental importance of plastic sandals, tea, and time in the constitution of working class identity. For while plastic sandals are the key semiotic in the factory differentiating workers from nonworkers, and although tea is the most important ritual in the daily life of the shop, and despite the fact that work and the company pay schedule structure how workers experience time (both in and outside the factory)—plastic sandals, tea, and time are meant to stand in for a mass of activity to which I would like to draw the reader's attention—what Malinowski called, "the imponderabilia of actual life." This metonymic triad, plastic sandals, tea, and time, therefore, serves two purposes: to represent the larger set of activities of which they are a part and to articulate the semiotic (e.g., plastic sandals), ritual (e.g., tea) and phenomenological (e.g., time) dimensions of social class.

Notes

Chapter 1. Introduction

1. Ellis Goldberg, *Tinker, Tailor, and Textile Worker: Class and Politics in Egypt, 1930–1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1986, and Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882–1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1987. Although Mahmoud Hussein's *Class Struggle in Egypt, 1945–1970* (New York: Monthly Review Press), 1973, appeared earlier, it is not primarily about the working class.

2. Zachary Lockman, ed., *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 1994; Omar El Shafei, *Workers, Trade Unions and the State in Egypt: 1984–1989* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press) vol. 18, no. 2, 1995; Ellis Goldberg, ed., *The Social History of Labor in the Middle East* (Boulder: Westview Press), 1996; Marsha Pripstein Posusney, *Labor and the State in Egypt: Workers, Unions and Economic Restructuring* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1997; Nicola Christine Pratt, *The Legacy of the Corporatist State: Explaining Workers' Response to Economic Liberalisation in Egypt* (Durham Middle East Papers), no. 60, November 1998; Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2001.

3. See, for example, Rauf Abbas, *Al-Haraka al-Umalayya fi Misr 1899–1952* (The Workers' Movement in Egypt 1899–1952) Cairo: 1967; Amin Ezz al-Din, *Al-With a'eq al-Tarikhiyya: al-Haraka al-Umallaya al-Misriyya 1856–1970, vol. 1* (The Historical Documents: The Workers' Movement in Egypt 1856–1970, vol. 1) Cairo: Workers University, 1986; Ahmed Ibrahim Mousa, *Min Bayn Sufuf al-Tabaqa al-Amila al-Misrayya* (From within the Ranks of the Egyptian Working Class), Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, 1985; Abd al-Salam Abd al-Halim Amer, *Thawrat Ulyu wa al-Tabaqa al-Amila* (The July Revolution and the Working Class) Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1987; Abd al-Azim Ramadan, *Sira' al-Tabaqat fi Misr: 1837–1952* (Class Struggle in Egypt: 1837–1952) Cairo: The Egyptian Organization for Research and Publishing, 1978; Mahmoud Amin al-Alim, *Al-Tabaqa al-Amila al-Misriyya* (The Egyptian Working Class) Qadayya Fikriyya (5) Cairo: House of the Arab Future, 1987.

4. Most of the literature has been concerned with the political and institutional history of the Egyptian working class, often to the neglect of

culture, consciousness, and lived experience. There are a few exceptions. See Ellis Goldberg's discussion of what it meant to be a worker in Egypt in the 1930s and 1940s in chapter 2 of *Tinker, Tailor, and Textile Worker*; Zachary Lockman's "Imagining the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt, 1899–1914," in *Poetics Today* 15:2, pp. 157–190, summer 1994 and Joel Beinin's "Writing Class: Workers and Modern Egyptian Colloquial Poetry (*Zajal*)," in *Poetics Today* 15:2, pp. 191–215, summer 1994.

5. See Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co.), p. 18, 1961. Malinowski writes, "In other words, there is a series of phenomena of great importance which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality. Let us call them *the imponderabilia of actual life*" (italics in the original).

6. Collective action is often included in definitions of class formation and is sometimes made a necessary condition of class formation. Such an approach claims that individuals constitute a group if (and only if) they undertake collective action. This has serious problems, however. Most simply, what are we to make of individuals (e.g., workers) who might otherwise attempt collective action (on the basis of common identity and shared interests) but because of obstacles to such action are unable or unwilling to do so? Second and more fundamentally, however, this understanding of group formation suffers from a methodology that constructs the world exclusively in terms of measurable quantities and the operationalization of variables. Why define group formation on the basis of collective action? The answer, I believe, is because "collective action" is something that positivist-inclined social scientists can more easily venture into the world, operationalize, and measure. With this approach, however, class formation is said to have occurred if and only if we can measure it. Measurement becomes the condition of possibility of conceptual understanding rather than simply a tool. This is to say nothing of the binary opposition—individual as opposed to collective action.

7. Michael Hanagan, "New Perspectives on Class Formation: Culture, Reproduction, and Agency," in *Social Science History,* 18:1, p. 78, spring 1994.

8. As owners of the means of production, capitalists attempt to extract as much surplus value as (in)humanly possible from labor while for their part, workers have an interest in receiving the highest remuneration for the least amount of work.

9. E.P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?," in *Social History,* vol. 3, no. 2, p. 149, 1978. My conception of class has been greatly influenced by the British Marxist historians. See Harvey Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians* (Cambridge: Polity Press), 1984.

10. That class is a social relation implies that it is not a thing (a tangible, concrete entity or a material substance in the world), but a particular type of relation between people.

11. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (New York: International Publishers), p. 18, 1976. See also Bertell Ollman's

excellent essay, "Marx's Use of 'Class,' " in *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 73, no. 5, pp. 573–580, March 1968.

12. The idea being that class consciousness comes, at least in part, through and as a result of struggle and political activity.

13. See the famous quotation from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. After Marx compares the French Peasantry with a "sack of potatoes," he writes that "in so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their modes of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class." In David McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 317, 1977.

14. Hanagan, "New Perspectives on Class Formation," p. 77 and Ira Katznelson, "Working Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons," in Ira Katznelson and Aristide Zolberg (eds.), *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1986.

15. Zachary Lockman, "Introduction," in *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies*, ed. by Z. Lockman (Albany: State University of New York Press), p. xxvi, 1994.

16. Although many have now noted that class takes place through both material and discursive practices, few go further and elaborate concretely what these practices are.

17. See his, *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies* (London: Hutchinson), p. 121, 1976. Giddens writes that ". . . structuration, as the reproduction of practices, refers abstractly to the dynamic process whereby structures come into being. By the duality of structure I mean that social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution" (p. 121).

18. Moreover, practices necessarily include within them the ideas people (agents) give to their actions. It is in this sense that the actions as well as the idea systems (e.g., implicit and explicit understandings, patterns of interacting, dispositions, habits, taken for granted knowledge, "common sense" in Gramsci's usage) that refer to social class, which individuals in a given society practice and hold make up an important part of a society's class structure. It is, in part, through these practices and idea systems that the class structure of society is reproduced. Thus, the ideas and practices concerning class that I encountered in the factory were one very important part of the class structure of Egyptian society.

19. This is a realm that might otherwise be overlooked. Giddens calls his reformulation of the relationship between structure and agency "the theory of structuration." See Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (London: Macmillan), pp. 49–95, 1979.

20. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (vol. 1), ed. Frederick Engels (New York: International Publishers), chapter VI, pp. 172, 1967.

21. For even if one accepts the proposition that "the very idea of a typical factory is a sociological fiction . . . the artificial construction of those who see only one mode of generalization—the extrapolation from sample to population," which I do, some factories are better suited to generalization than others. See Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production* (London: Verso) p. 18, 1985, and the preface of his *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1979.

22. See E.R.J. Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy, 1820–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1969, and Robert Mabro and Samir Radwan, *The Industrialization of Egypt 1939–1973: Policy and Performance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 13–19, 1976. For a good account of guilds and small-scale manufacturing in Egypt in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see *John T. Chalcraft, The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and other stories: Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863–1914* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 2004.

23. See Khalid Ikram, *Egypt: Economic Management in a Period of Transition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1980, pp. 241. See also CAPAMS (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics), *The Statistical Yearbook 2007*, Cairo, Egypt, December 2007, pp. 143.

24. Obtaining accurate statistical information about Egypt is challenging. Different sources often report significantly different figures. For example, employment estimates for the textile industry range from 1 to 2.5 million people employed in the sector. See *Egypt Economic Profile 2008* (Cairo: American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt), p. 8, 2008; "Doing Business in Egypt," American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, available at: http://www.amcham.org.eg/dbe/sector.asp; "Egypt's textile industry on growth path after 80 million EU funding," *The Middle East and North Africa Business Report*, February 21, 2008; "Economic Trends Report: Egypt May 2007," Embassy of the United States of America, p. 38; "Cleaning Up Textiles: Egypt," *Sharing Innovative Experiences*, vol. 1 (published by the UNDP) p. 36, available at: http://tcdc.undp.org/Sie/experiences/vol1/Cleaning%20up%20textiles.pdf

25. See *Arab Republic of Egypt: Cotton and Textile Sector Study* (Agriculture Operations Division, Country Department III, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa Region—The World Bank), p. xi, November 20, 1991 and Gamal Essam, "Liberalisation vs. protectionism," *Al Ahram Weekly*, 16–22 May, 2002.

26. *Textile Sector Report: Egypt, Cleaner Production Opportunities* (Part A: The Textile Sector), p. 2 and p. 8. (Published by the SEAM Program, Support for Environmental Assessment and Management, Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency), June 1999.

27. See Ahmed Farouk Ghoneim, "Every Thread Counts," *Al Ahram Weekly*, 21–27 September, 2006, and "Major Shippers Report: Section Two, Textiles and Apparel Imports by Country," U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, Office of Textiles and Apparel, available at: http://otexa.ita.doc.gov/msrcty/v7290.htm

28. See Bent Hansen and Karim Nashashibi, *Foreign Trade Regimes and Economic Development: Egypt* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research), pp. 206–227, 1975.

29. See Khalid Ikram, *Egypt: Economic Management in a Period of Transition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press) p. 134, 1980. Although I have not seen completely reliable figures, most observers believe that the majority of workers in Egypt are employed in either the informal and/or private sector. Until recently, the majority of those employed in modern, large-scale manufacturing, worked in public sector companies.

30. See *Egypt: Urban Growth and Urban Data Report* (prepared for the Advisory Committee for Reconstruction, Ministry of Development), July 1982 especially pp. 452–454. The statistics referred to in this section of the report come from the Central Agency of Organization and Administration, Cairo, May 1981. Metallurgical companies were the next largest sectoral employer. They accounted for only 9.4 percent of public sector employees by comparison.

31. *Arab Republic of Egypt: Cotton and Textile Sector Study*, pp. v, xi, World Bank Report.

32. According to information obtained from the World Bank, Egypt's public sector employed 348,800 in 2006. 102,276 of these were public sector textile workers. According to the Ministry of Investment, by July 30, 2006, 374,396 workers were employed in public sector companies. See *Wizarat Al Istithmar Fi 'am*, *Birnamij Idarat Al Usul Al Mamluka Lil Dawla 'am 2006*, p.2, available at: http://www.investment.gov.eg/NR/rdonlyres/A9E8DC0F-3D2C-4B45-935F-EB22F1AC17D0/5095/Report_editionpart3.pdf

33. See "900 million pounds for the reform of spinning factories in Kafr Al Dawwar," *Al Ahram*, April 11, 2006; Dan Magder, "Egypt after the Multi-Fiber Arrangement: Global Apparel and Textile Supply Chains as a Route for Industrial Upgrading," Working Paper Series, Institute for International Economics, August 2005, p. 5 and information available from the Egyptian Ministry of Investment. See also Moukhtar Khattab, "Future of Public Sector Spinning and Weaving Mills in Egypt," the speech of Egypt's Minister of Public Enterprise to the International Cotton Advisory Committee Conference, Cairo, Egypt, May 2004.

34. See K.M. Barbour, *The Growth, Location, and Structure of Industry in Egypt* (New York: Praeger Publishers), p. 67, 1972.

35. *Egypt: Urban Growth and Urban Data Report*, pp. 453–454.

36. I visited MIDIA and met with some of my former co-workers outside the factory on a number of occasions since then (e.g., 2000, 2004, 2005, and 2006). I have been unable to return to my second research site, however.

37. One *feddan* is approximately 1.038 acres.

38. For more on these questions, see Chapter 6.

39. Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 1988. Geertz's phrase is actually "being there."

40. If I had been a foreign woman things might have been different. Both factors (nationality and gender) would have made living with a family more

possible. Similarly, being male also fundamentally shaped my interaction with working women inside the factory and limited access to the working class home. For a discussion of how my identity affected my research, see Chapter 6.

41. For a discussion of the word *sha'b* and *sha'bi* see Diane Singerman, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 11, 1995.

42. It was unlikely that Abdel-Aziz, for example, would have been willing to have me record the fact that he used to pour water on his output, thereby making it heavier, and by doing so allowing him to meet his production requirements that much quicker.

Chapter 2. Plastic Sandals, Tea, and Time

1. In chapter 2 of *Tinker, Tailor, and Textile Worker*: *Class and Politics in Egypt, 1930–1952* (Berkeley: University of California), 1986, Ellis Goldberg writes about what it meant to be a worker in Egypt in the 1930s and 1940s.

2. Here, I use "management," "the administration" and "white-collar employees" interchangeably. Hierarchy certainly exists within management, however, and I discuss this in chapter 5, "In the *Basha's* House: The Political Culture of the Firm."

3. *Mashrew* literally means "project" in Arabic. In Egyptian life and here, however, it refers to the privately operated minivans that provide cheap but uncomfortable transportation within and between Egyptian cities. This has become an increasingly popular method of transportation, especially for those who have few other options.

4. Or, more often than not, what one does not do at the company! For some time now economists and others have decried excess employment in the public sector in Egypt and elsewhere. It is certainly the case that excess employment exists on most public sector shop floors. But redundancy and overstaffing are at their absolute worst among the low- and middle-level white-collar administration. Many of these employees (accountants, clerical staff, sales representatives, etc.) told me they work only 1½ hours a day, at most. The younger white-collar employees whom I befriended often read novels, hung out in the administration cafeteria, or studied English on company time.

5. These shifts are often referred to as the morning, afternoon, and evening shifts (*wardiyet al-subh, ba'ed al-duhr and bil-leil*).

6. Some workers always work the day shift (between 7:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M.). These include the mechanics, machine shop workers, and most maintenance workers. A few others, mostly for health reasons, have managed to be assigned permanently to the day shift.

7. In some cases, workers receive double pay for these types of workdays. Although double pay is not insignificant, when one remembers the terribly low wages that all public sector employees receive (workers and nonworkers alike) double pay does not amount to much after all. At the second company

I worked in, management received Thursdays and Fridays as weekly holidays, while workers only had Fridays off.

8. One usually thinks of workers signing or punching in at a time clock rather than administrators or management who are not made to do this. What is interesting in this case, however, isn't primarily the substance of the difference but rather the difference itself: workers were differentiated from nonworkers in how they were accounted for at work. For the classic account of how difference creates meaning and the arbitrary nature of the sign, see F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (La Salle, IL: Open Court), pp. 55–64, 1987.

9. My friend Fathy's sandals had clearly been repaired "at home." Fathy, or more likely his wife, had sewn on another plastic sole to his worn out sandals. It was a curious sight indeed, plastic sandals worth no more than a few pounds new, repaired by a method that must have cost someone a significant amount of time—literally sewing another plastic sole to the sandal.

10. Unlike most members of the administration who arrive at 8:00 or 8:30 A.M. and leave at 2:00 or 2:30 P.M., workers are in the factory from 7:00 A.M. until 3:00 P.M. (on the day shift) and this means that most must eat something during work to get through the day. Workers do not have a cafeteria, and even if one existed they would not have been able to afford to eat there. Although some white-collar employees bring a small amount of food with them to work (usually small sandwiches), they eat lunch at home and can purchase tea, coffee, soft drinks, and sandwiches in the administration cafeteria.

11. In fact, once inside the company premises, not unlike the military, you need official permission and documentation to leave early, before the end of the shift.

12. This is not the place to describe the culinary details of breakfast and lunch, the process of food preparation, consumption, sharing, and all that these entail. These subjects, however, are certainly worthy of discussion.

13. If there was ever a question or doubt about the strength of tea, workers would take a sip and then raise their glasses to the light, in the direction of the large windows in the work hall, and closely examine how dark, and therefore strong, the tea actually was.

14. Members of the administration get one free glass of tea a day and are charged five piasters for every additional glass they consume. Workers, on the other hand, do not receive free tea and must pay five piasters for each glass.

15. At least this is what was claimed. Since the intensity of work is somewhat lax, almost anyone on the shop floor could stop for the ten or so minutes necessary to get tea without significantly affecting production. Another quality desirable in the tea man, although not stated explicitly, is honesty, since a fair amount of money changes hands regularly.

16. *Al-Menoufiyya* is a province in the Delta. Being originally from *Sharqiyya* province, Mahmoud believed and repeated much of the folklore and popular tales about the *Menayfa* (people from *al-Menoufiyya*). The *Menayfa* are thought to be miserly while those from *Sharqayya*, in contrast, are believed to

be exceedingly generous. The vulgarity of Mahmoud's tea call is distinctively working class.

17. In fact, the pace of workers on their way to tea was distinctive and significantly faster than their usual pace at work. When walking around the shop floor for work, many workers moped more than they walked.

18. Football rivalries are taken fairly seriously and when Ahli plays Zamalek (the two most famous football teams) it seems as if the whole company, or rather the whole country (and not just the shop floor) is buzzing with talk before and after the match about the expected results, the players, the officials and the goals scored. Once when Ahli won an important (and as usual, controversial) match an Ahli fan working on my shop floor passed out candies in celebration. Another time when Zamalek lost I was told, along with others, to go "pay my condolences" to the Zamalek fans among us.

19. Because tea glasses are not provided for workers, they bring their own from home. Workers store their glasses, often old and chipped, in their lockers directly on the shop floor. And because of the dirt, grime, and lack of cleanliness of the work hall, workers often covered their glasses by placing pieces of paper on top of the glasses and securing them with rubber bands. This was intended to keep the small bugs and insects, which were common on the shop floor, out of the inside of the glasses. This was another reason why workers regularly washed out their glasses each day on the shop floor.

20. Because there are fewer white-collar employees who leave at 3:00 P.M. and because the exit procedure is substantially different and less time-consuming for them, white-collar employees do not stand in line with workers exiting the company.

21. This practice is also enforced for women workers who must exit through a small room by the factory gate where a woman security guard physically searches their belongings and their bodies.

22. "Routine," "regular" and "*almost* taken-for-granted," however, does not mean these searches are not resented.

23. Although we sometimes laughed about the physical searches that take place each day, some were critical of a company policy they felt was ultimately wrong, unfair, humiliating, and bothersome. What does it mean to be physically searched? The employee getting searched is not only routinely humiliated, but made painfully aware of the type and character of the relationship they have with their employer (in our case, the CEO, the firm, and the state), a relationship based on lack of trust and respect. Being searched daily tells workers, in no uncertain terms, that they are, from the perspective of the employer, expected to steal. Some of the reasons that might otherwise inhibit pilfering (trust in the employment relationship, loyalty to the company and employer, feelings for the success of the firm) disappear and the relationship is reduced to its bare, ugly, economic essence—the sale of labor power for a wage (with the employer expecting the worker to "rip them off" at the first opportunity—not just when they leave at the end of the day, but on the shop floor itself).

24. People teased Safwat more for being caught and therefore publicly humiliated than for actually "stealing company property." See my discussion of pilfering in chapter 4, "Indiscipline and Unruly Practices."

25. Unlike other systems of job classification, there were only a few possible classifications for workers in the factory where I worked (e.g., production worker, mechanic, general worker, and weaver). Differences in pay result from both the classification and seniority systems. Seniority was at least as important as job classification for workers. In the end, however, these differences did not divide workers among themselves. Almost all workers in this as well as other public sector companies are poorly paid, regardless of job classification or seniority, and all realize this. In fact, when it comes to pay, workers, at times, sympathize with management employees who are also "getting the shaft," as it were.

26. Incentive pay is ostensibly based on an individual's production. Those members of management whose work is directly related to production (members of the planning department, for instance) also receive incentive pay.

27. Although this is also the case for the administration, the similarity ends here however.

28. The reason the pay man walks around with so much money is that he carries wages for workers at several different factories, spread throughout the city, that are part of the same company.

29. On more than one occasion while I worked in the factory the money in the suitcase ran out and pay had to be continued the following day. The possibility of this happening contributes to workers wanting to get their pay as soon as the pay man arrives.

30. In the factory, *sheikh* was a religious title of distinction. See the section on religion in this chapter for a full discussion of the title's significance and an explication of its meaning.

31. I must say, however, that this has been the pay system for some time and most workers probably do not give it much conscious thought on a regular basis. It has simply become "the way things are done," taken for granted, almost "natural." I can't imagine my friend Fathy, for example, a gruff, always unshaven, barely literate winding machine operator whose second job involves carrying crates of fruits and vegetables on his back in the local wholesale market, becoming embarrassed or feeling awkward about the public nature of the transaction. Indeed, compared with his other job, receiving a computer-generated pay stub and having to sign his name before receiving his wages must seem terribly professional and organizationally elaborate compared to the *mu'alim* (the boss) digging some pounds out of his pocket each day (the amount being determined by the mu'alim's mood as much as how long Fathy actually worked) and handing them over to Fathy. On the other hand, there were certainly some workers, with more "refined sensibilities" (like sheikh Darwish and Nabil for instance) who were not only openly resentful of the difference between how workers and management got paid, but were uncomfortable with the pubic nature of the transaction. Both sensibilities existed among workers.

32. *Muda* literally means period or length of time. This is in sharp contrast to management who know no such concept because they are paid monthly and on a different basis.

33. Obviously, payday is important for many people well beyond this particular shop floor and this particular country. When people get paid structures, to some degree, their sense of time. But for these workers, partially because of their economic insecurity, company time is internalized to a surprising degree and the muda has become an accepted, frequently used, and "natural" category of thought and speech.

34. Many workers do not have bank accounts. If they do have assets or savings, it is usually in the form of a rented apartment (where they live), gold jewelry, and in rare cases, a small piece of land. One of the reasons gam'eyas work so well, especially for the relatively poor, is because they force savings. Saving is no longer an individual effort and responsibility but is transformed into both a collective endeavor and a serious obligation. Gam'eyas also potentially allow one to obtain a large amount of money earlier (if your turn to receive the collective amount is early on) than if one only depended on one's own savings. Fathy told me that if he didn't save some of his money in a gam'eya he would end up spending it on cigarettes, without being the wiser. Workers are certainly not the only group in Egyptian society to save through gam'eyas, however. Many middle- and even some upper-class Egyptians, in addition to having bank accounts, real estate, etc., also save through gam'eyas. Fathy told me that it was through his gam'eya that he saved for his television and the next time it was his turn to collect, he planned on buying a refrigerator. See also Diane Singerman, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 76, 1995.

35. Fathy's wife pays her local grocer for any purchases made on credit during each muda shortly after her husband collects his wages. When she doesn't seem to have quite enough money, Fathy explained, the local grocer allows her to take what she wants and then pay him after Fathy receives his wages.

36. The company pay schedule—the muda—causes time to be thought about (worried about, planned, mapped, and acted in, etc.) in terms of mudas. I am not arguing that the muda system is the *only* way workers can think about and experience abstract time.

37. At Misr Textiles, most workers brought tap water with them from home in plastic bottles, complaining, quite rightly, that the water available to them at work was not drinkable. This factory was located on the periphery of Alexandria in a "new industrial area" and the quality of water in the area was quite poor. The water workers brought with them was usually frozen the night before so that it would remain cold throughout the workday and despite the long (at least 45 minute) trip to work. It was used for drinking and making tea.

38. Not that work within the factory necessarily began at 7:10 A.M. I had a co-worker and friend on my shop floor, known throughout the entire

company as Wagdi *al-winch* (Wagdi the tow truck) because of his tremendous size and massive belly, who made it onto the company grounds by 7:10 A.M. and into the shop floor slightly thereafter. Wagdi worked as a winding machine operator for many years but when the type of machine he operated was replaced his position changed to maintenance and machine repair (*siyaana*). Wagdi tried to work as little as possible and when he did work it was rarely before 8:00 A.M.

39. Shift supervisors have tremendous discretionary power. Thus, workers' relations with their shift supervisors are extremely important.

40. See the sections on breakfast and tea for a full description and analysis.

41. Note the specificity of the manner in which Abdo Farag does *not* look at us. He does not look at us because he does not see us, not know that we are on the shop floor, or not care what we are doing, but because he is too important to look our way, concern himself or even acknowledge us. I witnessed workers attempt to greet him or speak to him about some matter of importance on his way in or out of the shop floor. On more than one occasion he simply ignored them, without even breaking his stride, as if they were not even present.

42. Notice that similar to the case of workers greeting their shift supervisor discussed above, it is the shift super who *greets* the engineer and not the other way around. Usually this is done with at least a gesture if not a handshake. Seeing the shift super quickly rise from his desk and walk purposefully toward the shop floor entrance is another good indication that Abdo Farag is coming our way. See chapter 5, "In the *Basha's* House."

43. I only know one exception to this rule. One middle-aged "head mechanic" chose to pray by himself, after the others finished. He was referred to as sheikh and although no one really questioned his religious convictions or knowledge, some workers resented the fact that he prayed by himself, saying he was self-righteous and that this was a sign of religious snobbery. I knew him well and he did, in fact, think that he was right and everyone else was wrong on all sorts of issues.

44. In *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1940, and *Social Anthropology and Other Essays* (New York: Free Press), 1964, Evans-Pritchard writes about how the Nuer experience and think about time and how this differs from "Western peoples"—"how the conceptualization of natural changes as points of reference in time-reckoning is determined by the rhythm of social activities . . . because their points of reference are the activities themselves."

45. The importance of this differentiation varied considerably. Some Muslim workers, for example, would not eat with Christians. Their thinking was that eating with non-Muslims was somehow against Islam. For many, however, religion made very little difference in terms of how they interacted with work mates who did not share their faith.

46. *Shuyukh* is the plural of sheikh.

47. It was not clear whether Omar Sa'ad had actually performed the pilgrimage (*haj*) or had just completed an '*omra* (a lesser pilgrimage that can take place any time during the year, unlike the *haj*, and does not entitle one to the title or status of *haj*). Of course, traveling to Saudi Arabia is expensive and Sa'ad was one of the very few workers who had done so. He might have been called *haj* simply because he had performed one of the pilgrimages. Sa'ad's example is interesting because it exemplifies the fact that one needed to meet all of the qualifications in order to be given the title sheikh. For although he was religious, prayed regularly, and even performed '*omra* or *haj*, he did not have the religious knowledge (or the beard) necessary for the title.

48. I could not control my laughter. The eloquence of Nabil's statement was dazzling. Here was a winding machine operator who had barely completed elementary school referencing Shakespeare's Romeo in the most humorous way imaginable.

49. Al Azhar mosque and university was founded in Cairo in the tenth century and represents a seat of Islamic learning and scholarship. In the comment above, the speaker differentiates the shuyukh of Al Azhar, officially certified and credentialed men of high religious learning, from the workers on the shop floor, with only superficial religious knowledge.

50. *Nuss kum* is a popular and humorous colloquial expression that literally means "short-sleeve," as in a short-sleeve shirt. It is used to mean that something is fake, done poorly (*ay kalam*), inauthentic or not genuine. Similarly, although *couscoussi ala hummusi* literally means couscous on top of hummus it is used to describe something that is nonsense or nonsensical.

51. Although the *higab* was worn by workers as well as administrators and management staff, it was particularly common among a certain age group and type of female employee: young unmarried women workers (those found on the ninth floor in linens as well as the majority of young women employed in MIDIA's sewing facilities, for example). Fathy's response to my question about what he was planning on doing during the *Eid* (Feast) holiday is also interesting and worth recounting. Naively, I thought he might tell me that was taking his family on a trip somewhere—the beach for a night, for example. Rather, Fathy's response, stated with complete seriousness, was "I will eat meat and pray."

52. The same could be said of the more common gesture of kissing both sides of one's hand (the palm and the back) to indicate "thank God." Although sometimes performed by educated and upper class Egyptians, when done so it is often performed with a consciousness regarding the *sha'bi* nature of the gesture itself. Rather than being exclusive to the shop floor, however, such gestures were more common among the working classes.

53. Of course, being hit with a sandal in Egyptian culture is particularly insulting. *Abu warda* was not a term that was—without question—universally known to all Egyptian workers. In fact, this is probably not the case. When I returned to MIDIA, after being at Misr Textiles for more than a month, I asked several people if they had heard the expression. Although many workers

knew what *abu warda* meant, some did not. These workers, however, managed to figure it out in little time and without any help from me. It could simply have been the case that inexpensive plastic sandals for women adorned with plastic flowers were popular at the time.

54. At times in my field notes I described some of these activities as "anything goes."

55. One of the workers once remarked that they keep the machines running with "*fahlawa wa gad'ana.*" Here *fahlawa wa gad'ana* referred to workers' abilities to keep the machine running by any means, including technical skill and personal ingenuity. John Waterbury has translated *fahlawa* as "verbal servility and ingratiation." See his *Exposed to Innumerable Delusions*: *Public Enterprise and State Power in Egypt, India, Mexico, and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press), p. 7, 1993. Ellis Goldberg devotes more than a page to the meaning of *gada'* for Egyptian workers in the 1930s and '40s. He writes, "The *gada'* was recognized by those who organized workers as the ideal type of worker, and was sharply differentiated from both the peasant and the intellectual (*fallah* and *muthaqqaf*) by urban workers. *Gada'* is an Egyptian colloquial term best rendered by the Russian *molodets*; there is no English equivalent, although the expression 'good ol' boy' might once have been close. In effect, the *gada'* is someone whose life experience and courage lead him to take correct stands in the face of difficult choices. He is a man of inferior status, but his experience sets him apart from other people of low status." See his *Tinker, Tailor, and Textile Worker*, pp. 25–26. Today in Egyptian society the word is used to refer to or characterize someone as capable, dependable, and somewhat tough or rugged (able to deliver in difficult circumstances). It has no specific relation to workers or the working class, and is not only used to describe people of inferior status.

56. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), pp. 79, 190–192, 1984.

Chapter 3. The Labor Process

1. Harry Braverman's highly influential study, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press), 1974, was largely responsible for interest in what is called "the de-skilling thesis."

2. Wool is purchased in the form of tape (*shireet*) from abroad and from other factories in Egypt.

3. Winding is an intermediate process between wool preparations and spinning, sharing features of both. Changes in the appearance of the wool tape are barely noticeable at this stage of production.

4. In other words, the large plastic spindles made of industrial strength plastic fit directly onto the spinning machines in the next stage of production.

5. As Robert Blauner notes, "[T]he job of the typical worker is to mind or tend a large number of spinning frames, looms, or similar machines.

He may feed yarn to, and remove yarn from, the machines when necessary and watch out for and repair breaks in the yarn when they occur. . . . In a machine-tending technology, the traditional manual skills which workers in a craft technology command have been built into the machine system." See *Alienation and Freedom: the Factory Worker and his Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1964, p. 59.

6. It is worth noting that when the three pulling machines were first purchased, brought into the department and assembled (many years ago), a crucial mistake was made in their positioning relative to one another. The three machines are different and the wool tape must go through each in a particular order. Instead of placing the machines in the correct order, however, machine 3 was placed in the middle (between machines 1 and 2). The present order is machine 1, 3, and then 2. The machines, extremely heavy and quite large, were secured to the floor before the mistake was detected. It has never been corrected.

7. Similarly, the counter on the winding machine was also broken, which meant that winding machine operators determined when "enough" wool yarn was on a spindle and when the spindles needed to be replaced.

8. Usually only one or two barrels would have to be replaced at the same time, not all thirty.

9. Sometimes workers would lightly spit in the palm of their hands before rubbing the wool tape together. I believe the moisture further strengthens the connected pieces of wool. The process looks similar to rolling a cigarette.

10. The sensors consisted of a long, thin metal wire running the entire length of the machine, on both the front and back. Curiously, the metal wire had been removed from the front of the machine. There were possibly two reasons for this: either it did not work properly or it gave workers too much freedom, allowing them to monitor the machine less carefully than they were supposed to. See my discussion of vacuum technology at Misr Textiles later in this chapter.

11. *Taqlee*' referred to the specific process of replacing the spindles when they became filled with wool (manually removing the spindles and attaching empty ones, which took a matter of minutes) *as well as* the entire process (and the time required) of filling empty spindles with wool (the time it took the machine to wind wool onto empty spindles—the nonmanual process performed by the machine, which took over an hour). Blauner reports a different division of labor in his chapter on the textile worker in *Alienation and Freedom*. He writes, "In spinning, the work has been more subdivided than in carding, for spinners do not 'doff' their own machines. When the bobbins are full, the frames stop automatically, and a doffer, always a male worker, exchanges empty bobbins for the full ones and starts up the machine again. The spinning itself is done exclusively by women." p. 64. Blauner does not seem to differentiate between winding and spinning operations. What he refers to as "doffing," the workers at MIDIA called taqlee' (changing). Interestingly, because workers at my second research site worked on two 120-spindle winding machines at the same time, they did receive help from a "doffer" at changing time. Part of the

difference between Blauner's account and my own results from the fact that he does not distinguish between spinning and winding machines.

12. Some workers placed the empty spindles they brought from the side of the machine directly on the hydraulic platform, *while* the machine was running. Although this saved a step (taking the empty spindles from the floor to the hydraulic platform), it was unnecessarily dangerous and undoubtedly against the rules. Not only was the hydraulic platform continuously moving up and down while the machine was running, the spindles revolved at dangerously high speeds. If a spindle was placed to close to the revolving metal, or worse, if one's hand or fingers came in contact with the metal while it was spinning, serious accidents could occur.

13. Spindles often returned from the spinning department with unusable wool or built-up grime. It was up to the winding machine operator to clean the spindles and remove excess wool. There was a considerable amount of waste caused by this. Sometimes when a tear or tangle occurred in the spinning stage (and there was not much wool left on the spindle), the spinning machine worker would replace the spindle instead of attempting to repair the tear or tangle. Thus, spindles were often returned to the wool preparations department with a considerable amount of wool still on them. It was easier for winding machine workers to cut the wool (off the spindle) and remove it entirely than attempt to salvage it. But this was not the winding machine operator's responsibility. When I inquired why this occurred I was told the people in spinning were lazy and their superiors were not concerned whether they wasted raw material in this way. It turned out that once several winding machine operators had complained. They were told it was their fault this occurred in the first place. The tangles and unusable wool, they were told, were the result of mistakes by the winding machine operator during the winding process. This was not necessarily the case. Even if this were true, however, spinning machine operators could have simply removed the unusable or inappropriate sections of wool and used what was left. Thus, in the end winding machine operators found it easier to say nothing and simply tear the already wound wool from the spindles (producing waste) than to attempt to correct the situation. Waste generated in the early stages of production was collected daily and taken to another factory where it was used as raw material for lesser quality production—mainly coarse wool blankets—used incidentally by the Egyptian military.

14. Although shift supervisors tolerated workers sitting down, most *mas'ulin* (higher ups) did not. Workers jumped to attention as soon as they saw or heard that someone important was coming. An elaborate sign language (hand signals) developed that allowed workers to communicate with one another despite the size of the shop floor and the noise of the machines. Of course, one of the primary purposes of such a language was to enable workers to warn each other, from far distances, that someone powerful (and therefore dangerous) was approaching. See chapter 2.

15. One could argue that sitting down negatively affected production, both in terms of quality and output. But this is neither obvious nor clear cut, especially considering the public sector character of the firm and the relatively

modest production requirements. Although one could watch the machine and observe the wool being wound onto the spindles while seated, one could not fully monitor the machine (observing it closely) from this position. Sitting was also conducive to talking with friends, day dreaming, sleeping and generally paying less than full attention to production.

16. The difference between informality and resistance is not always straightforward. Many people collapse the two in a framework that makes all cases of informality automatically examples of resistance. This is hardly the case, however. I discuss this issue in chapter 4.

17. Workers usually arrived to find some amount of wool already on the spindles. They were just as likely to walk onto the shop floor and find the spindles three-quarters full as three-quarters empty.

18. Production requirements for each machine were determined elsewhere—by the administration with the particular help of the work study department—years earlier.

19. If the figure was accurate then, sure enough, replacing the spindles four times would take approximately seven hours. When one added "down time"—oiling the machine (if this was done), breaks for breakfast, tea, lunch, and prayer, as well as minor repairs, fixing tangles, and tears—replacing the spindles four times would take an entire shift. The fact, however, was that one hour and forty-five minutes seriously overestimated the time required to fill an empty spindle with wool.

20. Differences in the amount of wool on spindles replaced at the same time provided a potential line of defense for winding machine operators. If a shift supervisor or production department administrator questioned a worker's judgment, asking why the spindles were changed at a certain time (e.g., early), the operator had different spindles to choose from (with differing amounts of wool on them) to justify the decision. Workers could point to spindles with more wool and argue that, in fact, all the spindles were "full."

21. This is a very simple illustration of Harry Braverman's point about technology and deskilling. The increased technology of the machine counter rationalized production by ensuring that each set of spindles, in theory, had exactly the same amount of wool (uniform production), thereby eliminating the worker's power to determine when the spindle changes should be performed, reducing the worker's role in the production process even further.

22. Complaining about a fellow shift supervisor, especially one who worked in the same department, was bound to cause trouble. Shift supervisors, like workers, needed to be on good terms with each other. Occasionally they trade shifts (work assignments), especially if someone has to run an errand during the day or cannot work a particular shift. Being on good terms with one's co-workers and colleagues is always advantageous.

23. Replacing the spindles early did not cause spinning machines to sit idle, for example. More finished spindles, even with less wool on each, meant more spinning machines could be put to work. This will be important to keep in mind when reading about resistance practices at Misr Textiles. One negative consequence of this practice, it could be argued, was that it required replacing

spindles on the spinning machines more often than necessary. Since the factory was already producing under capacity (for reasons mostly independent of the work force), this practice did not result in extra real costs to the company. Jeffrey Herbst makes a similar point in his discussion of peasants in Zimbabwe. Herbst argues, quite astutely, that one important reason peasants in Zimbabwe succeeded in accessing government land was because the land had relatively little value to the government. More abstractly, "the properties of the contested benefit" affect the potential success of contestation—or resistance. Similarly, one of the reasons winding machine workers "got away" with this form of resistance is because the costs to the administration and the firm were marginal if not entirely abstract. See Jeffrey Herbst, "How the Weak Succeed: Tactics, Political Goods, and Institutions in the Struggle over Land in Zimbabwe," pp. 198–220, in Forrest D. Colburn, ed., *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe) 1989.

24. By routinized I mean it was almost accepted, no longer thematized, not a conscious point of contention. It was resistance that had become acceptable, "cold" and no longer "hot."

25. In an interesting paper on output restriction, Jason Ditton writes, "a successful output restricter restricts *invisibly*: it is only the failed restricter who is noticed." See his, "Moral Horror versus Folk Terror: Output Restriction, Class, and the Social Organisation of Exploitation," in *The Sociological Review,* vol. 24, no. 3, p. 530, August 1976 (italics in original).

26. I think it would have been possible to let the machine sit for another ten to fifteen minutes while we had breakfast. Fathy, however, wanted to replace the spindles before sitting down to eat.

27. One *feddan* is approximately 1.038 acres.

28. In the factories that Blauner studied, it was standard to have a separate worker responsible only for replacing the spindles. Winding (and spinning) machine operators were mostly women while the extra workers (called "doffers") were men. See *Alienation and Freedom*, p. 64. Replacing the spindles is referred to as "doffing."

29. Why is this relevant to our discussion of resistance? Because it shows how despite (or in this case, *because* of) advanced technology and more sophisticated machines, workers continue to take advantage of the existing system, whatever that system may be, as best they can.

30. This made his reaction even more surprising since he was usually soft-spoken and mild-mannered.

31. *Fiteer* came in two varieties—*helw* or *hadeq* (sweet or salty), filled with either meats, vegetables, and cheese or topped with sugar, cream, or jam.

32. The less wool wound onto the spindles the more time it would take me to complete the first spindle change.

33. The first spindle change took less than one hour (some amount of wool was already on the spindles) while the second change took only one hour and fourteen minutes.

34. Not to mention the fact that he was a sheikh and respected by everyone on the shop floor.

35. The situation was almost comic. No one, however, was laughing.

36. See M. Dalton, "The Industrial Ratebuster: A Characterisation," in *Applied Anthropology* vol. 7, 1948 and Orvis Collins, Melville Dalton, and Donald Roy, "Restriction of Output and Social Cleavage in Industry," in *Applied Anthropology*, vol. 5, no. 3, summer 1946 (p. 2) for a discussion of "rate-busting."

37. Interestingly, according to both men, Fathy, like me, was too consumed by the personal and competitive nature of the wager to see anything else, at least at first. The other winding machine operators on the other hand saw it from a completely different perspective. For them it was not personal—not their word against mine—it was simply about the possibility of more work.

38. Note the importance of the English manufacture of woolens and England's special significance as a trading partner with Egypt before the 1952 revolution. MIDIA imported wool from England and much of the equipment (including the winding machine I worked on) was English. The work study department, in fact, still retained the original book about "work study and efficiency" they had first used in the 1950s. The head of the department referred to the book fondly. For him it was not a period piece but how production requirements in all factories should be calculated.

39. *Wazan* literally means "the person who weighs."

40. Herbert Heaton, *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries: From the Earliest Times up to the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), second edition 1965, p. 418 (my italics).

41. At least this is what Heaton implies. Who knows, however? Nineteenth-century English factory workers undoubtedly practiced other forms of resistance, and possibly this one.

42. Jason Ditton, in "Moral Horror versus Folk Terror: Output Restriction, Class, and the Social Organisation of Exploitation," in *The Sociological Review* vol. 24, no. 3, p. 530, August 1976, argues that output restriction can take place in systems in which workers are not paid by the piece. The classic accounts of output restriction are, of course, Donald Roy's, "Quota Restriction and Goldbricking in a Machine Shop," in *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. LVII, no.5, pp. 427–442, March 1952 and his "Efficiency and 'The Fix': Informal Intergroup Relations in a Piecework Machine Shop," *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. LX, no. 3, pp. 255–266, November 1954.

43. In piece-rate systems, workers are paid x amount for producing y number of product. Both x and y are variable quantities, however, and it is up to the work study man (and management more generally) to determine the relation between both (the number of pieces for so many dollars, for example). Obviously, management/capital has an interest in increasing y while reducing x, whereas workers' interests are the opposite: they have an interest in producing less while receiving more. In fact, workers paid by the piece are in constant fear that the rates will change in management's favor, that they will be required to produce more y to receive the same x. Output restriction, therefore, has been understood as workers' attempts to maintain the same ratio of y to x (output to pay) despite the fact that they could actually produce more—hence, the restriction of output.

44. Although workers were not paid by the piece, part of their wages were based on production. *Hawafiz* (incentive pay), discussed in chapter 2, was a basic component of overall wages. Thus, theoretically at least, more output could have led to more pay.

45. Regarding the last point about institutional systems, see Charles Sabel, *Work and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1982. This passage is particularly suggestive: "Under the right circumstances, I found, the clash of worker strategy and management counterstrategy could lead to transformations that neither foresaw." p. xii. Like a game of chess, both strategy and counter strategy are internally related. Management's strategy consists of the incentive structure and the institutional system they impose for measuring production. The counter-strategy consists in the techniques workers devise to work less while appearing to produce more. Obviously, this is a continuing dialectic.

46. Or by moving outside the systems themselves; including "cheating" regarding what constitutes a finished product (when a spindle is "full" and needs to be replaced, for example, or attempting to pass off work as complete, finished, or suitable when it is not). It is not a simple case of "effort bargaining" or a "reward-effort curve."

Chapter 4. Indiscipline and Unruly Practices

1. The expression *yiksar shughl* (literally, to "break work") is relatively unknown outside the factory. It means to deliberately stop or get out of work and, therefore, implies consciousness.

2. Fathy's statement is remarkably similar to the seemingly universal saying in socialist and certain other work contexts, "they pretend to pay us and we pretend to work." See Janos Lukacs and Michael Burawoy, *The Radiant Past: Ideology and Reality in Hungary's Road to Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1992; C. Banc and Alan Dundes, *First Prize Fifteen Years! An Annotated Collection of Romanian Political Jokes* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press) 1986; John Waterbury, *Exposed to Innumerable Delusions: Public Enterprise and State Power in Egypt, India, Mexico, and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 126, 1993.

3. Note the meaning and significance of the word *kutaymi*. Not only is it colloquial, it belongs to a *sha'bi* colloquial far removed from middle-class, educated, polite language. The word would never be used in a formal setting and like *yiksar shughl* is expressive of a certain working-class sensibility. Obviously, the import of the statement is that although Egyptian workers do not legally receive an hour for lunch (an hour U.S. workers achieved through collective bargaining, organized struggle, and union activity) they nevertheless manage to *take* an hour through extra-legal, informal means.

4. The mechanics and pulling machine workers spent a great deal of time in the area and had set up a semi-permanent place to sit and relax. Two small metal barrels had been turned upside down and placed against the wall, providing a relatively comfortable place to lounge, eat, and spend time. The three small pulling machines, a row of lockers, a drill, and several precariously

balanced metal shelves overflowing with old, rusting spare parts were located close by.

5. It was somewhat unusual for a machine to stop running and a worker to have to call a shift supervisor or mechanic to get it going again. Workers spent years on machines and although not trained mechanics they learned from experience why most stoppages occurred and how to fix them. Short of having to replace large parts, undertake major repairs, or fix electrical problems, workers more often than not got their machines up and running by themselves. Furthermore, a fuse coming out—or being pulled out—was so unusual and unlikely that it would not be the first (second or third) thing a worker, shift supervisor, or mechanic would look for. Normally, one would check the more likely causes before going through *all possible* causes of machine stoppage. This is precisely what was going to guarantee that the worker received a considerable respite from work.

6. I wasn't the only person who felt this way. Nabil seemed to love the sound of his own voice and had no social sense of how the person in front of him was reacting. Ramadan, for example, regularly referred to him as *al-'abeet* (the stupid one) behind his back. Nabil also fashioned himself a *zagal* (colloquial poet). He was a genius in his own mind.

7. *Bitae' shughl* was an expression used to describe only a handful of people in the factory. It is interesting in itself, but more so for what it implies about everyone else in the factory. People who were serious about work were the exception and not the rule. The '*Am* (uncle) in front of Rizq's name reflected both his age as well as the respect that many younger workers had for him.

8. By causing the machine to shut down, Nabil was getting even with the shift supervisor for turning the machine on before he arrived, breaking with custom and overstepping his bounds.

9. Nabil's actions are quite different from those of the previous saboteur. In the first example it would appear that the worker simply wanted a break from work. Nabil, however, was motivated by a different logic—a feeling of frustration and an attempt to assert control over his work (i.e., determining when the machine was to be turned on). This would seem to be a combination of two of the three meanings and types of sabotage identified by Taylor and Walton—"attempts to reduce tension and frustration," and attempts "to assert control." See Laurie Taylor and Paul Walton, "Industrial Sabotage: Motives and Meanings," in Stanley Cohen, ed., *Images of Deviance* (Penguin: Harmondsworth), esp. pp. 226–238, 1971.

10. Sabotage is defined in Webster's *New World Dictionary* as "deliberate destruction of machines, etc. by employees in labor disputes or of railroads, bridges, etc. by enemy agents or by underground resistance." p. 524. In an often quoted study, Laurie Taylor and Paul Walton define sabotage as, "that rule-breaking which takes the form of conscious action or inaction directed towards the mutilation or destruction of the work environment (this includes the machinery of production and the commodity itself)." See their "Industrial Sabotage: Motives and Meanings," in S. Cohen, ed., *Images of Deviance* (Harmondsworth), 1971, p. 219. Earlier in the century sabotage had a much wider

meaning extending well beyond the simple destruction of machinery. See, Geoff Brown, *Sabotage: a Study in Industrial Conflict* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books), 1977, pp. xi–xii. Brown identifies Emile Pouget as one of the most important and influential writers on the subject at the beginning of the twentieth century. His work had tremendous influence and circulation. Writing about Pouget's *la Sabotage* (Paris 1909), Brown states that "apart from the two main methods discussed so far—slowing down on the job, and deteriorating the quality of work—Pouget had some other variants. There was sabotage by 'la methode de la bouche ouverte'—open mouth sabotage. This involved workers divulging the industrial or commercial secrets of their employers, or making public instances of adulterated or shoddy products. Possibly a more important tactic, to which Pouget devoted a separate chapter, was 'l'obstructionnism,' or what has become known in Britain as working to rule. Pouget defined 'l'obstructionnisme' as sabotage in reverse—applying the rules with a meticulous and exaggerated care." p. 19. Sabotage, of course, is not singular and can occur in different forms, for different reasons and in different contexts. Taylor, Walton, and John Jermier argue against the commonly held idea that sabotage is meaningless and irrational action conducted by the crazed, mad saboteur. Jermier notes that "sabotage at work is usually a rational act, not inherently biased against machines or technological innovations, with powerful consequences favoring labor. Historical studies and reports of empirical research challenge the mythical image of the 'mad saboteur' who . . . explodes in a self-indulgent moment of destruction." See John M. Jermier, "Sabotage at Work: The Rational View," in Nancy Di Tomaso, ed., *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, vol. 6, p. 102, 1988.

11. Thorstein Veblen, "On Sabotage," in Max Lerner, ed., *The Portable Veblen* (New York: Penguin), pp. 431–432, 1977. When Veblen published his essay on sabotage in 1921 he noted that journalists and others commonly misused the term and purposely wanted to "discredit the use of sabotage by organized workmen."

12. Veblen was not alone in putting forward this definition. Some claim that it was first practiced by French syndicalists. In *Sabotage*, Brown writes, "Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's pamphlet, *Sabotage: the conscious withdrawal of the workers' industrial efficiency* tried to make things clear right from the subtitle itself. Gurley Flynn defined sabotage as the 'withdrawal of efficiency . . . either to slacken up and to interfere with the quantity, or to botch in your skill and interfere with the quality, of capitalist production. . . . Sabotage is not physical violence, sabotage is an internal, industrial process . . . it is simply *another form of coercion*.' " (my italics). Brown continues, echoing Veblen, "But in spite of all this clarification and the insistence that sabotage was not exclusively or even mainly concerned with the destruction of the means of production, it was frequently interpreted to mean precisely that by many adherents of the I.W.W. [the Industrial Workers of the World] as well as by the I.W.W.'s political opponents and the national press" p. 45.

13. Thorstein Veblen, "On Sabotage," in Max Lerner, ed., *The Portable Veblen* (New York: Penguin), p. 433, 1977.

14. The idea that if they were paid more they would work harder, was repeated by others, including sheikh Ramadan. Ramadan said that if he were paid £1000 per month he would do the work of the entire shop floor by himself! Being Ramadan, he acted out what this would be like, frantically running around from machine to machine, shoulders slightly lowered, with a look of seriousness and determination. Ramadan was a born actor, his face was expressive and every word was accompanied by a gesture.

15. Mohsen's actions were part of a larger discourse about justice and fairness in an employment relationship, a "moral economy" of exchange. This is directly related to Fathy's comment quoted at the beginning of the chapter, "they pretend to pay us and we pretend to work." Mohsen was saying, in a different kind of way, "you get what you give."

16. For example, see Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1985; Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 1987; Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1992; Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance," in *American Ethnologist*, vol. 17, no.1, pp. 40–55, 1990; and the writings of the Subaltern School of South Asian History. R. Guha and G. Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1988, provides a nice introduction.

17. *The History of Sexuality: volume I* (New York: Vintage), p. 95, 1980.

18. Ibid., p. 95.

19. The ethnographic detail and empirical discussion of resistance have undoubtedly contributed to the book's success. Unlike Foucault's work, which is almost impossible to emulate in terms of both style and substance, after reading Scott one can, quite literally, march into the field and study resistance. If one looks at the number of monographs, articles, and doctoral dissertations about resistance that appeared after the book's publication, one can only conclude that this is what happened. Of course, other studies of resistance have been influential. It might also be worth noting that unlike many who have written about resistance, Scott did not arrive at the concept exclusively through an interest in Foucault. Other writers and traditions, especially the historians of slavery (and particularly Eugene Geneovese) and Antonio Gramsci, have also influenced his thinking.

20. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 29, 1985.

21. Ibid., p. 29.

22. James Scott, "Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* (Special Issue on Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance in South-East Asia, eds., James Scott and Benedict Tria Kerkvliet), vol. 13, no. 2, January 1986, p. 6. The quotation continues, "For the peasantry, scattered across the countryside and facing even more imposing obstacles to organised, collective action, everyday forms of resistance would seem particularly important."

23. The quotation is worth reproducing. "Accompanied by Mr. Moneybags and by the possessor of labour-power, we therefore take leave for a time of this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men, and follow them both into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there stares us in the face 'No admittance except on business.' " Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers), p. 172, 1967.

24. Here, in fact, lies the crucial distinction between Marx's concepts of labor and labor power.

25. Widening the understanding of what counts as politics and therefore what political scientists can legitimately study is no easy feat. For this alone, regardless of any possible shortcomings in method or theory (these will be discussed later), Scott deserves our praise. Writing about "the hidden realm of political conflict," Scott draws our attention to "a vast realm of political action . . . that is almost habitually overlooked. It is ignored for at least two reasons. First, it is neither declared openly in the usually understood sense of 'politics.' Second, nor is it group action in the way collective action is usually understood. The argument developed here is that much of the politics of subordinate groups falls in the category of everyday forms of resistance, these activities should most definitely be considered political, that they do constitute a form of collective action, and that any account that ignores them is often ignoring the most vital means by which subordinate classes manifest their political interests." James Scott, "Everyday forms of Resistance," pp. 4–5, in Forrest Colburn, ed. *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe) 1989. These are the kinds of politics the majority of people engage in—not elections, labor unions, or political parties, but the politics of everyday life. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1990, Scott calls these practices "the infrapolitics of subordinate groups." See pp. 183–201.

26. Some resistance practices had also become "acceptable." For example, workers often performed less than the formally stipulated amount of work mandated by the company. More often than not, this was implicitly agreed upon by workers, shift supervisors, and management. Sometimes company policy and procedure allowed or even encouraged this. For instance, technically machines were not supposed to be turned off between shifts. You were supposed to work until the worker on the next shift took your place. Of course, in practice, this never occurred—nor would it have been acceptable. Shift supervisors and even high-level management would never have attempted to enforce such a policy. Another example was cigarette smoking. At Misr Textiles, there was an explicit policy regulating how many cigarette breaks workers were allowed each shift. Everyone knew they were only allowed one break but there was never a case in which a smoker who wanted to smoke two, three, and sometimes four cigarettes a day was prevented from doing so. Unless, of course, someone had it out for him. Informality and the implicit are essential features of the acceptable. Sometimes resistance practices are so common that they can easily be taken for granted. The obvious, of course, does not call attention to itself.

And some resistance practices are so regular and everyday, that they have become routinized, taken for granted, accepted as the operating norm—simply the way things are done ("cold"). Other practices are more contentious, testing the limits of the acceptable ("hot"). This is similar to what Scott, following Barrington Moore, calls, "testing the limits." See *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 192, 1990. Milton Esman also agrees that everyday forms of resistance are "expressions of nonformal, unorganized politics. . . . What makes this behavior a form of politics are the tacit understandings within the community of the disadvantaged that sanction, protect, and where necessary, enforce these patterns of resistance. . . . The collective character of this behavior qualifies it as a form of politics." See his, "Commentary" in F. Colburn, ed., *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, p. 222.

27. Paul Edwards, David Collinson, and Giuseppe Della Rocca, "Workplace Resistance in Western Europe: A Preliminary Overview and a Research Agenda," in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 284, 1995.

28. See Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism* (London: Verso), 1985.

29. Writing about small resistance practices, Scott notes "when they are practiced widely by members of an entire class against elites or the state, they may have aggregate consequences out of all proportion to their banality when considered singly" (p. 5). See also Asef Bayat's *Street Politics* (Columbia University Press: New York), 1997, and Jeffrey Kopstein's interesting article, "Chipping Away at the State: Workers' Resistance and the Demise of East Germany," in *World Politics* 48 (April 1996), pp. 391–423. Challenging conventional explanations of communism's collapse, Kopstein argues that years of workers' resistance in East Germany wore down a despotic state, "immobilized the regime," and ultimately affected its stability. pp. 422–423.

30. Scott also writes, "Everyday forms of resistance rarely make headlines. But just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, thousands upon thousands of petty acts of insubordination and evasion create a political and economic barrier reef of their own." See his "Everyday Forms of Resistance," p. 20, in F. Colburn, ed., *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. See also Scott's *Weapons of the Weak*, p. xvii.

31. Jeffrey Kopstein, "Chipping Away at the State: Workers' Resistance and the Demise of East Germany," in *World Politics* 48 (April 1996), pp. 391–423. Undoubtedly, the systematic and almost universal "withdrawal of effort" on the part of Egyptian public sector workers resulted in low productivity, inefficiency, poor quality products, and has surely contributed to Egypt's economic crisis. This is one possible interpretation of "State Control and Labor Productivity Crisis: the Egyptian textile industry," by Henley and Ereisha—what the authors call "the pathology of low labor productivity" p. 492, p. 516.

32. See the previous footnote's discussion of Henley and Ereisha as well as Heba Handoussa's *Public Sector Employment and Production in the Egyptian Economy* (The Technical Papers of the ILO/UNDP comprehensive employment strategy mission to Egypt, 1980) technical paper no. 7 (Geneva: ILO). When

one attempts to understand the failure of Egyptian public sector enterprise one must take this argument seriously. The question should no longer be one of simply assigning blame to the state, management, or workers. Workers' responded to low wages with little work and low productivity.

33. See also Randy Hodson, "Worker Resistance: an underdeveloped concept in the sociology of work," in *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol. 16, p. 82, 1995 (pp. 79–110).

34. Paul Edwards, David Collinson, and Giuseppe Della Rocca, "Workplace Resistance in Western Europe," p. 284. The last sentence in the quotation speaks directly to Aziz's story discussed in "subversive discourse and narratives of resistance"—later in this chapter.

35. Writing about power in hierarchical institutions, Foucault notes, "in an apparatus like an army or a factory . . . the system of power takes a pyramidical form. Hence there is an apex. But even so, even in such a simple case, this summit doesn't form the 'source' or 'principle' from which all power derives as though from a luminous focus (the image by which the monarchy represents itself). The summit and lower elements of the hierarchy stand in a relationship of mutual support and conditioning, a mutual 'hold' (power as a mutual and indefinite 'blackmail')." See "The Eye of Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books), 1980, p. 159. See also, David Collinson, *Managing the Shopfloor: Subjectivity, Masculinity and Workplace Culture* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter), p. 45, 1992, and Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Houndmills: Macmillan), p. 6, 1979.

36. See P.K. Edwards and Hugh Scullion, *The Social Organization of Industrial Conflict* (London: Basil Blackwell), 1982, and P. Edwards, D. Collinson, and G. Della Rocca, "Workplace Resistance in Western Europe," p. 284–285. Management is "concerned to generate employee consent, loyalty and commitment."

37. Resistance practices in the factory, for instance, can have significant consequences for production, efficiency, and overall firm performance. In other words, another reason everyday forms of resistance are important is because the combined effect of such small, individual acts on production targets, management strategy, firm performance, and profitability can be significant.

38. The New Labor Law (No. 12 for 2003) is also known as the Unified Labor Law.

39. In 1999, several members of the Tagamu' party were jailed and "charged with threatening national security" for encouraging workers to oppose the new labor law. See, Reuters Wire, March 14, 1999, from Cairo, Egypt.

40. This includes the 1994 Kafr El-Dawar strike that resulted in a number of deaths, including that of a young boy. See Nicola Christine Pratt, *The Legacy of the Corporatist State*; Omar El Shafei, *Workers, Trade Unions and the State in Egypt, 1984–1989* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo) 1995; and Marsha Pripstein Posusney, *Labor and the State in Egypt: Workers, Unions, and Economic Restructuring* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1997.

41. Michael Burawoy, "The Contours of Production Politics," in *Labor in the Capitalist World Economy*, pp. 23–47, ed., C. Bergquist (New York: Sage), p. 41, 1984.

42. See Marsha Pripstein Posusney, "Irrational Workers: The Moral Economy of Labor Protest in Egypt," in *World Politics*, vol. 46, no. 1, October 1993 and her *Labor and the State in Egypt*.

43. This is similar to what Lila Abu-Lughod prescribes in "The Romance of Resistance," *American Ethnologist*, vol. 17, no. 1, February 1990, pp. 41–55. Abu Lughod is critical of those who simply document resistance practices (locating and "romanticizing resistance") and argues that we should use resistance instead as a "diagnostic" of power.

44. Elsewhere I discussed how searches of white-collar employees and workers differed. Searches of workers were more extensive and included physical searches of their bodies as well as their belongings. This was not because workers had more opportunity to walk off with company property, however. Rather, it was based on the idea that they were more likely to steal. Many in management said that "stealing wasn't far from their nature (*tabe'hum*)," reflecting a common middle and upper-class view of workers and working-class culture. Physical searches were a company policy based on this conception. Interestingly, this thinking is similar to the way most middle- and upper-class Egyptians think about domestic servants. Stories of servants stealing from the families they work for are very common. And in Egypt, it is regular practice to search domestics (*shaghaleen*) before they leave the household (either permanently, at the end of employment or temporarily, to visit their parents in the countryside, for example). These searches are even more obnoxious and humiliating, often requiring servants to remove all of their clothing in addition to allowing employers to carefully scrutinize their bags and belongings. Despite this, "theft" of this nature occurs and has become part of the common stock of knowledge that many Egyptians have of their working class and poor countrymen.

45. Making things on company time and out of company property is a doubly egregious form of indiscipline. It shares certain features with what the French and Michel de Certeau call "la perruque" (the wig). "*La perruque*," de Certeau writes, "is the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer. It differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. *La perruque* may be as simple a matter as a secretary's writing a love letter on 'company time' or as complex as a cabinetmaker's 'borrowing' a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room. . . . the worker who indulges in *la perruque* actually diverts time (not goods, since he uses only scraps) from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit. In the very place where the machine he must serve reigns supreme, he cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his *work* and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family through *spending* his time in this way." See *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1984, pp. 25–26.

46. It is interesting to note that defective material *was* recycled earlier in the production process. The reason for this is, undoubtedly, that before the weaving stage, defective material was of no use to workers.

47. Here, specializing on the basis of comparative advantage means taking advantage of whatever resources one has at one's disposal. For example, if someone works at the telephone company they can help relatives, friends, and others with regard to any and all potential problems one might have with this agency (e.g., installing a new line, repairing a broken line, payment of bills). Similarly, someone working in the police can provide help with traffic tickets, car licensing, legal disputes, etc. This system of exchange is so extensive, pervasive, and well-developed that the exchange of services often takes place through an intermediary or third party. In other words, often more than one exchange takes place at a time. For instance, if I have a problem with my phone but don't know anyone at the phone company, I will contact a friend who does. The friend will, in turn, put me in touch with his/her contact at the phone company. In such an exchange, more than two people are involved and I become indebted to two separate parties: my friend, for putting me in touch with his/her friend, and the person at the phone company. Both individuals could and probably will contact me in the future requesting some similar service.

48. These types of exchange networks arise and become important, in part, due to a scarcity of resources, market failures, and the inability of bureaucratic structures to function properly.

49. Shall we call these "patron-patron" relations?

50. After discussing theft at his company, the CEO said that in an attempt to be fair he instituted a policy in which *everyone*, including himself, would be searched before leaving the company premises. Every item leaving the factory needed to be approved and all the necessary paperwork needed to be filled out beforehand, whether the item was leaving in a truck to be delivered to a customer or with the CEO. One day, he said, he completed the necessary paperwork to take nine shirts with him as he left the company. As he was exiting the factory he handed his driver the paperwork to give to the security guard. The guard examined the forms and opened the trunk of the car perfunctorily (ostensibly to see the shirts). A second later, he closed the trunk and waved the CEO on. After exiting the factory, the chief executive made his driver stop. He got out of the car and walked back to the guard to question him about the number of shirts he had left with. The guard failed to come up with the correct answer and was immediately demoted. The next day, the CEO said, the guard was sweeping floors. The executive recounted the story to demonstrate that he was both fair (having himself searched as well as the workers) and strict (demoting the guard for not doing his job properly). What is fascinating, however, is something entirely different. Despite the fact that the guard knew the search rule applied to everyone, including the CEO, he treated him differently, with deference and fear. The guard was afraid to follow the rules and apply them to the boss. Instead of searching the car properly, he waived the car on, most likely thinking he would get into more trouble by

actually following the rules (e.g., stopping the CEO) than by simply saluting and waving the boss on. This is typical in Egypt and says much about the organizational culture of the firm. See chapter 5, "In the *Basha's* House."

51. See Jason Ditton, "Perks, Pilferage, and the Fiddle: the Historical Structure of Invisible Wages," *Theory and Society* vol. 4, pp. 39–71, 1977. Writing about theft in "primitive societies," Donald Black notes that, "property may also be confiscated as a form of social control (one could substitute—exercise of power), so that what might at first appear to a modern observer as unprovoked theft or burglary proves in many cases to be a response to the misconduct of the victim." See his "Crime as Social Control," in Donald Black, ed., *Toward a General Theory of Social Control* vol. 2 (Orlando: Academic Press), pp. 1–27 (p. 5), 1984. See also the work of James Tucker, Gerald Mars, and Donald Horning referenced below.

52. James Tucker, "Employee Theft as Social Control," in *Deviant Behavior*, 10:319–334, 1989, pp. 319–320. See also M.P. Baumgartner, "Social Control From Below," in Donald Black (ed.), *Toward a General Theory of Social Control* vol. 1 (Orlando: Academic Press), pp. 303–345, 1984. See p. 309.

53. James Tucker uses the expression "employee theft as justice." See Tucker, "Employee Theft as Social Control," p. 321.

54. Gerald Mars, "Dock Pilferage: a Case Study in Occupational Theft," in Paul Rock and Mary McIntosh, eds., *Deviance and Social Control* (London: Tavistock Publications), pp. 209–228, 1974. See p. 224.

55. In this interpretation, pilfering becomes a form of agency where employees take for themselves what they "deserve." This is similar to the worker's statement at the beginning of the chapter describing how he and his co-workers "took" an hour for lunch despite the fact that they did not receive a lunch break. It should also be noted that even if a worker does not explicitly consider pilfering to be a form of wages, pilfering can easily be justified as a response to a previous injustice. A "moral economy" perspective is relevant here; workers have a sense of fair and unfair exchange (e.g., the idea of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work). This seems similar to Barrington Moore's idea in *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe) 1978, that although workers do not always have a well-developed and thought-out conception of justice, they know injustice when they see (or experience) it.

56. Gerald Mars, *Cheats at Work: An Anthropology of Workplace Crime* (London: George Unwin) 1982, p. 23. Mars notes that some pilfering occurs because of resentment. If someone takes something from the company because they feel unfairly compensated (i.e., low wages) or unjustly treated (i.e., humiliated in front of co-workers), for example, pilfering becomes an act of defiance against the boss and the company.

57. Gerald Mars, *Cheats at Work*, p. 19, emphasis in the original. "The fiddle" is the English equivalent of pilfering. Mars's use of the idea of "rules" is obviously problematic. Normative frameworks and prescriptions for action are always more like general guidelines than rules; the latter, as in chess, narrowly define what moves can and cannot be undertaken. Surely human agents have

more room for maneuver, improvisation, and agency than this. For a similar critique of the concept of "rules" in describing social action, see David Held and John B. Thompson, eds., *Social Theory of Modern Societies: Anthony Giddens and his Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1989, particularly the article by Thompson.

58. Donald Horning, "Blue-Collar Theft: Conceptions of Property, Attitudes Toward Pilfering, and Work Group Norms in a Modern Industrial Plant," in *Crimes Against Bureaucracy*, eds., Erwin Smigel and H. Laurence Ross (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold), 1970. There are other interesting similarities between Horning's observations and my own. For example, Horning notes that workers made "stool pads fabricated from packing material." p. 52. As I described in chapter 1, workers at MIDIA made makeshift chairs as well as pads out of the material that was available on the shop floor. So, for instance, cardboard packing material taken from the inside of containers of imported wool were recycled into pads/flat surfaces on which workers could more comfortably sit. We also used the cardboard for other purposes like makeshift machine repairs. I have the impression that this practice was more common where I worked than in the facility where Horning carried out his research. In fact, I used this material regularly, almost daily. Finally, Horning reproduces part of an interview about pilfering on page 61. He quotes a worker at length as saying—" 'There's a guy on our line who's supposed to take things all the time. They tease him a lot—he really gets it when the line goes down because of a shortage of parts. They all start saying to him 'Hey, how about bringing in some of your parts so we can work tomorrow.' I don't know if this is just bullshit or not.' " p. 61. Remarkably, *exactly* the same joke was directed at Safwat *al-harami* at MIDIA! See chapter 2, "Plastic Sandals, Tea, and Time."

59. Horning, p. 52. "e.g. stools which have been modified for personal use; stool pads fabricated from packing material; 'personal items' fabricated from junk parts . . . and tools on which special grips have been added."

60. Ibid., p. 53.

61. Ibid., p. 65. "Theft has a victim; property of uncertain ownership lacks a victim." p. 64.

62. Ibid., p. 62. On one reading, the nickname bestowed upon Safwat by his co-workers (*al-harami* or the thief), expresses the fact that his work group did not consider his action (attempting to steal a machine counter) acceptable.

63. Unlike Mars and Horning who set out to explore pilfering through fieldwork, questionnaires, and interviews, I never intended to study "employee theft." Pilfering was something I came across accidentally, working in the factory and interacting with co-workers. In fact, at the private textile company, it was management that brought up the subject, not me. While I observed "employee theft" at MIDIA, I did not attempt to probe the phenomenon too deeply while in "the field"; exploring, for example, the explicit and implicit understandings workers and management had of pilfering. I did not ask Safwat why he attempted to steal the machine counter. Needless to say, this would have been

awkward and inappropriate. And Fathy's analysis of Safwat's motivations for pilfering was completely unsolicited.

64. It certainly would have made it less "crime-like" and potentially more acceptable in the eyes of many employees.

65. Similarly, the metal tools (both kitchen utensils and all-purpose instruments) made on company time and out of company material were, in fact, fashioned out of old, worn-out, and therefore no longer useful metal blades removed from the combing machines.

66. See chapter 3 for a detailed explanation of the system of measuring production that developed.

67. See the discussion of "rules" governing pilfering earlier in the chapter. Considering the stigma of theft in Egyptian society (and being a *harami*), this reading makes much sense. Despite being known as "the thief," Safwat was not a pariah. When discussing Safwat's story, Fathy, our co-worker, explained his situation this way: "Safwat *mid eedo* [reached his hand, i.e., stole] because of the economic conditions [referring to both the economic situation and, more specifically, wages in the factory]. . . . He is *ta'ban* (badly off) . . . and the wages aren't enough." Like the expression *yiksar shughl* and the word *kutaymi*, Fathy's word choice is itself interesting. *Mid eedo* (reaching his hand) is concretely expressive of theft in the sense that Safwat "reached his hand" for something that was not his for the taking.

68. This can be contrasted with Fathy's comment at the beginning of the chapter where he described the employment relationship at MIDIA as being one where "the pay is bad but the work is easy." In other words, a structural analysis of their position proves more useful in explaining their behavior than different conceptions of property and ownership.

69. High turnover or "exit" is one of the most common forms of industrial conflict—workers simply resist with their feet. See Edwards and Scullion, *The Social Organization of Industrial Conflict* on turnover and absenteeism as indices of conflict.

70. See "In Search of Livelihood: Females' Informal Factory Work in Textile and Garment Manufacturing in Rural Egypt," Naima Abdu Hassan, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1998.

71. This is something that might otherwise have served to inhibit pilfering. The fact that private sector employment entailed greater effort, physical exertion (in short, more work) with low wages also has consequences for feelings of exploitation.

72. In fact, it would be unlikely that anyone would even be prosecuted. The worst outcome would be immediate dismissal. In one sense, the gains from pilfering potentially outweighed the risks. Note, however, that simply because rational calculation is a part of an explanation does not mean that "normative understandings" (culture, ideology, rationalization) are unimportant or secondary. In fact, particularly in situations of heightened moral ambiguity (i.e., theft or pilfering), these are precisely the ways agents understand their actions.

73. Mars, "Dock Pilferage: a Case Study in Occupational Theft," p. 226. The quotation continues: "It appears here that pilferage, in the actor's definition

of his position, is perceived as a legitimate means of redressing an exploitative contractual situation. Considered in this light, pilferage can then be appreciated as having possible implications for working class consciousness. It is perhaps a device which, in part at least, expresses alienation in an alternative manner to more open industrial and political action."

74. Not that meeting output requirements and achieving incentive pay was difficult or required backbreaking, fast-paced work eight hours a day from anyone.

75. Although Wagdi's job was easy, this didn't prevent him from desiring an easier one—one that paid more as well. In addition to being a clown and prankster, Wagdi exploited his talents to make political connections and gain social credit. During my fieldwork he managed to move from the dirty work of the wool preparations department to a more respectable position in the company club. There he worked as a caretaker. He got the promotion through a series of political and personal maneuvers that gained him the favor of certain "higher-ups." Before I finished my fieldwork, however, he got into trouble and was demoted. He left the clean and quiet club for a position as a security guard at one of the company's other factories. Although it wasn't as nice as being a caretaker, it was still as step up from the shop floor.

76. I recorded the following in my fieldnotes under the heading "Wagdi's time-management skills": "Wagdi seems to disappear for several hours each day and then magically appear again at about 2:00 P.M." He would also take an incredibly long time to get dressed before work each morning. Almost everything could be done at a snail's pace, and much of it was.

77. They also said that Safwat's repairs were of poor quality and that often after he finished fixing a machine it would run for a shift and then break down again, leaving one of them to fix it.

78. The story is a bit more complicated. Ibrahim Hassan didn't particularly like Ramadan while Safwat and Wagdi were known to be his lackeys. It was rumored that when he needed something from our department, including information, they were the ones who delivered. And sometime later when Hassan ran in the union election to keep his seat on the Board of Directors, Safwat and Wagdi did more than their part to help his campaign. Hassan lost, however, much to the delight of everyone else. Thus, Ibrahim Hassan was favorably disposed toward Safwat (and disliked Ramadan) from the beginning.

79. Ramadan's relationship with Safwat is interesting. As the senior mechanic, Ramadan had authority over the other two. Although Darwish and Ramadan got along and were, in fact, quite friendly, the same was not true of Ramadan and Safwat. Hierarchy among the mechanics did lead to conflict. Burawoy and others have argued that hierarchy (among workers) serves to redirect conflict from management-worker relations to relations between workers. Safwat's evasionary tactics were intended to get him out of work and away from Ramadan who, after all, was his boss. On this basis one could argue that Safwat was, in fact, "resisting" Ramadan.

80. The open door was particularly pleasant toward the end of the workday, after we had changed into our street clothes and were waiting for the

bell. It was nice to sit on a work cart facing the door and look outside (with the breeze coming in), and chat a bit while waiting for the end of the shift.

81. The interesting point here is that deference was not always an act, as Scott seems to imply. For example, workers believed Abdo Farag, the engineer in charge of our department, deserved a certain amount of respect—his position in the company, technical knowledge, and experience required it. Workers bought into at least part of this ideology. This was a kind of "symbolic violence" (See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 191–192, 1977). At the same time, workers did not want to get in trouble, as might happen if Abdo Farag caught them sitting down, for example. In this regard, once I asked Abdo Farag if I could take a picture of him. He didn't object and when the shift supervisor approached him to get on with the business of the day, I snapped a photo of both men standing together in the middle of the work hall. After taking the picture I approached Abdo Farag and the supervisor to thank them. To my surprise, I found the engineer scolding the shift super for not displaying enough deference during the photo. More specifically, Abdo Farag was upset that the shift supervisor had placed his hands on his waist, a stance that was too informal in the presence of his boss. Abdo Farag told Salah, the shift supervisor, that he hadn't appeared respectful enough in the photo. The engineer ended the conversation by reminding the shift supervisor that he was the boss. What made the incident particularly surprising was that Abdo Farag was a practical and serious man, not one to make small talk or waste time with seemingly trivial matters. He obviously took these things (the micropractices of hierarchy) seriously.

82. Randy Hodson, "Worker Resistance: an Underdeveloped Concept in the Sociology of Work," in *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol. 16, p. 82, 1995 (pp. 79–110). Letting off steam and releasing pent-up anger are some of the functions of discursive resistance. But to concentrate on the psychological effects of this type of activity is to potentially lose sight of how discursive resistance often accompanies and is integral to other forms of resistance. Indeed, to view discursive resistance outside the contexts in which it occurs runs the risk of reducing it to "mere talk." Scott it seems makes another move. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, Scott's argument, if I understand it correctly, is that discursive resistance forms part of larger "hidden transcript" that informs and generates (material) practices of resistance. These hidden transcripts are somewhat like counter-hegemonies and cultures of resistance. Their relationship to material practices of resistance is that they imbue the latter with meaning and therefore must be taken seriously. See particularly his discussion of the "safety-valve" hypothesis. The problem with this, however, is that it implies a basic division of the world into material and discursive (nonmaterial) realms, independent of one another, and then privileges the former.

83. Salah began with the company as a clerk in the 1950s and was retrained in the mid-1980s. He volunteered for a program initiated by high-level management to retool white-collar staff for production jobs. The intention was to shift manpower and excess employment from desks to production while, at the same time, limit hiring. The ultimate goal was to solve problems of

overemployment and the resulting inefficiency. Earlier I mentioned that excess employment, although present on the shop floor, was worse among lower- and middle-level management, resulting in an over-bloated white-collar staff. Although many workers were contemptuous of Salah they were not always hostile to nonproduction-related jobs or theoretical knowledge more generally. Unlike Salah, Sayid Rizq was hard working and had always worked in production. He was one of the few examples I came across of someone who began as a worker and eventually became a shift supervisor. Whenever I asked workers to describe him, almost all of them responded by saying immediately "*huwwa bitae' shughl*" (literally—he is about work—referring to how serious and hardworking he was). It is interesting that workers were genuinely scornful of Salah and criticized him despite the fact that he did not demand much from them in terms of work. On the other hand, workers respected Rizq despite the fact that he was a tougher taskmaster. In fact, sometimes they complained about his over-enthusiasm for work and what this meant for them. But no one criticized him personally.

84. This is not a word but rather a sound used to imitate certain activities. The closest word in English is "thud."

85. Scott's discussion of symbolic inversion, although not the same, shares some parallels. Fathy was inverting the normal hierarchy, reversing the roles one would expect, turning the world upside-down. See *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 166–172. Ramadan's specific criticisms about the bonus centered on his claim that Salah wasn't productive or even necessary and therefore didn't deserve the extra pay. He compared what he did and how important his work was with Salah's. In his eyes there was no comparison. Darwish had a different view. He didn't care if Salah deserved the money or not. He simply wanted some of it. And why not, he said? He worked in the company longer than Salah. He thought, and I think many would agree, that he worked harder and had more skills and knowledge of the machines and production than the shift supervisor. Why should Salah get a bonus and Darwish sit and watch?

86. These are only a few of the times workers joked about, and in the process criticized, the bonus system. Morsy, for instance, would often ask Salah in a mockingly sarcastic tone whether "tomorrow is the bonus?"—teasing and taunting his shift supervisor. When it came to comparing one's lot with others, most people in the company looked only to those directly above them. For the most part, people did not look to the CEO, managing director, or even to the engineers whom they interacted with regularly when expressing feelings of frustration about the inequality of rewards and the dissimilarity of condition. It was the person directly above oneself (in terms of pay and power) that one looked at with envy. Just as Darwish and Ramadan looked at Salah, Said looked at Fathy and his position. He was jealous of the extra "incentive pay" (*huwafiz*) that came with the position of machine operator (Said was an auxiliary worker). He wanted the position for himself. This phenomenon, in which individuals look only to the people closest to themselves, directly above them, and desire what they have (instead of critiquing the entire system) helps

reproduce systems of structural inequality. Instead of questioning the system, people decry their place within it and how it has treated them. They aspire to have more within the system and by doing so they implicitly accept the existing rules of the game (and are unable to look beyond the game itself).

87. Aziz was not yet married but was on the market. So much, in fact, that on more than one occasion, workers attempted to "hook him up" with young women of marriageable age in the sheet department. At the time, I remember thinking that there had to be a connection between his lewd brand of humor, his fondness for discussions about sex and dirty jokes and the fact that he was unmarried and "looking for a bride." Aziz, I thought, must have been in heat.

88. Writing about pilfering, Randy Hodson notes, "Often stories of pilferage are told and retold for the pleasure of their symbolism," in Randy Hodson, "Worker Resistance," p. 86.

89. The story also says something about how authority, exercised by shift supervisors and superiors, was potentially threatening for workers' sense of manhood and dignity. It also highlights the opportunities as well as the dangers of this relationship. Having to follow orders, being bossed around and told what to do is potentially damaging for one's conception of self and self-worth, and in Aziz's case, his conception of his masculinity. Recounting the incident was one of the ways Aziz understood and demonstrated his *rugula* (masculinity). See also Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City: Doubleday), 1959.

90. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," in *American Ethnologist,* vol. 17, no. 1, Feb. 1990, p. 41. Power and particularly resistance have become standard motifs in much anthropological and historical work. The number of studies that have dealt with resistance is truly astonishing. The concept has become a standard mode of inquiry in history, anthropology, and cultural studies.

91. Michael Brown, "On Resisting Resistance," in *American Anthropologist*, vol. 98, no. 4, pp. 729–735, 1996.

92. Sherry B. Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 37, no. 1, January 1995, pp. 173–193. See p. 175.

93. *Power/Knowledge*, ed., C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon) p. 89, 1980.

94. Ibid., pp. 120–123.

95. About being subtle, insidious, and minute, Foucault writes, "in a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize, and constitute the social body," Ibid., p. 93. About being exercised: "Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising

this power. . . . In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application" p. 98.

96. Ibid., p. 119.

97. Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance," p. 42.

98. C. Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge*, p. 119.

99. Ibid., p. 98.

100. Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 17, 1989.

101. J. Rubin, "Defining Resistance: Contested Interpretations of Everyday Acts," in *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society*, vol. 15, pp. 237–260, 1995, eds., Austin Sarat and Susan Silbey. Rubin writes that "much of the work that derives from notions of power as decentered assumes that resistance is always present in some form, that people always resist domination" p. 258.

102. See James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1990.

103. In other words, how do we define resistance?

104. See his "Tenant's Non-Violent Resistance to Landowner Claims in a Central Luzon," in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 87–106, 1986, p. 104. It is worthwhile noting a part of the quotation, which Fegan himself does not emphasize, "on the ground that a particular landlord or the tenancy system is *unjust*." What is considered just and unjust are crucial to understanding resistance practices and patterns. See also Jeffrey Rubin's "Defining Resistance: Contested Interpretations of Everyday Acts," in *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society*, vol. 15, pp. 237–260, 1995, eds., Austin Sarat and Susan Silbey. Randy Hodson defines resistance as "any individual or small-group act intended to mitigate claims by management on workers or to advance workers' claims against management. Worker resistance thus includes sabotage . . . but it also includes less destructive acts that have been referred to more generally as 'the withdrawal of cooperation' or as part of the 'effort bargain.' All of these forms of resistance are attempts to regain dignity in the face of organizations of work that violate workers' interests, limit their prerogatives and undermine their autonomy." See his, "Worker Resistance," p. 80. The point here is that resistance is a social relation, not a thing.

105. Rubin, "Defining Resistance," pp. 245, 239.

106. The Comaroffs recognize that the question of consciousness is crucial. They write, "As we put it in a recent paper (Comaroff and Comaroff 1989), much of the debate hinges on two matters: Does an act require explicit consciousness and articulation to be properly called 'resistance?' Should the term apply only to the intentions behind social and political acts, or may it refer equally to their consequences?" See *Of Revelation and Revolution*, p. 31. Their answer is that modes of control extend across a wide spectrum, from organized protest to gestures of tacit refusal and iconoclasm, "gestures that sullenly and silently contest the forms of an existing hegemony. For the most part . . . the ripostes of the colonized hover in the space between the tacit and the articulate, the direct and the indirect." (p. 31). Despite their sophistication, however, their answer does

not seem to reflect the explicit recognition of resistance as a *social relation* and not a thing. They do not take the further step that I am taking here and ask, consciousness on the part of whom? For them, the question is always (and only) posed from the perspective of the subaltern, the actor engaging in resistance. They are limited to the perspective of only *one* participant.

107. It is worth noting that no one in management used the word resistance to describe this practice or any other. In fact, no one, neither workers nor management, ever used *muqawma* (resistance) to describe any activity. Management said that eating was a "big problem that we had difficulty with," noting that it was "against the rules" and "wrong" and actively tried to stop it. The fact that no one ever used the word indicates that resistance (at least here) is an "experience-far" concept. On experience-near and experience-far concepts see Clifford Geertz, "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," pp. 226–227, in *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, eds., Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1979.

108. Imagine the scene—the new facility, designed by a Swiss company, advanced machinery, stainless steel construction, etc., and hundreds of "peasant workers" sprawled on the shop floor, casually eating together.

109. The fact that the director and the management staff had trained once "peasant workers" to actually eat sandwiches made from the more expensive (and unpopular according to their tastes and sensibilities) *aaysh fino* (long European-style bread) was considered a management victory. It is worth noting that although the overwhelming majority of workers (during the day shift) did eat sandwiches by their machines, on several occasions I witnessed workers eating collectively, out of shared plates, with *aaysh fallahi*. Their resistance (or intransigence) continues and old habits die hard.

110. They were, more mundanely, eating meals in the manner in which they were most accustomed.

111. This poses a fundamental problem for understandings of resistance that posit consciousness on the part of agents as necessary for an act to be considered resistance. The situation is even more complicated.

112. In one sense, Dr. Watash's victory was the triumph of industrial discipline and the city, making workers out of peasants and changing their habits, tastes, and culinary sensibilities. For peasant bread also symbolized the opposite of Dr. Watash and the educated, middle-class Alexandrian management.

113. Each winding machine worker at Misr Textiles was issued a plastic device. Because they were so seldom used, most workers either wore them around their necks or placed them in their pockets in order to keep their hands free.

114. Tony Watson and others have argued that one of the ways supervisors and foremen "obtain flexible and more than grudging co-operation from those they supervise" is by tolerating certain informal practices and minor rule violations (or not implementing the letter of the law). See *Sociology, Work, and Industry* (New York: London), p. 199, 1980. Note also that this practice was terribly unhygienic, for a number of reasons. First, one had to place one's lips squarely on each plastic spindle. Every winding machine operator ran two

machines, each with one hundred and twenty spindles, and performed several spindle changes each day. Thus, the number of different spindles that came into contact with one's lips was truly staggering. Secondly, the spindles circulated throughout the factory (from the winding machines to the spinning machines and then back again) and spent much of the time in between on the factory floor. The factory, and especially the floor, was not particularly clean; grease, grime, and lubricating oil seemed to get on everything. Most importantly, however, *every* winding machine operator in the entire factory extracted the yarn using the same method. Because the spindles circulated throughout the factory and were used randomly, you were placing your lips on something that every other winding machine operator had already touched in the same fashion. Although directors and shift supervisors tolerated the practice, everyone knew it was against company policy.

115. One can think of countless examples of this sort of thing. Machines were supposed to be cleaned at the end of the shift with special brushes. No one did this however. Instead we used '*awadim* (scrap pieces of wool and cotton that were readily available), except, of course, in the presence of "higher ups." See chapter 3, "The Labor Process."

116. I give as examples the quite common and mundane deviations from "the rules"; that is, number of bathroom and coffee breaks, private "business" on company time (personal telephone calls, email, Web surfing, etc.), decision making, and chain of command issues.

117. In the example it is more complicated because one and the same practice might be considered resistance by some and not by others—that is, shift supervisors and mubashrin didn't care about the informal method the workers used while engineers and management types did.

118. E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," in *Past and Present*, no. 50, pp. 76–136, February, 1971. See p. 78.

119. The manager's point was simply that workers give you what you give them in return—(translated literally as, "they give you—what the money they get is worth"). This has direct relevance for economists, at least for those who recognize that there are noneconomic elements to the exchange of labor power for a wage. George Akerlof, for example, has written that a "workers' effort depends upon the norms determining a fair day's work." See his "Labor Contracts as Partial Gift Exchange," in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. xcvii, no. 4, pp. 543–569, November 1982 and "Gift Exchange and Efficiency-Wage Theory: Four View," in *American Economic Association Papers and Proceedings*, pp. 79–83, May 1984. The wage-labor relation is not simply an economic exchange.

Chapter 5. In the *Basha's* House

1. Linda Smircich, "Studying Organizations as Cultures," in Gareth Morgan, ed., *Beyond Method: Strategies for Social Research* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications), p. 163, 1983.

2. For starters, see the special issue of *Administrative Science Quarterly* vol. 28, no. 3, 1983, devoted entirely to the concept. See also Morgan's edited volume referenced above and William G. Ouchi and Alan l. Wilkins's excellent review article, "Organizational Culture," in *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 11, 1985, pp. 457–483. Ouchi and Wilkins state that like older traditions of organizational sociology, studies of organizational culture focus on "the normative bases and the shared understandings that, through subtle and complex expression, regulate social life in organizations" (p. 458).

3. *The Statistical Yearbook 1992–1998* (Cairo: Central Agency for Pubic Mobilization and Statistics), June 1999, p. 301. See also Alia Al-Mahdi, "GPN Global Labor Market Database: Egypt," October 10, 2003, available at: www.gpn.org/data/egypt/egypt-data.pdf

4. See *Wizarat Al Istithmar Fi 'am, Birnamij Idarat Al Usul Al Mamluka Lil Dawla 'am 2006*, p. 2, available at: www.investment.gov.eg/NR/rdonlyres/A9E8DC0F-3D2C-4B45-935F-EB22F1AC17D0/5095/Report_editionpart3.pdf. In personal correspondence with officials in the Middle East and North Africa Division at the World Bank (June 2008), I was told that in 2006 public sector workers in Egypt numbered 348,800. Of course, obtaining reliable and accurate statistical information about Egypt has always been challenging.

5. See John Waterbury, *Exposed to Innumerable Delusions: Public Enterprise and State Power in Egypt, India, Mexico and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1993.

6. The Ministry of Public Enterprise was subsumed under the newly established Ministry of Investment in 2004, which is now responsible for public-sector companies.

7. In a Hobbessian way, the CEO *is* the company. Many workers and white-collar employees identified him *as* the firm.

8. *Mubashrin* (the plural of *mubashir*) are supervisory personnel directly underneath the shift supervisors.

9. At the time the CEO reported to the Minister of Public Enterprise.

10. Everyone referred to the CEO as *al-Basha* (the lord). This will be discussed below.

11. The supervisor went to the CEO and apologized, pleading with him, but Ali Bey did not change his decision.

12. The spinning factories at Misr Textiles were "steel construction" and had no windows. Once inside you could not tell whether it was 2:00 P.M. or 2:00 A.M. The factory was completely dependent on artificial light and with half the light bulbs removed, the lighting was not very good. Describing the factory's visibility before the cost-cutting measure, when all the light bulbs were turned on, one of the workers said, "one used to come here and it was as if you were going to (entering) a wedding. This bad lighting has an effect on work, the worker can't see mistakes as easily . . . especially in spinning which has fine yarn." Armed with a long brush, the worker installing the extra lighting also brushed off the existing light bulbs, dislodging cotton and polyester fibers, which then floated in the air.

13. This caused at least two other problems. First, almost all of the wheels on the bottom of the barrels that we transported raw material in were

broken as a result. This meant that moving the barrels became quite difficult. The solution, makeshift as usual, simply exacerbated the existing problem. A "rope system" developed in which a big rope would be tied around a number of barrels and one or two people would pull it, dragging the barrels from place to place, usually between the *sahb* and *barm* machines. Second, the rough, uneven floor made it more difficult to clean, resulting in more cotton and polyester fibers and dirt particles in the air, which was certainly not good for anyone's lungs.

14. The other interesting and important point to note here is that both men told me that the temperature and humidity in the work hall needed to be controlled, as this affected production (the winding process, the yarn, etc.). The factory had a special, high-tech air-conditioning system that had broken down about a year earlier. Because it was a modern "steel-construction" factory, however, the work area did not have any windows or alternative air-ventilation system. This meant that during the summer—which was when I worked there—the factory was like an inferno (the steel construction absorbed the sun's heat). The CEO, it was said, in another money-saving measure, did not want to spend the one million pounds needed to replace the expensive, imported air-conditioning system. This is an example of inappropriate technology. (The other factory where I worked—MIDIA—was built in the 1970s with little technology. With many large windows on all the walls, it was much more pleasant to work in and did not suffer from the same problems. We regulated the temperature simply by using the windows.) The Swiss company that designed Misr Textiles, however, assumed that something of this scale and expense would be run like a Swiss firm—no skimping on expense or production. The bathrooms (specifically toilets with seats and hand dryers) were another example of inappropriate technology. After several weeks, all the hand dryers broke and management replaced the European-style toilets with "Turkish toilets" as they were much easier to keep relatively clean.

15. The truth is that to overcome the sweeping problem, workers (with either the shift super's tacit approval or under his orders) often sprayed water on the floor. Dr. Watash and the senior engineer might have known this or they might not have noticed—spending most days in their air-conditioned offices (which in the case of Dr. Watash did not look into the factory but had a much more pleasant view looking outside the building). This was, in some ways, solving one problem by causing another.

16. The raw material for this machine—a special cotton and stretch polyester blend—was produced in another part of the same factory, and that section was running behind. It was uncertain when they would finish another batch for us—it could be done in five minutes or an hour. The production engineer did not want to be in the position of having the machine sit idle when the delegation (and the CEO) showed up.

17. If the machine was turned on, however, it might run out of raw material before the delegation arrived. Again, the appearance of being productive was more important than production itself. The next day, the senior engineer wanted to show me the different types of machines in the factory. Most of the machines at Misr Textiles were relatively new and fairly sophisticated. Many

of the pulling machines, for example, came with built-in computers, which measured production, including the weight of what was produced, the number of times the machine stopped during a shift and other types of information (including general efficiency readings). By coincidence, he demonstrated the computer's capabilities on this very pulling machine. It came out to 39 percent efficiency whereas the other shifts on the same machine usually get no less than 80 percent and some get even higher. He was quick to say that there were reasons other than the visit that led to the low efficiency that day!

18. Something very similar happened at MIDIA. Once Mahmoud said, "just like Hosni Mubarak—they only clean the streets and paint the curbs when he comes."

19. Of course, one of the reasons behind the CEO's visits—planned, rumored, or probable—could have been to get everyone on their toes and working. Even if this were the case, however, and I don't believe it was, it was still a terribly inefficient system since preparing for these visits took time and resources and meant less time working than on regular days.

20. The sign itself is intriguing. Why is it that workers use this particular signal to mean that a "higher-up" is on the way? Hierarchy in the factory is similar to and to some extent modeled on military hierarchy. In the early years of the public sector, many company directors were ex-military officers appointed by the Nasser regime.

21. It is also interesting to note *how* Dr. Watash and the head engineer heard that the CEO might be coming. When I asked the engineer how he knew the CEO was coming today he told me that someone had seen his schedule book. The production engineer quickly remarked half-jokingly, "he's not the only one who has spies. We have our ways as well." From what I gathered, they had someone in the inner circle—a secretary, administrative assistant, or his driver—who was told of the visit or had access to his schedule.

22. Making everyone wait was another exercise of power. It was his right, the privilege of his position. See Robert Levine, *A Geography of Time: The Temporal Misadventures of a Social Psychologist, or How Every Culture Keeps Time Just a Little bit Differently* (New York: Basic Books), 1997.

23. Although the CEO's visits might have been worse for the "higher-ups," they were tough on everyone. It was difficult to extend machine stoppages for an extra minute or two, take a break or talk with a friend when he was said to be visiting the factory.

24. The same thing happened but on a much smaller scale whenever it was rumored that a *murur*—a surprise inspection—was about to take place. We usually had less preparation for such visits.

25. This is very similar to the receiving lines that greet the president every time he travels. Whenever the president leaves or enters the country all of the ministers come to the airport to meet him. Surely they could be doing better things with their time. But what would happen if one of them decided not to go to the airport but to actually work instead. Most likely, they would be out of a job the next day! The same thing happens when the president

travels overseas and is greeted by the entire Egyptian diplomatic delegation stationed in the country he is visiting.

26. It wasn't the CEO or his personality—it was the way one managed in Egypt—part of the ideology of management—that you had to be tough, almost ruthless with workers (and those underneath oneself more generally) or else you would lose all authority. Otherwise, people believed that workers would lose respect for you and take advantage of your "weakness." And nothing would be accomplished.

27. It was the company's own version of the gulag.

28. This, of course, was the intention. Sending the shift supervisor to this factory was a form of punishment.

29. Sometimes people took desperate measures to get an audience with the CEO. My closest friend, sheikh Darwish, hid behind a support beam and as the factory head walked by he jumped up to meet him. The usual response was, "go talk to my assistant."

30. Both of these officials were terribly important in their own right, wielding tremendous power. They wrote down every word the CEO said, which would later become law. What is interesting is that these two officials became completely subservient in his presence but were incredibly powerful and tyrannical on their own.

31. Both *Bey* and *Basha* were official titles of status conferred on distinguished members of Egyptian society (usually large landowners) by the monarchy before the 1952 revolution. *Bey* and *Basha* were two different degrees of lordship, and both titles are used colloquially today in an informal manner. Although honorific titles (especially *Basha* and *Bey*) are quite common in Egypt, it is much less common to refer to individuals as *al-Basha* or *al-Bey* while not in their presence. Usually, these titles are placed in front or said in place of someone's name while addressing them directly. Although this occurred in the company (that is, when employees spoke to him directly they addressed him as "*ya Basha*"), something more than this occurred as well. When employees spoke about him (among themselves in the cafeteria, in their offices, or on the shop floor) they referred to him as *al-Basha* (with the definite article)—literally "The lord." And it was unmistakable who one was referring to when one said "*al-Basha*" in the company or in any conversation regarding the company. Although workers sometimes addressed their supervisors (and employees addressed their immediate superiors) as "*ya Basha*," there was only one *al-Basha* and it was absolutely clear who he was and whom you were referring to. How one addresses someone and the title (honorific) used is very important more generally (and reflects the unbelievable hierarchy of the society). These small practices establish and maintain relations of hierarchy. So, similarly, workers address their shift supervisors as *ya rayyis* (boss/head) while supervisors address workers as *ya wala* (boy) or as *ya wala* followed by the worker's name (as in *ya wala* Hussein). Interestingly, this does not apply to workers who are known as sheikhs, making the status (power, prestige) of the title of sheikh that much more important. See chapter 2.

32. I have addressed this phenomenon elsewhere. See chapter 3, "The Labor Process." Safwat *al-harami* once said that the CEO didn't like it when people addressed him as Bey, which, although still an honorific of respect, is lower than *Basha* in the hierarchy of titles and status. Employees are also conscious of what they say about the CEO and are careful how they refer to him. It was said that "the walls have ears" and if two people are alone in a room they often still refer to him as *al-Basha* fearing that if they referred to him by his name (let alone saying something derogatory or disrespectful) someone outside might hear and they could get in trouble.

33. It was infantalizing, degrading, and it could be humiliating. His power was almost magisterial. Seeing highly powerful people—the senior company officials—prostrating themselves in front of him, completely powerless, was also interesting.

34. The meetings also said to everyone that the CEO could help you with one word or make you miserable with another.

35. See Michael Burawoy on "industrial citizenship" in "The Anthropology of Industrial Work," in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 8, p. 255, 1979. Burawoy makes a similar argument with regard to bureaucracy in modern organizations. He writes, "The grievance procedure turns struggles between classes into struggles between the individual and the company. The system of day-to-day factory administration represents workers as industrial citizens-individuals with rights and obligations." See also his, *The Politics of Production*, p. 10.

36. *Al-Ragil* (the man) was another, much less common but more hip, vulgar, and masculine, reference to al-Basha. A few of the workers sometimes used it to refer to the CEO. The reference to masculinity was obvious.

37. And then Shohdy said something to the extent of, "this is his kingdom."

38. All roads lead to Rome . . . and to Caesar. All white-collar employees who were about to be hired had to have a final interview with the CEO. This established a personal relationship, even if it was only in the employee's imagination, between themselves and *al-Basha*, cementing the idea that he hired them, that he gave them their job, and that he could also take it away.

39. Having to go through people instead of institutions to address one's problems and pursue one's concerns leads to the development of patron-client relations. Workers (and everyone else in the firm) needed to establish and maintain good contacts with people above them—especially the most powerful people they knew—so that they could call upon them for help when they needed them. This highlights the informal, hierarchical, and clientalistic aspects of these relationships.

40. I am not claiming that bureaucracy is inherently inefficient. Although bureaucracy often "evokes an image of inefficiency" because "by the nature of their activities, officials produce very little of tangible good to anybody else, and their work might appear to be simply red tape," bureaucracies have coordinating and organizing functions, not to mention their importance in administering fair treatment. But in the context of an organization like the ETUF, set up more

to control workers than to represent their interests—bureaucracy can become pathological, "involving unnecessary rules and procedures, and . . . the stifling of all initiatives by using these rules and procedures actually to block them." See Edward C. Page, *Political Authority and Bureaucratic Power: A Comparative Analysis* (New York: Harvester), pp. 6–7, 1992.

41. The ETUF was established and is maintained by the state more to secure its own interests than to defend the interests of workers. The two are very often at odds.

42. At the factory level, the union's most important role was organizing yearly *ma'arid* (exhibitions) that allowed employees to buy consumer durables (and clothes) on credit and at "reduced prices." The organization of these *ma'arid* was said to be incredibly lucrative for the union officials, as they negotiated with wholesalers and retailers to sell their products. In other words, it was rumored that union officials received kickbacks from the retailers. It would seem to have been an incredible opportunity for the merchants since the cost of the commodities purchased was regularly deducted from workers' wages and thus, they were guaranteed payment. I compared the prices for color television sets in Alexandria during the summer of 1996 and found the *ma'arid* to be noticeably more expensive than the "free market."

43. Most commentators label the ETUF as corporatist. See, for example, R. Bianchi, *Unruly Corporatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1989; M. Posusney, *Labor and the State in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press) 1997; Huweida 'Adly, *al-'Umal wa al-Siyasa* (Cairo: Kitab al-Ahali); N. Christine Pratt, *The Legacy of the Corporatist State* (Durham: Durham Middle East Papers) 1998. The problem I have with this, however, is that the ETUF does not provide real, actual, or effective representation of workers. Corporatism is about interest aggregation and representation—industry and labor cooperating or negotiating with(in) government—and is not the same as the sham representation of labor. Providing the classic definition, Schmitter writes: "Corporatism 'can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognised or licensed (if not created) by the State and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for absolving certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports.' " See "Still the Century of Corporatism?" in F. Pike and T. Strich, eds., *The New Corporatism: Social-Political Structures in the Iberian World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), 1974. Posusney provides an excellent account of the ETUF as an institution. The questions that remain, however, are how important is the ETUF to most workers, when has it supported, encouraged, or engaged in collective action, for instance, and what do workers think of "their institution?" Any account of the ETUF is likely to tell us more about the intestines of the Egyptian state (the large bowels to be more exact, corrupt, and foul), than it will about "ordinary workers."

44. For a different perspective on unions and what they do, see Richard Freeman and James Medoff's *What Do Unions Do?* (New York: Basic Books),

1984. Freeman and Medoff write, "the union constitutes a source of worker power, diluting managerial authority and offering members protection through both the 'industrial jurisprudence' system, under which many workplace decisions are based on rules . . . instead of supervisory judgment or whim, and the grievance and arbitration system, under which disputes over proper managerial decision-making on work issues can be resolved. As a result, management power within enterprise is curtailed by unionism, so that workers' rights are likely to be better enforced." Ibid., p. 11.

45. Workers recounted how, in the old days, when Rashid was a "nobody," he would borrow cigarettes and money from them. They said he was self-serving, only interested in himself and his own personal gain.

46. Ironically, Rashid was also one of the candidates for parliament in my district of Alexandria. He was a personal friend of the CEO, and later an enemy. The CEO played a tremendous role promoting him within the union hierarchy. Everyone said that without Ali *Basha*, Rashid would never have been the head of the ETUF. Some of the workers remembered a co-worker traveling to Cairo with a serious complaint to deliver to their old co-worker who now had tremendous resources at his disposal and was immensely powerful. The worker arrived in Cairo (after a three-hour train trip), made his way to the headquarters of the ETUF, and waited to see Rashid. After telling him his sob story, Rashid simply said, "I can't help," and gave him ten pounds for lunch.

47. In fact, it was co-terminus with the firm. See the following paragraphs describing the make-up of the union at the company level. Reporting on events at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in Mehala Al-Kubra in November 2007 (not to be confused with Misr Textiles), Faiza Rady writes, "the workers' coordinating committee distributed a leaflet in which they accused the plant's newly appointed union leader, Masaad Al-Fiqi, of catering to the president of the General Union of Textile Workers . . . instead of representing labour interests." In the same article, Rady reported that "14,000 Mehala workers signed a petition to impeach their local union committee and denounce the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) as an arm of the government." See, Faiza Rady, " 'The Struggle is One,' " *Al Ahram Weekly*, 8–14 November, 2007.

48. It was said that people ran for union seats to gain money and power, if they wanted a nicer apartment or a car.

49. Many people took advantage of credit and purchased things they couldn't otherwise afford and thus the *ma'arid* were considered an important service. Deductions were made directly from wages and there was a limit regarding what percentage of someone's wages/salary could be deducted. This served to limit purchases.

50. And when it did, it did not occur within the institutions of the union. In fact, the union did not have an institutional existence, just positions and people occupying them. Part of this had to do with the CEO's ability to neutralize it as an institution.

51. No one believed in the union because it was a creature of the state and at the local level, it was controlled by the firm. It had severely limited real

powers, was co-terminus with the firm and was composed of elected officials who were thoroughly self-interested and easily co-opted.

52. See Bianchi, *Unruly Corporatism*, p. 129. This, of course, also happened at the national level.

53. See Nicola Pratt, *The Legacy of the Corporatist State*, op. cit., p. 53. She writes, "Due to their illegality, workers' protests are always organised independently of their trade unions. . . . In fact, trade unions have usually condemned striking workers, and have even informed the security forces of an imminent protest."

54. Darwish added, "He says he brought you here [to this position]. Therefore, you can't do anything against him!"

55. See Nazih Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris), p. 349, 1995. Note also that overall my "findings" vary significantly from Samir Youssef, *System of Management in Egyptian Public Enterprise* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press), 1983. His account, like many, emphasizes public-sector managers being constrained by the General Organizations and "a complex set of laws and regulations." (p. 16). "Managers faced with a maze of rules and regulations had very little opportunity to make decisions on their own" (p. 17) . . . a general problem has been to over-centralize . . . dependency on the central government" (p. 102). The difference can potentially be explained in a number of ways. First, Youssef's account is heavily influenced by "management studies," which could potentially bias him in this direction. Additionally, my account analyzes the CEO's power vis-à-vis the firm and its employees—not other firms, government organizations, or regulated markets. Finally, his book was published in 1983 (well before law 203/1991) and addresses an era when state-owned enterprises were, in fact, more heavily regulated.

56. See Pratt, *The Legacy of the Corporatist State*, p. 61.

57. For example, the right to hire someone after the official retirement age as a "consultant." There were quite a few workers as well as nonworkers who were rehired in this capacity. Mohamed *'aknana* was one such "consultant" on our shop floor and the old weaving department next door had someone as well.

58. Ali Bey's was a kind of emergency appointment—to rescue the firm. It was said that the company was losing 100 million pounds a year at the time of his appointment. See also Ibrahim Khalil, "Ahmed Abou Al Wafa and Public Money," in *Ruz al-Youssef*, November 4, pp. 13–15, 1996. (Note there is a page misprint in the original. The article begins on page 13 although it is printed as page 17.)

59. Of course, price only provides one kind of accountability—financial and efficiency—and this is assuming competitive markets. Although price provides some measurement of efficiency, it doesn't say anything about the qualitative aspects of labor or the organization of production.

60. See Ratan Kumar Jain, *Management of State Enterprise in India: A Study of the Organization and Management of Public Sector Enterprises in Indian Setting* (Bombay: Manaktalas), p. 92, 1967. One of the primary

purposes of accountability is to safeguard against the potential abuse of power and corruption. Accountability ensures that the CEO is answerable for his decisions (and performance) including, hiring, firing, promotion, policy changes, strategy. "In its most narrow interpretation, accountability involves answerability to a higher authority in the bureaucratic or inter-organizational chain of command." See Kevin Kearns, *Managing for Accountability: Preserving the Public Trust in Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), p. 7, 1996.

61. Ratan Kumar Jain, Management *of State Enterprises in India*, pp. 92–93.

62. Ibid., p. 168. Among the different forms of accountability, Jain discusses "administrative and legal," "efficiency accountability," and "financial." "The effective use of accounts for the purpose of accountability, however, presupposes the existence of a strong, efficient, and independent body of auditors" (p. 95). Note, however, that in Egypt, *al-rikaba al-idariyya* (the Administrative Supervision Agency), although ostensibly set up for this purpose, is used primarily as a method of punishment and harassment—after the fact—and as a justification to replace CEOs. A similar situation exists within firms.

63. Aly El Salmi, *Public* Sector *Management: An Analysis of Decision-Making and Employment Policies and Practices in Egypt* (the Technical Papers of the ILO/UNDP comprehensive employment strategy mission to Egypt, 1980) technical paper no. 6 (Geneva: ILO), p. 18.

64. The function of the public relations department was not clear. The factory rarely had visitors and although the company advertised, it certainly was not in need of an entire department devoted to public relations. Sheikh Darwish was certain that the public relations department was basically the way that State Security kept track of people in the company and their activities. Darwish said that Ibrahim Hassan (head of the wool preparations department) would tell public relations if certain people seemed overly religious. For example, on the Fridays the factory is open; there is also a Friday *khutba* (sermon). If the person giving the *khutba* says anything about the state, politics, etc., Hassan would tell public relations, who would in turn inform State Security. The public relations department also uses certain people who act more or less like spies—regular workers who provide information (no doubt for some benefit) on other workers and their doings (see the case of the letter discussed later in this chapter).

65. Although it was officially the *sanduq al-ta'min*, everyone informally referred to it as the *sanduq al-zamala* (collegial fund). The *sanduq* worked very much like a pension fund except that it was an institution specific to MIDIA, in addition to the national pension system. Money was deducted directly from employees' wages or salaries throughout the year. When they reached sixty—retirement age—employees received their share of the proceeds, which was significantly more than what they contributed because the firm invested the money in the meantime.

66. If you left the company before reaching sixty, for example, you only got back what you put in. This wasn't right, Khamis claimed, because "your

money is working the whole time. If you would have put it in any bank it would have become larger—you would have gotten interest." There were other things that needed to be changed. If you suffered a death in your family the *sanduq* gave you a measly fifty pounds. This was much too little, he said. And if you needed a loan ("to marry off your kids or to change apartments," for example), Khamis believed you should be able to borrow money—up to three thousand pounds—from what you contributed. Employees could pay it back by receiving less money at age sixty, he said. "After all, it's our money. We should be able to do with it as we please."

67. Of course the locus classicus of this definition of the state (I have made a slight modification), is Max Weber's "Politics as a Vocation." "Today, however, we have to say that a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory." See p. 78, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge), 1985 (italics in the original).

68. For Hobbes, breaking the law was a personal insult to the sovereign.

69. Ayman also acknowledged that walking away from someone, especially someone older, is considered very rude. Ayman said, "the CEO doesn't really ask questions. He asks questions that he already knows the answers to!"

70. The stool was also lower than the chair, making it somewhat awkward to sit at as it was not the appropriate height for the desk.

71. A *mulahiz* was below a director in the factory hierarchy.

72. This seemingly trivial interaction demonstrates how agents through small, everyday practices reproduce hierarchy and a system of authority relations. No one needed to make anything explicit or give the situation a second thought. We improvised, yet it was effortless improvisation. We were going to sit according to our rank. This was one of the ways the firm's organizational structure and hierarchy were enacted in the world. It had long since become part of the *habitus* of working in the factory. See my discussion of hierarchy and seating on company buses at Misr Textiles in chapter 6 for an analysis of an institution *as* practice.

73. Examples like this abound. For instance, although '*Am* Sayid Rizq (like all of the shift supervisors in our department), often had tea with the workers, he would sometimes order a worker to bring him tea at his desk.

74. Because many needed the extra money and work on Friday was relatively lax, it was desirable to be asked to work on Fridays. Supervisors had many other small potential sources of power. Although the number of cigarette breaks workers could take, for example, was regulated, many *mubashrin* allowed them to smoke more frequently than what the rules allowed. This was a source of good will as well as a source of power.

75. This idea is neither new nor specific to Egypt. Graeme Salaman writes, "Managers and army officers, for example, in Britain if not elsewhere, very often have separate eating, recreation, and toilet facilities, presumably on the grounds that, within British class culture, 'familiarity breeds contempt.' " See his *Working* (London: Tavistock Publications), p. 28, 1986. Class divisions in Egypt run at least as deep as in Britain.

76. The literal translation of this is "laugh at you." The meaning, however, is to take advantage.

77. I imagine this was the case because Ramzi was a relatively well-educated young man who found himself supervising women workers close to his age. The fact that he was only going to be working as a shift supervisor temporarily might have also contributed to this.

78. This is how Dr. Watash explained the existence of separate buses for shift supervisors and workers at Misr Textiles. Although it was inefficient to have different buses for different groups, Dr. Watash claimed that too much contact between workers and shift supervisors would make it difficult for the latter to perform their jobs successfully.

79. This is not to assume that employment in the private sector is necessarily better.

80. And yet despite hierarchy, asymmetrical power relations and the arbitrary exercise of authority, in spite of the absence of institutions capable of addressing their grievances and bereft of a union willing to promote their interests, workers found ways to resist—at times quite successfully—negotiating how they worked as well as how hard they worked, regulating their time and their effort. Through small acts of sabotage, insubordination, pilfering, evasion, and short cuts, workers occasionally managed to creatively escape work and their supervisors, with obvious implications for the firm. See chapters 3 and 4.

81. It should be obvious that although I have been intentionally provocative in my discussion of "the CEO as Leviathan," this has not been an argument about Oriental Despotism, the Egyptian Authoritarian Personality or "hydraulic society." Instead, I have attempted to provide something approaching an institutional and cultural account of the centralization and concentration of power, the lack of accountability and the absence of what some have called "industrial citizenship."

Chapter 6. Ethnography, Identity, and the Production of Knowledge

1. See Lorraine Bayard de Volo and Edward Schatz, "From the Inside Out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research," *PS: Political Science and Politics* April 2004, pp. 267–271. The fact that de Volo and Schatz need to write an article arguing for the potential utility of ethnography as a method for students of politics, something that should be quite obvious, demonstrates the state of the discipline, dominated as it is by quantitative methods, formal modeling, and other nonfieldwork, nonqualitative approaches to the study of politics. Moreover, the authors temper their enthusiasm for ethnography as method with statements such as, "[E]thnography has shortcomings, but if used judiciously, its contribution is noteworthy." Although their hearts are in the right place, the authors display an incredible defensiveness about ethnography, as if somehow it is inherently problematic in a way that other research

methods are not. De Volo and Schatz do not address the more complex issues about the role of the ethnographer in the production of knowledge discussed here.

2. See for example, Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co), 1961. Some have called these "author-evacuated texts." See Judith Okely and Helen Callaway, eds., *Anthropology and Autobiography* (London: Routledge) 1992.

3. Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: the Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 1988, p. 4–5. For an excellent analysis of the arrival trope see Mary Louise Pratt, "Fieldwork in Common Places," pp. 27–50, in James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1986.

4. See Peggy Golde, ed., *Women in the Field: Anthropological Experiences* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing), 1970, p. 2.

5. See Clifford Geertz, Works *and Lives,* and James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1986.

6. In fact, Geertz claims that epistemological questions about "the problematics of field work" (and the status of ethnographic knowledge) have actually obscured the real question. He expresses the problem this way: "The difficulty is the oddity of constructing texts ostensibly scientific out of experiences broadly biographical, which is after all what ethnographers do, is thoroughly obscured." See *Works and Lives*, p. 10. For Geertz, this is a "narratological issue," not an "epistemological one."

7. See Judith Okely's prescient "The Self and Scientism," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 6 (3), pp. 171–188, 1975. See also Judith Okely, "Anthropology and Autobiography: Participatory Experience and Embodied Knowledge," pp. 1–28, in Judith Okely and Helen Callaway, eds., *Anthropology and Autobiography* (London: Routledge), 1992; and Kirsten Hastrup, "Writing Ethnography: State of the Art," pp. 116–133 (esp. p. 119) in the same volume.

8. Judith Okely, "Anthropology and Autobiography," p. 14, in J. Okely and H. Callaway, eds., Anthropology *and Autobiography*. See also Pat Caplan, "Engendering Knowledge: the politics of ethnography (part 2)," p. 15, in *Anthropology Today*, vol. 4, no. 6, December 1988.

9. For an interesting analysis of the place of "the field" in anthropology, see Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science (*Berkeley: University of California Press), 1997.

10. In some ways, my loyalty to Egypt was at stake in my answers. It also seemed that people wanted contradictory, or at least complicated, answers to the first question. "Of course, Egypt is better than anywhere else including the United States. It is, after all, where we are from!" At the same time, however, one can only deceive oneself so far, and if I did not begin with complaints and criticism about the political, economic, and social problems in the country, they

did. Although most people were fierce and unthinking nationalists, they were also filled with unending criticism of the state of affairs in the country.

11. After Fathy asked about milk consumption in the U.S., he said, "I would be lying to you if I told you my kids drink milk everyday."

12. This phrase, *min al-dar ila al-nar (*from home to hell), rhymes in Arabic.

13. Interestingly enough, this sentence was first uttered by Mohamed Abdou while characterizing the differences between Europe and the Middle East. Abdou (1849–1905) was one of the leading Egyptian thinkers of the nineteenth century. Exiled for three years, he traveled to Paris and London, eventually returning to become the Mufti of Egypt in 1899. These workers, however, did not know the origin of the phrase.

14. When engineers did arrive to scrutinize the machines or production, they never acknowledged the workers on the shop floor.

15. I would imagine doing ethnographic research among "over-studied" peoples would bring its own complications. In fact, some anthropologists joke that certain over-studied groups (in the Pacific islands, for example) have an established social category of "the anthropologist."

16. Or, *"al-thiqaffa wa al-siyassa 'and al-tabaqa al-'amilla"* (literally, the culture and politics of the working class). Misunderstandings arose not because of incorrect translation but as a result of how "culture" (*thiqaffa*) is popularly understood.

17. Although workers (like peasants) might not have "culture," they do have "customs and traditions." *'Adat wa taqaleed'* does not have the elitist connotations of *thiqafa* (culture). Everyone is thought to have traditions and customs; peasants, tribes, popular classes, etc. Lila Abu-Lughod notes a similar experience during her fieldwork. See her "Fieldwork of a Dutiful Daughter," in S. Altorki and Camillia Fawzi El-Solh, eds., *Arab Women in the Field* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press), 1988. Some of my workmates have been the most tenacious and skeptical questioners of the importance of the research, its worthiness for study, and any possible conclusions I might derive. And the question of "who benefits from the research?" is an embarrassing one, as the answer is, at least most immediately—me! As one of my workmates loved to repeat—"without us, you wouldn't get the degree!"

18. One *feddan* is approximately 1.038 acres.

19. Few spoke while riding the bus to work in the morning, in part, because it was dreadfully early, all the passengers were tired and some tried to sleep on the bus. This made the outburst, noise, and confusion even more worrying—and puzzling. Although some people conversed during the ride home (in the afternoon), they were a minority.

20. I later noticed that the buses used for shift workers were in significantly worse condition than the other two types of buses. The buses reserved for top management also had higher, more comfortable seat backs. Except for the nice buses reserved for senior employees, seats were similar to those found on school buses in the United States: not individual seats separated from one another, but padded benches with back rests. Thus, not only was hierarchy reflected in which bus you rode (and with whom), but it was also reflected in

the quality of the buses, the comfort of the seats, and where specifically you sat inside the bus.

21. At the firm I worked at the longest, my company issued me an identification card, which stated, quite unnecessarily, that I had received a master's degree and listed my field of specialization.

22. Not to mention the fact that I had not finished my PhD.

23. In one case, a young female engineer was assigned to work in a lab in which the director, although older and more senior, did not have an engineering degree. It was frequently said, including by the young engineer herself, that the lab director resented the fact that one of her employees was referred to by the prestigious title of *bash muhandisa* (engineer), which she herself, not being an engineer, did not receive. A minor dispute resulted between the two women because of this issue.

24. The privatization of public sector companies has been a major component of Egypt's economic reform and structural adjustment program beginning in the early 1990s. The policy, pushed by the World Bank, IMF, and Western creditors (especially the U.S.), is highly controversial and has led to the "early retirement" and unemployment of thousands of workers.

25. *Ibn naas* literally means "the son of people," referring to not just any people but people of character, standing, and respectability. The meaning seems to have evolved over the last few decades. At first, *ibn naas* primarily referred to respectability and morals. Today, however, wealth and economic status seem to be just as essential for qualification for this category. In the context of the interview, *ibn naas* referred to my similarities with the interviewers: sharing the same class background, mixing in similar social circles, membership in the same sporting clubs, and so on.

26. The possibility of management wanting to keep an eye on me as the reason for the training department staff reacting this way to my work hours is highly unlikely. First, it was the secretarial core that primarily reacted, not the security people. Second, I am certain management did keep an eye on me, but they did not need to be physically present to do so. Finally, I got my way in the end and showed up at 7:00 A.M. every morning and left at 3:00 P.M. every afternoon.

27. Another reason wearing sandals entered my mind is that I noticed the director of the training department kept a pair of quite nice, leather sandals under his desk, which he would wear on his way to the administration bathroom to wash before praying. He was ridiculed behind his back by the young administrators for doing so. It was simply not right that a director ("of all people") should wear sandals at work, whatever the reason.

28. Darwish was usually the first one on the shop floor each morning, arriving well before the beginning of the shift. This was somewhat unusual as many tried their hardest to arrive at the very last minute. Darwish was also in no rush to leave when the bell rang. This could have been because his apartment was simply too small and uncomfortable for him and his family.

29. It is popularly believed that this is a quotation from the Quran. When it is repeated, it is done so as such. To the best of my knowledge, however, it is not.

30. Although I have no proof, I am certain that the news that I prayed was conveyed to other workers who worked different shifts with me on the same shop floor.

31. Egyptians (and the Egyptian state) often speak of *ism al-thulathy*, one's three-part name (first name, father's name, and last name).

32. Egypt, like much of the Third World, has experienced mind-boggling rural-urban migration in the decades since World War II. Many of those I worked with had migrated to Alexandria in order to find work. I, quite literally, witnessed rural-urban migration and a related process, proletarianization: the transition from agricultural to factory labor.

33. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (Chicago: Open Court), 1986.

34. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City: Doubleday), 1959.

35. See Stocking's account of William Rivers' "General Account of Method" in *The Ethnographer's Magic*, pp. 36–40.

36. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), especially chapter 2, "Structures and the Habitus," 1977.

37. The term "findings" often suggests a positivist model of the human sciences in which knowledge is assumed to be "out there," existing already, independent of us, preresearch and pretheory, waiting to be "discovered"—very much like Columbus "discovered"—or shall I say *found* America. This is in contrast to a model of the human sciences based on the idea that knowledge is produced.

38. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 1977.

39. Quoted by George Stocking in, *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 1992, p. 51.

40. See Deborah E. Reed-Danahy, ed., *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (Berg: Oxford), 1997.

41. Whether this model is even appropriate for the natural sciences is a legitimate, although thoroughly different question. As such, it can not be addressed here.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall), 3rd ed., paragraph 67, p. 32, 1958.

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