

**EXPERIENCING AND NEGOTIATING (AMBIVALENT) CAREER
BOUNDARIES: A STUDY OF SIE ACCOUNTANTS IN THE UAE**

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Abstract

Career boundaries are at the centre of this study. Through a qualitative inquiry, based on 30 semi-structured, thematically driven interviews of SIE accountants from the Asian subcontinent, who are living and working in the UAE, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which individuals experience career boundaries and how they may or may not navigate their way around these boundaries via various strategies. A key contribution of this study to the careers literature is its focus on the versatility and richness of boundaries and its examination of how individuals negotiate with a range of multiple and co-existing boundaries as they structure their careers. In particular, the findings of this study demonstrated that participants were ambivalent about their choices of coping strategies, either because they were faced with doubt (psychological ambivalence) or because contradictions within the system (sociological ambivalence) prevented them from taking an alternative strategy. Examining how individuals experience ambivalence in their careers offers a valuable contribution to the careers literature as little attention has been paid to acknowledge uncertainties and contradictions in how individuals perceive and experience a career and career boundaries. By illuminating the dynamics within ambivalent career experiences and comparing these experiences with career literature generally and career boundaries specifically, this study therefore theoretically contributes to our understanding of *why* individuals may or may not adopt certain modes of engagement in dealing with their perceived career boundaries.

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Preface

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Glossary of Acronymns

| | |
|------|--|
| SIE | Self-Initiated Expatriate |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| GCC | Gulf Cooperation Council |
| NOC | No Objection Certificate |
| CA | Chartered Accountant |
| CPA | Chartered Professional Accountant |
| CMA | Certified Management Accountant |
| ACCA | Association of Chartered Certified Accountants |

Chapter 1: Introduction

“A good theory of boundaries both introduces a new set of questions for career research to address, and redirects our attention to important questions that the boundaryless career literature has shifted focus away from”. (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012, p. 332)

Career boundaries are at the centre of this study. The interest in career boundaries, specifically those experienced by the globally mobile professional, stems from wider debates about the changing nature of career and whether or not careers have become boundaryless (e.g., Currie et al., 2006; Feldman & Ng, 2007; Gunz et al., 2000; Hirsch & Stanley, 1996; Inkson, 2006; Inkson et al., 2012; King et al., 2005; Pringle & Mallon, 2005; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). Consequently, several scholars have called for more research that examines the nature and influence of career boundaries in shaping individuals’ career experiences (e.g., Guest & Rodrigues, 2014; Gunz et al., 2000; Inkson et al., 2012; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). In this chapter, I begin by introducing the main debates associated with the boundaryless career framework. In doing so, I consider the importance of boundaries within career scholarship. I also locate career boundaries within the global careers literature and I discuss the importance of examining career boundaries perceived and experienced by self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) located in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In this chapter I also outline the objectives of this study, as well as its potential theoretical and empirical contributions. I conclude this chapter by providing an outline of all the chapters in this dissertation.

1.1. PERSPECTIVES OF THE BOUNDARYLESS CAREER

Globalization, accompanied by the rise of multinational corporations (MNCs), downsizing, and rapid technological advances (Baruch, 2003), particularly in the developed

world, have altered the way scholars conceptualize the idea of careers (Cappellen & Janssens, 2005, 2010; Carr, Inkson, Thorn, 2005). Consequently, career frameworks, such as the *protean career* (Hall, 1976, 1996, 2002), the *portfolio career*' (Cohen & Mallon, 1999), and the *boundaryless career* (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), started to gain momentum within career scholarship. The boundaryless career, often positioned in opposition to the *traditional organizational career* (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996), has proved to be an influential framework within the career literature. In a general sense the boundaryless career framework contends that, "careers are no longer constrained by organizational boundaries" (Gunz et al., 2000, p. 25) and instead represents "notions of unbounded, limitless, or infinite possibilities" (Feldman & Ng, 2007, p. 368).

Despite the important ways that the idea of the boundaryless career has advanced our current understanding of careers, the boundaryless career framework has also provoked important criticism (e.g., Currie et al., 2006; Feldman & Ng, 2007; Hirsch & Stanley, 1996; Inkson, 2006; Inkson et al., 2012; King et al., 2005; Pringle & Mallon, 2005; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). For instance, some scholars have argued that careers are not, and never have been, completely "boundaryless" (Gunz et al., 2000; Inkson, 2006; Inkson et al., 2012; King, Burke, & Pemberton, 2005; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). As Inkson (2006) suggested, while individuals may transcend boundaries, some with more difficulty than others, boundaries themselves have never ceased to exist: "the notion of boundarylessness may conjure up images of careers taking place without constraints. Is this realistic? Is it ever true that a career has *no* boundaries? Career boundaries are ubiquitous and significant" (p. 54). Empirical evidence supports Inkson's (2006) claim. For example, drawing on a study of IT professionals, King et al. (2005) demonstrated that while there may be mobility between jobs, careers are still constrained by human capital, prior

career mobility, and relationships with gate-keepers in the labour market. Their study is in stark contrast to the discourse of boundarylessness that involves individuals *cutting across* or *transcending* boundaries out of their own volition. Instead, King et al.'s (2005) study argued that careers may not be boundaryless at all, but *bounded*. In a similar vein, Rodrigues and Guest (2010) took a labour economics approach to examine general trends in job stability in the United States, Japan, and Europe. They contended there is no evidence to suggest that employment and career patterns are coalescing towards a boundaryless career model and concluded by asserting the continued significance of organizations in individuals' career patterns. This finding is further supported by Ituma and Simpson (2009) whose study not only highlighted the presence of career boundaries, but also emphasized the ways in which employees are still engaged in traditional career patterns "characterized by hierarchical and progressive movement within a single organization" (p. 727). This argument was further supported by Currie et al. (2006) who argued "the remnants of traditional structures remain given that many people are still dependent upon large bureaucratic organizations for their careers" (p. 757).

Furthermore, there is limited empirical support for the enactment of the boundaryless career (Bagdadli et al. 2003; Gunz et al. 2000, Ituma & Simpson, 2009; Zeitz et al., 2009), despite claims asserting that most careers are becoming boundaryless (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996). While the concept of the boundaryless career may be "intuitively appealing," Ituma and Simpson (2009) argued this framework "lacks theoretical rigour and offers limited empirical evidence" (p. 731). The findings from these studies reinforced Inkson's (2006) earlier arguments that career boundaries are "ubiquitous and significant" (p. 54). Given the weak empirical evidence in support of the boundaryless career, Inkson et al. (2012) cautioned the normalization of this concept as if it were "accepted as fact so self-evident it requires no

justification” (p. 329). Given these critiques, rather than treating career boundaries as if they have disappeared altogether, scholarship must consider boundaries within careers and examine how individuals cope with them. This approach not only acknowledges the presence of boundaries (Inkson, 2006; Inkson et al., 2012; King et al., 2005), but will provide a broader understanding of how individuals experience these boundaries and how they may or may not navigate their way around them.

1.2. BOUNDARIES IN CAREER RESEARCH: CONCEPTUALIZING BOUNDARIES

Career boundaries are conceptualized in the literature as having both objective and subjective dimensions¹. Objective career boundaries represent “real barriers to mobility imposed by the nature of territory that the careerist is traversing” (Gunz et al., 2000, p. 27). These may include gatekeepers who impose specific criteria for hiring and/or promotion. In contrast, subjective career boundaries are boundaries that are perceived “in the mind of the person experiencing a career” (Gunz et al., 2000, p. 27) and, “unless forced by circumstance, the individual may not test the reality of those limits so that they become self-fulfilling boundaries to career movement” (Gunz et al., 2000, p. 27). While a detailed discussion of the differences between objective and subjective boundaries is offered in Chapter 2, it is important to note here that in this study I take the perspective that boundaries are socially constructed (Inkson et al., 2012) by individuals within the contexts in which individuals are situated. In contrast to a realist ontology (Burrell & Morgan, 1998), which takes the perspective that the world is “out there” to be discovered, I emphasise that boundaries are based on individual perceptions. Individuals may

¹ As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, it is important to note that for the sake of simplicity these two conceptualizations of career boundaries will be discussed in isolation from each other. However, it is important to highlight the recursive nature of career boundaries – objective career boundaries impact the creation of subjective career boundaries, but subjective career boundaries also shape the construction and perception of objective career boundaries for individuals experiencing them.

perceive that a boundary is external to them (i.e., an objective boundary), but the existence of an actual boundary matters little; the significance of career boundaries lies in how individuals perceive them. As Gubler, Arnold, and Coombs (2014) have argued, “examining what kinds of boundary people feel ready to cross, and the nature of the boundaries they perceive, gets to the heart of individuals’ career thinking and action” (p. 642). In this study I therefore focus on examining how participants subjectively perceive career boundaries as both constraining and/or enabling, and the strategies they take when negotiating these boundaries.

1.2.1. The different roles boundaries play in careers

While boundaries can be, and often are, defined as “limits to career moves” (Bagdadli et al., 2003, p. 789), the literature does offer other conceptualizations of what a career boundary may entail. For instance, Gunz and Mayrhofer (2011) have proposed that boundaries may play three distinct roles in individuals’ career experiences. First, boundaries may *constrain* individuals’ careers insofar that they may block or limit career opportunities and/or mobility. Second, boundaries may have the ability to *enable* careers by providing structure, direction, and opportunities for career socialization². Third, boundaries have a role in *punctuating* individuals’ careers by providing them with information on the passage of time³. In light of this discussion it is important to note that in this study I do not treat career boundaries as a synonym for ‘barriers’; instead I take the perspective that boundaries may constrain, enable and punctuate careers. Such an approach allows me to consider the other influences of career boundaries on individuals’ career experiences and therefore acknowledges the “richness and versatility” of career

² For example, drawing on Gunz and Mayrhofer (2011) Inkson et al., (2012) have suggested that the process of becoming socialized into a new role enables an individual to learn how to cross certain organizational boundaries.

³ The notion that careers have a punctuating effect on individuals’ careers overlaps with Okay-Somerville and Scholarios’ argument that boundaries can enable individuals’ careers, but focuses on the temporal markers that inform the career actor with a sense of career progression. These may include moving from probationary to permanent status or transitioning from an employed worker to a retiree.

boundaries (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010, p. 1170), thus allowing for a broader understanding of how career boundaries are both perceived and experienced.

1.3. THE GLOBAL CAREER OF THE SIE

While the global careers literature examines individuals who either experience an international career as part of an expatriate assignment (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009) or through migration (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Quereshi, Varghese, & Osella, 2013; Zikic et al. 2010), there is a growing interest in the global career of the self-initiated expatriate (SIE) (Altman & Baruch, 2012; Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Dickmann et al., 2008; Doherty, 2012; Richardson & Zikic, 2007). SIEs are broadly defined as individuals who voluntarily decide to move abroad in search of adventure and opportunities, often on a quest to fulfill both professional and personal goals (Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Doherty, 2012; Doherty & Dickmann, 2012; Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013; Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008; Mayrhofer, Sparrow, & Zimmerman, 2008b; Richardson, 2006, 2008; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Selmer & Luring, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). While the extant literature has traditionally defined a SIE as someone driven by the desire for adventure who yearns to experience other cultures, Doherty et al. (2013) have suggested that securing employment, either professional and/or non-professional, is still a “key feature of the SIE” and urge scholars “[to] not overlook the extent to which career remains a necessary dimension of SIE and [to] acknowledge the centrality of career competencies, skills and experiences for facilitating and supporting this type of mobility”(p. 100). By understanding SIEs according to this broad definition, we can more fully understand the salience of careers on SIEs’ experiences.

Scholars in the field of self-initiated expatriation have regularly drawn upon the boundaryless career framework suggesting that it allows us to understand and theorize the experiences of those who choose to cross both organizational and geographical boundaries (e.g. Altman & Baruch, 2012; Crowley-Henry, 2012; Dickmann et al., 2008; Doherty, 2012; Richardson, 2008; Richardson & Zikic, 2007; Stahl & Cerdin, 2004; Tams & Arthur, 2007). Just as personal agency is reflected in the discourse of boundaryless careers it is also a key idea within the SIE discourse. SIE researchers usually emphasise the importance of personal agency and intrinsic motivation associated with SIEs' desire to expatriate (e.g., Doherty et al., 2011; Inkson et al., 1997; Shaffer et al., 2012; Suutari & Brewster, 2000) and, in turn, the SIE is often described as someone who is able to transcend geographical boundaries with ease (e.g., Doherty, Dickmann, & Mills, 2011; Inkson et al., 1997; Shaffer et al., 2012; Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

However, this definition is simplistic: simply because SIEs are able to move across geographical boundaries in the enactment of their global careers, they still may experience other types of boundaries inherent in the contexts in which they are embedded. Specifically, SIEs may encounter boundaries based on individual attributes. As Scurry et al. (2013) noted, the global careers literature treats globally mobile individuals as if they are a homogenous group of "global citizens" engaging in "global work" (p. 13). They have suggested that this approach is "problematic given that workers are not on a level playing field, and the homogenising representations of what it is and means to be global are contested at national and local levels with impositions and constructions that use nationality, citizenship and regulations to establish the differences between individuals" (Scurry et al., 2013; p. 12). The global careers literature therefore fails to consider important individual characteristics, such as race, gender, cultural differences, and individual competencies that may influence a person's career experience (Inkson

et al., 2012; Scurry et al., 2013; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Similarly, Scurry et al. have suggested that “there are boundaries to the boundarylessness through impositions based on nationality, citizenship and culture” (Scurry et al., 2013, p. 13). Echoing earlier arguments made by Sullivan and Arthur (2006), Sullivan and Baruch (2009) also have suggested that “while boundaries in general have become permeable, the ease of passage between boundaries is not the same for all individuals” (p. 1553). Consequently, this study addresses the need to investigate the range of boundaries that may constrain and/or enable career mobility as perceived by the individuals themselves.

1.4. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Career boundaries and how they may influence and shape individuals’ career experiences remain relatively under-researched (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014; Gunz et al., 2000; Inkson et al., 2012; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). As such there have been numerous calls to examine the nature of career boundaries (e.g. Guest & Rodrigues, 2014; Gunz et al., 2000; Inkson, 2006; Inkson et al., 2012; Mayrhofer & Gunz, 2009). As Inkson et al., (2012) have asserted, boundary-focused research is therefore interested in the boundaries themselves: why career boundaries may vary in permeability; what are the conditions in which boundaries may be crossed (or not) and why; what is the role of the individual career actor in crossing boundaries and what is the impact of this crossing or non-crossing on their career experiences?

To this end, this study therefore addresses the need to examine the range and nature boundaries that may constrain and enable career experiences (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). While there are studies that examine objective boundaries (e.g. Inkson & King, 2012), the extant research fails to examine “how people perceive these boundaries” (Yao et al., 2014, p. 684) and how people’s careers may be “shaped by a range of

multiple and co-existing boundaries” (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010, p. 1170). This study examines these issues and addresses Dany’s (2014) suggestion that “[s]tudying how psychological boundaries interplay with other boundaries could allow career theory to illuminate how individuals’ work matters to the inhabited world in which careers unfold” (p. 724). In other words, “this kind of research has the potential to take advantage of the study of career to better understand the interplay of individual agency and structures” (Dany, 2014, p. 724). Specifically, this research contributes to the increasing circumspection about boundaryless career as a concept by examining specific boundaries as identified and experienced by participants themselves.

There are also gaps in scholarship based on the context(s) in which careers are examined and scholars have called for a more country-specific approach to researching careers (e.g., Cohen et al., 2011; Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2007; Tams & Arthur, 2007;) to “broaden our understanding of careers beyond the economically advanced industrialized countries that Western career scholars have tended to study” (Tams & Arthur, 2007, p. 89). Recently, a few studies have offered country-specific research on careers in non-Western or non-industrialized countries where the influence of boundaries is likely to be different from a Western environment (e.g., Fernando & Cohen, 2011; Ituma & Simpson, 2009; Yao et al., 2014). These studies contributed to the extant careers literature by offering insights into national context-specific career patterns and career boundaries. This study will take a similar approach to addressing gaps in scholarship by focusing on SIE careers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The national context in which this study is embedded offers another contextual underpinning to study of career boundaries. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to contribute to a more balanced perspective of global careers by considering the career boundaries experienced by SIEs working as accountants in the UAE. Doing so not only responds to the growing number of calls to examine international careers

evolving outside the developed world (e.g., Bozionelos, 2009; Cohen, Arnold, & O'Neill, 2011; Fernando & Cohen, 2011; Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2007; Richardson & McKenna, 2010; Scurry, Blenkinsopp, & Hay, 2012), but it also may elucidate specific institutional and structural boundaries within these contexts. To address these gaps in scholarship, this study uses the conceptual framework, theories, and research questions identified below.

1.5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

This section outlines two key conceptual frameworks that I draw upon to provide a theoretical backdrop for this study. It is important to note that I use these conceptual frameworks as “sensitizing devices” rather than theory to be empirically tested (Duberley et al., 2006, p. 1133). In doing so, these frameworks provide a useful lens to examine and understand individuals’ career experiences and allow for a consideration of the question, “What are we able to see or think about [career] if we talk about it in this way?” (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, p. 42).

1.5.1. Barley’s (1989) structuration model

In this study, I emphasize that careers do not evolve in a vacuum (Inkson et al. 2012); instead, they are deeply embedded in context(s) in which they are situated. This perspective allows me to examine how individuals may account for dealing with the career boundaries they experience within these contexts. I draw on Barley’s (1989) model, which examines the role of career in the structuring process. Rather than treating structure and agency as polar opposites, Barley (1989) adopts an interpretive perspective and encourages us to “look at what individuals see as the contexts in which they operate, how they account for their own agency and how they describe the relationship between the two in telling their career stories” (Duberley et al., 2006, p. 1133). To this end, I am interested in examining how individuals perceive and experience career

boundaries within the national, organizational, and professional contexts in which they are situated and how they account for their own agency in negotiating these perceived career boundaries. While boundaries may be seen as limits to career mobility, it is important to note that they should be conceptualized as “real dilemmas to be negotiated” (Pringle & Mallon, 2003, p. 848). Using Barley’s (1989) framework as a conceptual lens allows for a richer understanding behind how individuals negotiate the career boundaries they have identified. A detailed discussion of Barley’s (1989) structuration model is offered in Chapter 2.

1.5.2. Kaulisch & Enders’ (2005) neo-institutional framework

Kaulisch and Enders’ (2005) framework provides an understanding of how individuals’ career experiences are shaped by social contexts. They argued that careers evolve in multiple and overlapping contexts (Kaulisch & Enders, 2005). Looking specifically at academics, Kaulisch and Enders (2005) identified three contexts: institutional (“science” system), national, and organizational. The institutional or science context is the specific set of rules that guide behavior within an academic profession, whereas the organizational context refers to the institution in which an individual academic is employed, and the national context refers to the host country where an individual is working. A detailed discussion on these three contexts is offered in Chapter 2.

Many scholars have contended that more attention needs to be given to the context in which a career is experienced (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004; Cappellen & Janssens, 2005, 2010; Duberley et al., 2006; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Responding to this call, Yao et al.’s, (2014) study highlighted the importance of understanding social and cultural influences on career boundaries. They argued, “both the individual and contextual perspectives provide useful material, but they need to be combined, for careers depend on the interaction of individual

agency and the constraining or enabling aspects of social context” (Yao et al., 2014, p. 694). In a similar manner, this study attempts to investigate SIE careers within a specific professional, organizational and national context. Such an approach addresses the need to “elucidate the socially and culturally embedded nature of career” (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 410).

1.5.3. Connecting Barley (1989) with Kaulisch and Enders (2005)

This study connects Kaulisch and Enders’ (2005) framework with Barley’s (1989) model to consider how SIEs within the UAE experience and navigate their perceived career boundaries in their national, organizational, and professional contexts. By considering the theories of Barley (1989) and Kaulisch & Enders (2005) in tandem, this study responds to the call to examine the interplay between individuals and their institutional contexts (e.g., Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; Duberley et al., 2006; Eaton & Bailyn, 2000; Forrier et al, 2009; Inkson, 2012). By complementing the ideas of both theoretical frameworks, I consider the role of individual action, which is *bounded* within these institutional contexts. I contend that while individuals can exert some level of agency, this agency is embedded within national, organizational, and professional contexts: on one hand, individuals are shaped by the contexts in which they are situated, yet on the other hand, they are able to shape these contexts in a recursive fashion (Barley, 1989). By using these conceptual frameworks, this study addresses the relatively under-researched topic of career boundaries and how they may influence and shape individuals’ career experiences (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014; Gunz et al., 2000; Inkson et al., 2012; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010).

Given the above-noted critical observations, this study does not assume career boundaries have disappeared, but rather identifies which boundaries exist and examines how individuals cope with these boundaries. As such, this approach not only acknowledges the presence of

boundaries (Inkson, 2006; Inkson et al., 2012; King et al., 2005), but also provides a broader understanding of how individuals experience these boundaries and how they may or may not navigate their way around them. Specifically, I focus on examining how participants subjectively perceive career boundaries as both constraining and/or enabling and analysing the strategies they take when negotiating these boundaries.

This approach to studying careers acknowledges that “career represents a unique interaction of self and social experience” (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 381). In line with Barley’s (1989) career structuration model, “institutions jointly ‘constitute’ and are ‘constituted by’ the actions of individuals living their daily lives” (p. 52). In other words, the social world in which the individual is situated in is not “fixed”; rather it is “constructed by individuals through their social practices” (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 409). The way individuals assign meaning to their careers, and career boundaries is therefore an “active and creative” process (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 411). By taking this contextualized and subjective approach to studying careers in this study (see Young & Collin, 2004), ‘career’ is considered to be socially constructed by the individuals who experience it, and in context. This perspective of career “recursively links the individual to the wider, changing social world” (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 409) and “elucidates the socially and culturally embedded nature of career” (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 410). As Cappellen and Janssens (2010) affirmed, “careers need to be situated in the contexts within which they develop” (p. 689). By focusing on the career experiences of a particular group (i.e., professional SIEs from the Asian subcontinent) within the UAE, this study contextualizes an understanding of global careers generally and career boundaries specifically.

1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Informed by the study's conceptual frameworks and literature dealing with global boundaryless careers, this study aims to “bring back boundaries” (Inkson et al., 2012, p.323) to the careers literature generally and the global careers research specifically, in order to understand how individuals account for and deal with identified boundaries. I identify three broad research questions to be explored:

1. How do SIE accountants from the Asian subcontinent experience boundaries in the context of their career?
2. What boundaries do SIE accountants from the Asian subcontinent identify as being constraining or enabling forces on their career experiences?
3. How do SIE accountants from the Asian subcontinent negotiate and/or leverage their perceived career boundaries?

Through a qualitative study, based on semi-structured, thematically driven interviews, the primary focus of this dissertation is to explore and develop an understanding of the career boundaries experienced by SIE accountants from the Asian sub-continent⁴ who are living and working in the UAE. By examining the experiences of these expatriates in situ, in this study I treat careers as if they are *bounded* within their structural contexts (Inkson, 2006; King et al., 2006). These research questions are intended to uncover how SIE accountants from the Asian subcontinent experience career boundaries within their professional, organizational, and national contexts and how they manoeuvre their way around these boundaries. An exploration of these

⁴ Generally, the Asian subcontinent includes the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka.

strategies facilitates an understanding of the interplay between agency and structure in career research.

1.7. EMERGING THEMES FROM THE FINDINGS: THE SALIENCE OF AMBIVALENCE

Even though there is an alignment between the themes that emerged from the findings and those in the careers literature, the prevalence of uncertainty, mixed feelings, and contradiction throughout all of the participants' accounts of their career experiences pointed me to another body of research, namely that of ambivalence⁵. While research has started to examine the experience of ambivalence in organizations (e.g. Ashforth et al., 2014; Plambeck & Weber, 2009; Vadera & Pratt, 2013) much of this research is based on a psychological conceptualization of ambivalence. The findings (discussed in chapters 5 and 6) reveal that the way participants give meaning to their work experiences is ambivalent, both psychologically and sociologically (for a full discussion on both of these components, see section 2.7). Despite the burgeoning research around ambivalence within organizational studies, the role of ambivalence specifically in career studies is absent.

Using ambivalence as a lens through which to understand career experiences offers an alternative perspective to the discourse of free-will and fluidity that is embedded within our current understandings of the SIE as it allows for an examination of the conflicted thoughts and feelings inherent in career decisions and career experiences. While some of the global career literature proclaims SIEs “can decide for themselves where to apply and which job offer in

⁵ It is important to note that an examination of ambivalence was not part of this study's original research objectives and therefore does not constitute the study's research objectives. Instead, it is a key finding that emerged after data collection and now represents an important theoretical and empirical contribution to the study of career boundaries. In order to preserve the way in which ambivalence emerged in the fieldwork, the study's original research questions remain; however, a conceptual discussion of the concept of ambivalence is still offered in chapter 2 before I present the empirical findings related to this theme in chapter 5.

which country to accept in order to promote their careers” (Biemann & Andresen, 2010, p. 434), this perspective ignores the importance of structural factors in shaping careers. Instead, ambivalence “bridges social structure and individual lives by emphasizing the tensions between them” (Connidis & McMullin, 2002, p. 565). Not only does the framework of ambivalence complement the work of Barley (1986), but studying these tensions or “in-between” spaces of contradiction and conflict within individuals’ career experiences provides the opportunity to explore the challenges individuals face as they enact their career, which is often marked by conflicting expectations of social roles.

1.8. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter 2 examines some of the main themes with the boundaryless careers research. In particular, I identify several theoretical and empirical gaps related to the boundaryless careers framework and provide a case for “bringing back boundaries” to the global careers research specifically and the career research generally. I then discuss how individuals negotiate and/or manage the constraining and/or enabling boundaries they have identified and I highlight the importance of considering both individual agency and structure. Chapter 3 describes the study’s research process (with special attention given to issues relating to accessing the study’s sample, interviewing participants, and analysing the data) and the methodology for interpreting the data to ensure quality and robustness.

Chapter 4 discusses research questions 1 and 2. The focus in this chapter is to examine how boundaries are perceived subjectively and how they constrain or enable a career from the perspective of the participants themselves. This chapter is therefore organized based on the main

boundaries identified by participants⁶. In each section I highlight factors that participants attribute to boundaries themselves and consider the extent to which participants feel these enable or constrain their career experiences in the context of the UAE. Chapter 5 empirically examines the findings relating to ambivalence. In this chapter I argue for the importance of examining this concept particularly in light of the objectives of this study. Chapter 6 discusses the findings related to research question 3. In particular, I consider how participants negotiate the perceived constraining and/or enabling career boundaries embedded in their contexts. Finally, Chapter 7 reflects on the entire study discusses the specific theoretical and empirical contributions of this dissertation for understanding SIE careers generally and career boundaries specifically. In this chapter I also reflect on the entire study and propose areas for future research.

⁶ It is important to note that all the boundaries I introduce in this chapter are based on participants' perceptions of them. In contrast to a realist ontology, which takes the perspective that the world is out there to be discovered, I emphasise that the boundaries are based on the perceptions of the participants themselves. While participants may perceive that a boundary may be external to them (i.e., an objective boundary), the key is that they have perceived them as such.

Chapter 2: Re-introducing Boundaries to Contemporary Career Theory

There is an extensive body of literature dedicated to the concept of the boundaryless career. Introduced by Arthur and Rousseau (1996), this concept was developed in order to address the limitations of researching careers within large bureaucratic organizations and to reflect the apparent demise of the traditional career, which often is characterized by its organization-centered hierarchical linear progression, long-term employment, and job security (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan, 1999). The boundaryless career is a framework for understanding careers that evolve across an organizational setting. While the boundaryless career framework has been widely applied, and considered, as mentioned in Chapter 1, it also has provoked some important criticism (e.g., Currie et al., 2006; Feldman & Ng, 2007; Hirsch & Stanley, 1996; Inkson, 2006; Inkson et al., 2012; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). In this chapter, I look at some of the key issues found within the boundaryless careers literature and review some of the criticisms surrounding this concept. During this discussion, I draw attention to the paucity of research that examines types of boundaries within the careers literature. I then discuss the significance of boundaries in understanding SIE career experiences. I also highlight how individuals may cope with the boundaries they have identified, drawing on Duberley et al.'s (2006) 'modes of engagement' and highlight the importance of both individual agency and structure in shaping individuals' career experiences. I finally provide an overview of how ambivalence, a theme that emerged from the findings, is conceptualized in the literature.

2.1. OVERVIEW AND CRITICISMS OF THE BOUNDARYLESS CAREER

2.1.1. The Boundaryless Career

Over the past two decades, research on the organization-centered career, typically characterized as linear progression within a single organizational setting, has made way for the notion of a boundaryless career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Baruch, 2004; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Hall, 1996; Handy, 1994). The boundaryless career concept developed within a North American context, which was experiencing changes to its economy, including de-regulation, organizational restructuring, globalization, increases in knowledge work, and technological advancements (Banai & Harry, 2004; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Tams & Arthur, 2010). In response to these changes, career scholars asserted that individuals not only had to adjust to the ways in which they pursued and enacted their careers, but also that they needed to develop coping strategies that made them less reliant on their organizations (Banai & Harry, 2004; Currie et al., 2006; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Tams & Arthur, 2010). Consequently, career scholars seemed less interested in focusing on the traditional notion of a career, based on vertical progression within a single employment setting, and research in this area therefore started to decline (Eaton & Bailyn, 2000; Hall, 1996; Sullivan, 1999; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

Based on these environmental changes, career researchers believed that individuals' attitudes regarding work and their careers were evolving (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). For instance, changes in family structures, such as the rise of dual-earner couples, and an individual desire for more meaningful work, among other things, meant that traditional career models often examined within the literature had to be readjusted (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). As a result, the literature called for a broader understanding of careers and career experiences based not only on

the employee-employer relationship, but also on a consideration of issues that involved an individual's professional and personal life.

Defined as a “sequence of job opportunities that goes beyond the boundaries of single employment settings” (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996, p. 116), the boundaryless career framework was constructed not only to capture the changing career landscape, but also to encourage researchers to adopt a more inclusive, holistic picture of careers beyond a single organizational setting (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Collin & Young, 2000; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). Such an approach allowed career researchers to consider how a career transcends the employee-organization relationship and can be sustained by other activities, such as external networks and personal and family commitments (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). The boundaryless career framework therefore allowed for a broadening of previous conceptualizations of career to include life beyond the organizations, where individuals' careers develop over time and through a variety of work and non-work experiences (Table 1).

Table 1

Comparison of Traditional and Boundaryless Careers

| Career Attribute | Traditional | Boundaryless |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Employment relationship | Job security for loyalty | Employability for performance and flexibility |
| Boundaries | One or two firms | Multiple firms |
| Skills | Firm-specific | Transferable |
| Success measured by | Pay, promotion, status | Psychologically meaningful work |
| Responsibility for career management | Organization | Individual |
| Training | Formal programs | One-the-job |
| Milestones | Age-related | Learning-related |

Note. Adapted from “The Changing Nature of Careers: A Review and Research Agenda,” by S. Sullivan, 1999, *Journal of Management*, 25, p. 457-484.

As seen in Table 1, compared with the traditional career, the boundaryless career framework is based on the notion that an individual is responsible for his/her career management. The boundaryless career suggests an individual can have little to no reliance on an organization to be the main force in determining and managing his/her career. Instead, according to this framework, individuals “unilaterally take charge over their [own] careers” (Banai & Harry, 2004, p. 98). The boundaryless career framework asserts individuals have the drive, as well as the wherewithal, to pursue meaningful work aligned with their own individual aspirations.

2.1.2. Criticisms of the Boundaryless Career Framework

While the boundaryless career framework has become prominent within the careers literature, it is not without its criticisms. Some career scholars, such as Inkson et al. (2012), feel

broadly describing the boundaryless career as “the opposite of organizational careers” may have created an impression that career boundaries may be restricted only to the organizational context (p. 326). Consequently, several scholars felt that this framework gives priority to organizational boundaries at the expense of other types of boundaries such as geographical, industry, occupational, professional and role boundaries (Gunz et al., 2000; Inkson, 2006; Inkson et al., 2012).

Additionally, the boundaryless career framework is problematic because it does not widely discuss the range and nature of career boundaries.⁷ Furthermore, this focus on a limited kind of boundary relates to a narrow focus on a certain group of individuals who have this type of boundaryless career. As Pringle and Mallon (2003) have argued, the boundaryless career framework focuses on a limited range of people within specific occupational contexts. Likewise, Currie et al. (2006) argued that the boundaryless career framework reflects only a privileged few because being “successful” at enacting a boundaryless career focuses on “the development of scarce technical skills and/or membership of small firms in networks with rich connections” (p. 757). By extension, Sullivan and Arthur (2006, p. 1553) have contended, “[W]hile boundaries in general have become permeable, the ease of passage between boundaries is not the same for all individuals”. This limited focus is problematic because most of the tenets associated with boundaryless career framework simply do not capture the experiences of most individuals (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Consequently, Pringle and Mallon (2003) encouraged researchers to not only examine other industries, but also the experiences of individuals who may be marginalized from the careers literature, such as ethnic minorities, blue collar workers, and the poor, most of

⁷ There are a few exceptions (e.g., Bagdadli et al., 2003; Gunz et al., 2000, 2002; Ituma & Simpson, 2009; Pringle & Mallon, 2003); however, most boundaryless career literature does not discuss the range of career boundaries.

whom arguably do not even have a ‘career’⁸. Further, because contexts are different, the nature, form and shape of a career will take many forms. This is compounded by the individual career actor themselves and how they subjectively perceive their career boundaries (this will be discussed further in section 2.2.). Examining the effects of multiple and co-existing boundaries, as identified by the participants themselves, therefore enriches our understanding of careers more generally and career boundaries specifically.

Furthermore, some researchers contended that the boundaryless career framework may be difficult to operationalize, thus making it ineffective to utilize when studying careers (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). One reason the boundaryless career framework is hard to operationalize is due to its broad definition. As Arthur and Rousseau (1996) noted, the term “boundary” can refer to objective *and* subjective boundaries and can be investigated from a micro (individual) or macro (environment) perspective (Feldman & Ng, 2007). Given this broad definition, Rodrigues and Guest (2010) suggested that the boundaryless career framework has turned into “an umbrella concept,” thus losing “the usefulness in addressing changing career dynamics” (p. 1169). Further, Dany (2014) has argued that the boundaryless career is “ill-defined” and “used with different meanings,” which has “unfortunately prevented scholars from taking advantage of the literature to develop a cumulative approach of career” (p. 723). Ambiguous and imprecise definitions therefore “render it inadequate as a central concept in future theory-building” (Inkson et al., 2012, p. 324).

Finally, some authors have cautioned against the overly positive rhetoric of the boundaryless career model (e.g., Currie et al., 2006; Hirsch & Shanley, 1996). For instance,

⁸ In line with the way the career concept is treated in this study (see discussion in section 1.6), it is argued that some careers may be “seen as legitimate and valued, while others are cast aside as deviant, or are simply ignored” (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 409).

Zeitz, Blau and Ferig (2009) have argued that the discourse within the boundaryless careers literature often evokes “seductive connotations of escaping limits and exploring uncharted territory” (p. 372). This language does not address the challenges individuals may face in boundaryless careers, such as “increase[d] external constraints on individual actions and unpredictability” (Hirsch & Shanley, 1996, p. 224). For example, Currie et al.’s (2006) study found individuals faced anxiety, not elation, when faced with boundaryless careers. As Currie et al. (2006) observed, following corporate restructuring, organizational boundaries became more permeable and boundaryless. However, “rather than feeling liberated from the constraints of the organizational-career,” many individuals were left feeling “anxious about the loss of the organizational boundary as an orienting device for their career progression” (Currie et al., 2006, p. 767). Similarly, Hirsch and Shanley (1996) have suggested that even if a boundaryless career does provide opportunities for individuals to take control of their careers, for some workers the idea of boundarylessness means the feeling of stable employment within one organization has been replaced with instability, volatility, and precarious work regimes. In addition, the overly optimistic discourse surrounding boundaryless careers may be “potentially harmful for weaker employee groups” including women, ethnic minorities, and poorly educated individuals (Dries, Van Acker, & Verbruggen, 2012, p. 272).

Further, Currie et al. (2006, p. 758) suggested that beyond these ‘seductive connotations’ there may be a ‘dark side’ to the boundaryless career, which is driven by an organizational need to cut costs, “where risk is transferred from firm to employee in the name of organizational flexibility in a way that impedes employability of the individual”. This line of thinking is echoed by Roper, Ganesh, and Inkson (2010) who argued that the boundaryless career framework may have individualized the employment relationship, shifting responsibilities from the organization

onto the worker to maintain their own job security and employability. Within this context, it is therefore important to consider whether ‘boundarylessness’ is an individual choice or not. While some individuals may seek out and benefit from a career that is ‘boundaryless’, many individuals may experience “involuntary boundarylessness” (Currie et al., 2006; Pang, 2003) due to organizational layoffs and restructuring.

Given the existence of apprehension possible within boundarylessness careers, scholars like Feldman and Ng (2007) have argued for a “more precise, value-neutral specification” of the concept in order for “serious research to accumulate in meaningful ways” (p. 369). Emphasizing the “evocative” (Inkson et al., 2012, p. 327) language surrounding individuals who can “seamlessly move around and work in multiple contexts” (Harrison, 2006, p. 20) is problematic as it fails to consider the influence of structure on individuals’ career experiences. The positive connotations associated with the boundaryless career concept have become part of the discourse within the boundaryless career framework, and therefore should be subject to further critical investigation.

2.2. CONCEPTUALIZING BOUNDARIES

Another way of understanding careers is by understanding the ways in which boundaries are conceptualized in the careers literature. The extant literature considers both objective and subjective boundaries when examining individuals’ career experiences. According to Gunz et al. (2000), objective boundaries usually refer to the structural or institutional factors *imposed* on the individual, whereas subjective boundaries are *perceived* in the minds of individuals and often reflect individuals’ own perceptions regarding their capabilities (Gunz et al, 2000, 2007). It is important to note that for the sake of simplicity these two will be discussed in isolation from

each other in the following sub-sections; however, it is also important to highlight the recursive nature of career boundaries – objective career boundaries impact the creation of subjective career boundaries, but subjective career boundaries also shape the construction and perception of objective career boundaries for individuals experiencing them.

2.2.1. Objective career boundaries.

Objective boundaries represent “real barriers to mobility imposed by the nature of the territory that the careerist is traversing” (Gunz et al., 2000, p. 28). These boundaries may be viewed as ‘labour market imperfections’ (Gunz et al., 2000) driven by a reluctance of selectors to grant opportunities to individuals based on a variety of factors within the industry, including specialization, occupation, education, professional qualification, work experience, geography, “and to a lesser degree (although nevertheless real), age, race, ethnicity, sex and religion” (Gunz et al., 2002, p. 62). Empirical evidence supports this assertion. For instance, by drawing on a labour market perspective, King et al. (2005) highlighted that demand-side boundaries can consist of the experience and skills considered to be important for the given job. They argued that recruitment agencies, through their role of screening and shortlisting candidates function as intermediaries between individuals and organizations. As gatekeepers, recruiting agencies become boundaries that constrain the amount of options available to an individual (e.g., Zeitz, et al., 2009; Zikic et al., 2010). Zikic et al. (2010) demonstrated that individuals seeking employment may face other gatekeeping-imposed boundaries, such as having their foreign qualifications and/or work experience discounted or being required to undergo lengthy and expensive recertification processes. Individuals also may experience career constraints due to gender and/or racial discrimination based on hiring firms’ “reluctance to select” (Gunz et al., 2000, p. 50). It is important to note that Ituma and Simpson’s (2009, p. 748) study of technical

professionals in the Nigerian information and communication technology industry suggested, these perceptions, “are not a result of irrational thoughts of the gatekeepers held only at the individual level or aberrations but rather are ingrained in the Nigerian psyche and are largely the outcomes of the institutional framework embedded in the Nigerian context”. This demonstrates the idea that individuals are inextricably connected with the contexts in which they are embedded and their perceptions surrounding career boundaries are shaped by these contexts.

2.2.2. Subjective career boundaries.

Opposed to objective boundaries, which are externally imposed upon individuals, Gunz et al. (2000) have suggested that subjective boundaries are internal and are “constructed in the head[s] of those experiencing [them]” (p. 27) based upon “socially determined perceptions of what is valued and appropriate behaviour” (King et al., 2005, p. 998). Thus, individuals use their perceptions about what others value to establish subjective boundaries for themselves (Gunz et al., 2000). These perceptions may establish a subjective boundary constructed in the minds of individuals (Gunz et al., 2000). While it was previously noted that gatekeepers may restrict career opportunities to individuals based on job-related requirements, Ituma and Simpson (2009) indicated that this may also be due, in part, to the *perceptions* individuals may have regarding their *own* educational qualifications. Therefore, while the objective boundary of gatekeepers may be *imposed* onto the individual, subjective boundaries refers to the boundaries we “place on ourselves when we wonder what we could possibly do” (Gunz et al., 2000, p. 28). Therefore, in addition to being faced with others’ subjective perceptions of them, individuals may also experience a ‘reluctance to move’ based on their own subjective perceptions of themselves. Based on these perceptions individuals may therefore restrict their own career opportunities.

However, it is important to highlight once again that these perceptions may be shaped based on the institutional contexts in which individuals may be situated. This will be discussed further in section 2.5.

Further, individuals may establish subjective, career-restricting boundaries based on their perceptions of themselves and their understanding of their own qualifications (Ituma & Simpson, 2009). As a result of their own perceptions regarding their own capabilities, individuals do not “test the reality of those limits, so that they become self-fulfilling boundaries to career movement” (Gunz et al., 2000, p. 28). In this manner, subjective boundaries may cause a “reluctance to move” or change careers. Bagdadli et al. (2003) found that individuals’ reluctance to move was due to a concern that their skills or firm-specific competencies may no longer be of value in the labour market, whereas Zikic et al. (2010) demonstrated individuals’ subjective career orientations are often dependant on the objective reality they face. Furthermore, individuals’ reluctance to move may be due to low confidence levels that stem not only from the individual him/herself, but also from objective barriers or other individuals by whom they have been confronted (Gunz et al., 2000; Zikic et al. 2010). For example, qualified immigrants were “very much ‘bounded’ both by the objective career barriers they faced and by their perceptions of these barriers” (Zikic et al., 2010, p. 680). As Gunz et al. (2007) have argued, boundaries are subjectively perceived and socially constructed; they exist both in the minds of individuals and the minds of others.

Iellatchitch et al. (2003) argued that subjective career boundaries are not just based within an individual’s mind, but also are connected to their career fields. Inspired by Bourdieu’s (1997) notion of *field*, Iellatchitch et al. (2003) broadly defined career fields as the “historically embedded social contexts” in which individuals are situated (p. 732). Within each career field,

individuals develop a *habitus*, which represents an internalized set of attitudes, beliefs and values, and dispositions (Iellatchitch et al., 2003). Iellatchitch et al. (2003) contended that individuals may be constrained by their habitus. Put simply, “what they can achieve is constrained by what they envisage for themselves (King et al. 2005, p. 984). Since the field is the structural context in which the habitus operates, Iellatchitch et al. (2003) offered an insightful framework for thinking about how subjective boundaries are deeply connected with the institutional environment.

2.2.3. Enabling and punctuating career boundaries.

As the aforementioned discussion has centred on how boundaries may constrain careers, it is important also to consider the other influences of career boundaries. While boundaries can be, and often are, defined as “limits to career moves” (Bagdadli et al., 2003, p. 789), a boundary does not have to be a synonym for a barrier. Nonetheless, much of the literature does not offer other conceptualizations of what a career boundary may entail. While empirical support does suggest that boundaries can, and often times do, restrict and constrain career mobility, Gunz and Mayrhofer (2011) reminded us that they may also help individuals “mak[e] sense of one’s place in the world” (p. 50) by taking on the roles of *enabling* and *punctuating* careers.

In an *enabling* career, boundaries play a role in structuring individuals’ career passages (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2011); they provide order to a career in the form of structure and orientation (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2011). For example, specific organizational boundaries, such as strict promotion criteria, give individuals a sense of structure and direction in the development of their careers. In the case of SIE professional accountants, it is argued that while strict promotion criteria may constrain career mobility if the standards at which individuals are being evaluated exclude them, it may also provide individuals with a sense of direction with respect to knowing

how to move to the next level in the organization by meeting certain standards set out in the promotion criteria.

Gunz and Mayrhofer (2011) also highlighted the temporal element of careers and suggested that boundaries have a positive role by *punctuating* people's careers; that is, boundaries can provide individuals with temporal markers associated with career progression, particularly surrounding passing certain "rites of passage" (Inkson et al., 2012, p. 333). In addition to providing the individual with a sense of structure, careers also have a temporal element to them as they involve the movement through both space and time (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2011). The use of career scripts (section 2.4.) offer an important role in punctuating an individual's career as it provides 'markers' of what to achieve, and more importantly, by when. While the discussion thus far has focused on boundary-crossing in a spatial sense, it is critical to examine how individuals traverse career boundaries temporally as well. As Inkson et al., (2012) have suggested, "the punctuating role is informative about the meaning of time to the career actor and about how this relates to his or her sense of career progression" (p. 334). For example, experiencing a career milestone such as being promoted to 'manager', moving from probationary to full-time status, or transitioning into retirement (Inkson et al., 2012) signifies a 'crossing' of a temporal boundary as boundary-crossing events such as these are salient in punctuating the passage of time (Inkson et al., 2012). By considering boundaries in this manner, we not only contextualize them within a specific 'space' (i.e. different contexts), but also within a specific point in time (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2011).

2.3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BOUNDARIES IN UNDERSTANDING SIE CAREER EXPERIENCES

These above-mentioned characteristics of boundaries are essential for understanding global careers and SIEs. However, the importance of boundaries is often overlooked since the boundaryless career has often been used as a ‘prototype’ for understanding a global career (Carr et al., 2005; Inkson et al., 1997; Stahl et al., 2002; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007; Tung, 1998). As Carr et al. (2005) have demonstrated, a global boundaryless career involves the movement and mobility across geographical and international boundaries. Just as personal agency is reflected in the discourse of boundaryless careers it is a key idea within the SIE discourse too. Researchers in the field of self-initiated expatriation have emphasised the importance of personal agency and intrinsic motivation associated with SIEs’ desire to expatriate (e.g. Doherty et al., 2011; Inkson et al., 1997; Shaffer et al., 2012; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). With respect to the motivation to go abroad, SIEs have been portrayed in the literature as people who are free to move of their own accord, mainly to pursue some form of an adventure (Inkson et al., 1997; Myers & Pringle, 2005; Richardson & Mallon, 2005); to advance career development or learning (Richardson, 2006; Richardson & McKenna, 2006; Selmer & Luring, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000); or to merely escape from the monotony or dullness of everyday life in their home country (Richardson & McKenna, 2006).

While these motivations to go abroad may certainly hold true for many SIEs, it ignores the consideration of potential barriers faced by some individuals (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Scurry et al., 2013). Further, emphasizing this discourse of free will and fluidity that is embedded within our current understandings of SIEs, and accepting the resulting “ideology of self-reliance” (Zeitz et al., 2009, p. 376) can lead us to ignore the importance of the context in

which SIEs work. To understand SIEs, we should explore the social structures that shape career patterns and experiences (Dany et al., 2003; Forrier, Sels, & Stynen, 2009; Inkson, et al., 2012; Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Tams & Arthur, 2010). This idea is reinforced by Cohen et al. (2004) who argued that “examin[ing individuals] in isolation from their social circumstances” is problematic (p. 412). Examining contextualized career experiences of individuals (e.g., Blustein, 2004; Cohen et al., 2004; Duberley, Cohen & Mallon, 2006; Fernando & Cohen, 2004; Inkson et al., 2012; Ituma & Simpson, 2009; Kaulisch & Enders, 2005) can shed light on how SIEs negotiate structural factors, such as “labour market segmentation, institutional rules and regulations, [and] organizational policies” (Forrier et al., 2009, p. 740) and can demonstrate how context may influence individuals’ career experiences.

Part of SIEs’ context involves the boundaries which are embedded in them. While self-initiated expatriation “may, by its very nature, involve crossing national boundaries, further institutional and disciplinary boundaries may be more difficult to cross” (Doherty et al., 2013, p. 17). Compared with corporate expatriates who have organizational support, SIEs may face more difficulty in obtaining visas and work permits because they do not have the support of an organization. Several researchers have shown the inability to obtain visas or work permits may be a constraining boundary that impedes the fluidity of movement often evoked within the concept of the boundaryless career (e.g. Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Scurry et al., 2013; Shaffer et al., 2012). On the flip side, and linked with the notion that career boundaries may also be enabling (section 2.2.3.), obtaining a work visa may also be made easier if the location has a high demand for qualified migrants. As discussed previously individuals may therefore simultaneously experience both ‘winning’ and ‘losing’ (Currie et al., 2006) with respect to the career boundaries they identify and experience. This idea is important for this

study, which attempts to examine the multiple and co-existing boundaries, as identified by the participants themselves.

While existing studies have suggested that expatriates believe international assignments act as a facilitator for career advancement (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Doherty et al., 2011; Suutari, 2003, Tung, 1998), other empirical work has indicated international assignments can limit career advancement due to boundaries established based on nationality and race (e.g., Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Qureshi et al., 2013).

Important in some studies of the boundaryless career is the idea that the ‘career actor’ must possess ‘career capital’ in order to be successful in shaping their own career (Arthur et al., 1999; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). Drawing on their notion of the intelligent career, DeFillippi’s and Arthur’s (1996) conception of “career competencies” spoke to the central role of individual agency, which they applied to the boundaryless career framework. They suggested that in order for an individual to successfully enact a boundaryless career, he/she must have three sets of career competencies: ‘knowing-why’, ‘knowing-how’, and ‘knowing-whom’. Firstly, ‘knowing-why’ competencies relate to an individual’s motivations and values in pursuing a career, and the meaning they assign to having a career (Arthur et al. 1999). As the boundaryless career framework argues against the organization as being the primary shaper of an individual’s career, it is increasingly important for individuals to have a level of self-awareness that provides them with a personal identification with their work (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010).

Secondly, ‘knowing-how’ competencies are concerned with, “career relevant skills and job-related knowledge, and underlie how people contribute to a firm’s repertoire of overall capabilities” (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996, p. 309). In contrast to a ‘traditional’ career perspective, often characterized by a life-long employer-employee relationship, within a boundaryless career

framework, it is essential for individuals to be able to transfer these skills and expertise across many organizational settings (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Jones & DeFillippi, 1996). Finally, ‘knowing-whom’ competencies reflect career-relevant networks and relationships. DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) suggest that networks provide an individual with ‘social capital’ which can aid in increasing job opportunities.

However, when examined in the context of SIEs’ global career experiences, the issue of whether only a ‘privileged few’ are able to access these ‘capitals’ needs to be considered. For instance, studies have indicated that SIEs experience career difficulties in the host country if their qualifications or credentials are not recognized, utilized, or treated differentially (e.g. Carr et al., 2005; Fang, Zikic, & Novicevic, 2009; Jones, Thomson, McKenna, 2013; Qureshi et al., 2013; Zikic et al., 2010). In this sense, individuals lack the necessary ‘know-how’ capital to be able to effectively enact a career in the host country. Drawing from the ‘brain drain’ literature, Carr et al. (2005) therefore considered this a form of “talent waste” as skilled individuals are underutilized in the host country. With respect to the ‘knowing-whom’ career competency, research has indicated that in an attempt to adjust to their new setting SIEs actively engage with both their professional and personal networks (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2012), which could have an enabling effect on their career experiences. However, due to their ‘newness’ of this context, SIEs may be denied access to important networks (Carr et al., 2005), thus restricting their career opportunities in the host country. In this manner, SIEs may experience limited access to important networks, which can constrain future career options (Bozionelos, 2009; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014).

2.4. LINKING CAREER STRUCTURES AND INDIVIDUAL AGENCY

2.4.1. Individual Agency

As discussed, the boundaryless career literature emphasizes the role of the individual actor and individual agency (Dany, Mallon, & Arthur, 2003; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010; Inkson et al., 2012; Zeitz et al., 2009). Given uncertain labour market conditions, research has focused on “enabling individuals to engage effectively within the context of changing and modernizing social structures” (Tams & Arthur, 2010, p. 633). In this manner, the literature often describes individuals as being able to make career-related decisions based on personal choices and values (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Career actors are therefore portrayed in the literature as being able to “sculpt” their own career trajectories rather than becoming “corporate sculptures” (Inkson et al., 1997, p. 354-355).

It is important to highlight that the literature often depicts these individuals as being the “main agents” (Bird, 1994, p. 337), who, “scramble, bee-like, from opportunity to opportunity without regard to boundaries” (Jones and DeFillippi, 1996, p. 89). However, as discussed, by focusing too much on the individual agent, we run the risk of ignoring the importance of social structures in shaping his/her career patterns and experiences (Dany et al., 2003; Forrier, Sels, & Stynen, 2009; Inkson, et al., 2012; Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Tams & Arthur, 2010). Based on these concerns, a complementary approach within the careers literature focuses more on the importance of grounding our understanding within a social context (e.g. Blustein, 2004; Cohen et al., 2004; Duberley, Cohen & Mallon, 2006; Fernando & Cohen, 2004; Inkson et al., 2012; Ituma & Simpson, 2009; Kaulisch & Enders, 2005) and considering how structural factors may influence individuals’ career experiences. Consequently, the next section examines the

importance of considering the interplay of individual agency and structure for this study, by paying particular focus on Barley's (1989) structuration model of career.

2.4.2. The interplay of individual agency and structure: The Barley (1989) model

Inspired by the earlier work of Giddens (1984), Barley (1989) contributed to career theory by considering the balance of both structures and agents without giving primacy to either. Structure refers to “rules and resources recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems” (Giddens, 1983, p. 33). As New (1994) has argued, “the agents who are variously positioned in these systems draw on these rules and resources in order to act and in so acting, reproduce them” (p. 194). As opposed to treating structure and agency as polar opposites, structure then is viewed as both a medium and an outcome of individual action (Barley, 1989; Cohen et al., 2004; Duberley et al., 2006).

As depicted in Figure 1, Barley's (1989) model considers the relationship between institutions and individual action and interaction, with career scripts acting as a mediator in this relationship. Originally developed through Barley's (1989) model of career structuration, career scripts refer to the schemas and norms, or required ‘performances’ in specific situations (Gioia & Poole, 1984), which guide career behaviours; they are not only internalized by the career actor, but also are deeply entrenched within social structures (Gioia & Poole, 1984). This idea of career scripts is reinforced by Barley and Tolbert (1997) who have argued that “organizations, and the individuals who populate them, are suspended in a web of values, norms, rules and beliefs, and taken-for-granted assumptions, that are at least partially of their own making” (p. 93). In this manner, individuals envision what is attainable (or not) based on the structures within which they live; in other words, there are ‘rules’ attached to having a certain career and individuals must

learn these normative expectations and behaviours to play within them. An individual's chance to 'boundary cross' is therefore linked not only to their habitus, but to the structures within the field, i.e. the 'rules of the game' (Iellatchitch et al. 2003). While there is some degree of individual agency, the career actor is therefore not 'free', but deeply embedded within structures in which they are situated. Careers therefore need to be examined at the intersection of individual agency and structure.

Figure 1. The Role of Career in the Structuring Process: The Barley (1989) Model

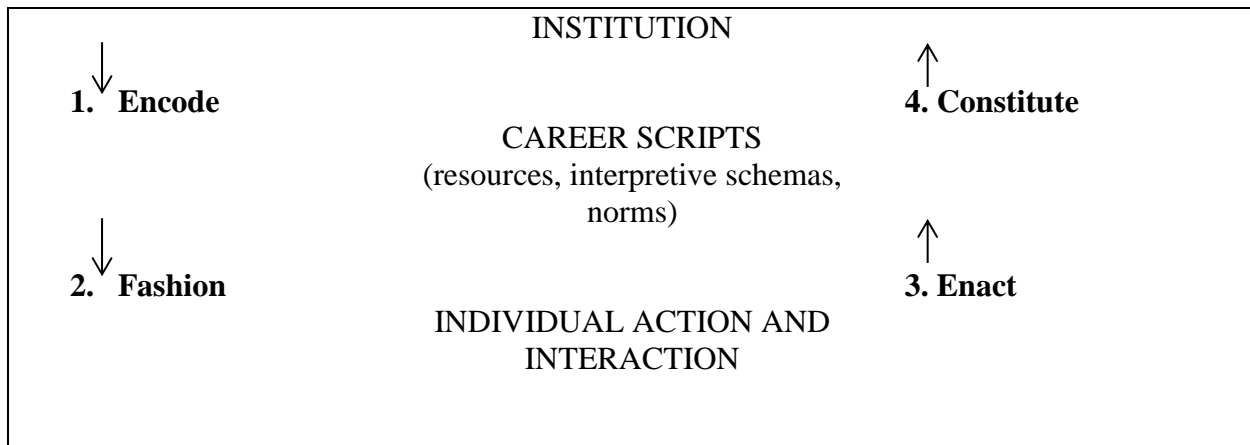


Figure 1: The Role of Career in the Structuring Process. Adapted from: Barley, S. R. (1989). Careers, identities and institutions: The legacy of the Chicago School of Sociology. In M. B. Arthur, D. T. Hall, & B. S. Lawrence (Eds.), *Handbook of career theory* (pp. 41-65). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

However, it is important to note that within Barley's (1989) model of career structuration, individuals do have agency in the sense that they can navigate their way around the rules of these contexts. Individuals engage in "career actions" according to the career script that they may find the most suitable (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; Dany et al., 2003). As this study is concerned with gaining an understanding of how individuals navigate their way through their identified career boundaries, Barley's (1989) model of career structuration therefore acts as a useful heuristic to understand how individual actions and structures may be interlinked.

2.5. THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT: KAULISCH AND ENDERS (2005)

Tams and Arthur (2010) have asserted, “it would be a fallacy to assume that boundaryless careers (defined by their relative independence from organizations) could be constructed independently of contextual constraints and boundaries” (p. 633). It is not enough to simply identify and examine career boundaries; rather, it is also necessary to contextualize them. This study therefore considers the role of the ‘career actor’ who is embedded within their professional, organizational, and national contexts (Kaulisch & Enders, 2005). Further, there is an appreciation in the literature that careers evolve and are shaped within several contexts, which include professional, organizational, national, and global environments (e.g., Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; Currie et al., 2006; Duberley et al., 2006; Kaulisch & Enders, 2005; Richardson, 2009). In order to develop an in-depth understanding of how SIE professional accountants experience and deal with career boundaries it is important to examine “an intersection of several influencing contexts” (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010, p. 688).

In an attempt to explore this idea further, Kaulisch and Enders (2005) adopted a neo-institutional framework in understanding how academic careers are embedded within societal and institutional contexts. In their study, Kaulisch and Enders (2005) identified three contexts: institutional, national, and organizational. Drawing on neo-institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1997; Zucker, 1997), they focused on “the institutional embeddedness of human agency in social structure” (Kaulisch & Enders, 2005, p. 130). These three contexts, including examples of boundaries specific to this study are highlighted in Table 2, and are also discussed in the next sub-sections.

Table 2

Examples of Boundaries Within Contexts

| Context | Attributes |
|----------------|---|
| Professional | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social relations/networks• Accounting qualifications/designations• Prestige/reputation• Accounting rules and policies |
| Organizational | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public accounting firms versus industry• Promotion criteria• Global mobility emphasis• Client relationships |
| National | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Labour market• High reliance on foreign workers• Labour laws (e.g. No Objection Certificates)• Kafala system• Language preference• Cultural norms (e.g. networking - <i>Wasta</i>)• Accounting principles (e.g. taxation laws)• Racial hierarchy |

2.5.1. Professional Context: Accounting Professionals and the Accounting Profession

A professional context is the context specific to the profession within which an individual is embedded. Previous studies have examined the impact of the professional context within the science discipline, specifically on the career experiences of academics (e.g., Duberley et al., 2006; Kaulisch & Enders, 2005; Richardson, 2009; Duberley et al., 2006). In these studies, this context has been characterized by a specific set of rules for conducting research and teaching within academia. Applying this idea to the accounting profession, it is important to consider the specific set of rules within the public auditing context. For example, Cooper and Robson (2006) described professional services firms as “important sites where accounting practices emerge,

become standardized and regulated, [and] where accounting rules and standards are translated into practice” (p. 416). This idea can be connected to the career boundaries literature in two ways. First, the importance of profession-specific rules and policies indicates that SIE accountants require the necessary ‘know-how’ (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996) to enact their career. Second, these rules and policies may influence the ‘career scripts’ (Barley, 1989) that individuals may have access to, thus these rules and policies guide individuals’ behavior. As Arthur et al. (1999) asserted, career scripts can be understood as “institutionally rather than individually determined programs” (p. 689). As Barley (1989) suggested, career scripts act as a mediator between ‘institutions’ and ‘individual action and interaction’. To that extent, Cappellen and Janssens (2010) have suggested that institutions (i.e., organizations or the professional community) translate these scripts into specific schemas and norms, which can then guide individual action and interaction. Highly regulated accounting rules and policies may therefore serve the function of encoded career scripts that help guide the career behavior of SIE accountants.

The professional context is also associated with the social relations and communities within the discipline, especially networks (Cohen et al., 2004; Duberley et al., 2006; Kaulisch & Enders, 2005; Richardson, 2009). Given the role networks and social communities may have on individuals’ career experiences, it is important to examine whether ‘who you know’ (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996) is salient within the accounting profession and the role this may have on individuals’ career experiences, if any. Prior studies that have adopted this framework also have stressed the importance of the reputation and prestige associated with the professional context (e.g., Cohen et al. 2004; Kaulisch & Enders, 2005). The prestige associated with having a

“Chartered Accountant⁹” designation may also be an important consideration for SIE professional accountants from the Asian subcontinent and a factor that warrants exploration.

2.5.2. Organizational Context: Accounting in Professional Services Firms Versus Accounting in Business Organizations

In their study of academics, Kaulisch and Enders (2005) and Richardson (2009) identified specific organizational contextual factors that are relevant to a university setting. For the purposes of thinking about certain organizational factors specific to the accounting profession, it is important to note the distinction between working in a public accounting firm and in a business organization¹⁰. In contrast to public accountants who work for a range of organizations within a range of industries, those who work as private accountants work in internal audit functions, thus “accountants working in industry have a different sense of their responsibilities than those working in large firms” (Cooper & Robson, 2006, p. 416). Private accounting jobs tend to have more of a consistent work schedule with less travel compared with public accountants whose work is client-heavy with an emphasis on regular travel to different client sites (www.roberthalf.com).

Anderson-Gough, Grey, and Robson (1998) suggested that there is often a rhetoric of “the bottom line” within public accounting firms. Since these types of organizations are reliant on client revenue to increase their earnings, there is a heavy emphasis on client satisfaction and maintaining client relationships, both of which are important considerations in promotions decisions for accountants. Anderson-Gough et al. (1998) also contended that with this bottom-

⁹ Internationally recognized professional designation for qualified accountants who are able to provide accounting services to the public. The primary functions offered by Chartered Accountants can include assurance services, taxation, business consulting, financial planning, analysis and reporting.

¹⁰ Working in a public accounting firm provides accounting services to other businesses; working in a business organization is considered as ‘private accounting’ where individuals work in a company in a specific industry (www.roberthalf.com) “provides accounting services to others and gain experience working with a variety of businesses”.

line ethos, there tends to be a survival-of-the-fittest organizational culture. Public accounting firms are described as having a “steeply pyramidal structure” (Anderson-Gough et al., 1998, p. 576) and while there may not be an explicit organizational policy, there appears to be a “tacit norm” (Anderson-Gough et al., 1998, p. 576) whereby individuals must be promoted each year or otherwise leave the firm. Due to the very limited positions available at the Partner level to which public accountants strive to be promoted, many individuals choose to opt out of public accounting firms to instead work as private accountants. Linking this to the careers literature as mentioned in section 2.2 it is argued that individuals are faced not only with objective boundaries imposed *onto* them but this objective ‘reality’ may subsequently shape their own subjective perceptions of their own abilities.

2.5.3. National Context: The UAE

Since the discovery of oil in 1966, the UAE has become a major player in the global environment, especially with respect to trade and finance, industries intimately tied to the oil industry (Davidson, 2009). The growth of the oil industry and its related economic developments have led to a high demand for foreign labour with various skills (Forstenlechner, 2010) and foreign workers contributes to and sustains the UAE’s economy. In fact, 85% of the UAE’s population is made up of foreign workers, with the majority of these individuals having moved from Arab and Asian countries (Edwards, 2011; Randeree, 2009). Further, its workforce to population ratio is one of the highest in the world at 75%¹¹. This high ratio stems from the fact that foreigners residing in the UAE are legally obligated to adhere to the Kafala system, whereby individuals who wish to move to the country to work must enter into a contractual agreement with an Emirati, institution, or employer to obtain an entry visa and residence permit (Barria,

¹¹ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.EMP.TOTL.SP.ZS/countries>

2008). Should a foreigner lose his/her job, he/she must find another sponsor, or kafeel, in order to stay in the country. If he/she is unable to do so, he/she would be required to leave the country. As a result of this system, foreigners are unable to attain citizenship within the UAE, so regardless of their length of stay, SIEs are considered permanent expatriates. These labour and immigration laws that can be perceived as restricting the movement of individuals between jobs (Fernandes & Awamleh, 2006) are important to consider in light of the study's objectives.

In-line with other Gulf Cooperation Council¹² (GCC) countries, the UAE has begun to strongly encourage localization, or Emiratization programs, which are designed to increase the participation of UAE nationals in the national workforce. While Emiratization projects allow for the development of skills within the local population, they also have the potential to decrease job opportunities available to foreign workers (Forstenlechner, 2008, 2010; Forstenlechner et al., 2012). Specifically, many organizations have started implementing an expatriate quota system (often based on nationality) in an attempt to increase the workforce participation of the local population (Forstenlechner et al., 2012). While the success of these programs is debateable (Forstenlechner et al., 2012) it is important to be aware of them in the context of constraining career boundaries. In particular, SIEs may perceive objective “demand-side” (King et al., 2005) barriers due to the ‘Emiratization’ initiatives. The presence of such boundaries will therefore impact the amount of perceived agency a SIE has in the pursuit of their career. The successful enactment of a career in the UAE is also heavily dependent on the general social expectation of networking in the country (Harry, 2007; Hutchings & Weir, 2006). In the UAE, the career competency of knowing-whom (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996) is privileged. Given the salience of

¹² GCC countries consist of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman. Founded on 26 May 1981, the aim of this collective is to promote coordination between member states in all fields in order to achieve unity. From <http://www.sheikhmohammed.ae>

networking in the UAE, having and maintaining networks is considered to be an important career script that individuals are expected to follow. In contrast, not being able to engage in networking, due to a lack of 'knowing whom' competency, may constrain individuals' career experiences. It is therefore important to examine how individuals deploy specific 'career actions' (Barley, 1989) related to the networking career script.

There also appears to be a racial and social division of labour in the UAE. Naithani and Jha (2010) highlight the "social hierarchy" present in GCC and UAE careers, noting studies that identify categorization of workers according to their nationalities: local Arabs who occupy the highest platform, followed by skilled Westerners, Arabs from other countries, and Asians, who occupy the lowest position (Malecki & Ewers, 2007). As Naithani and Jha (2010) explain, "Expatriates from different foreign locations are extended a different social treatment [than local workers] and Asian expatriates do not enjoy the same social status as their counterparts from the Western world do" (p. 99). Further, the 2013 Gulf Business Salary Survey indicated that the average monthly salary for a Western expatriate is 15% higher than the average Arab expatriate's salary and 34.8% higher than an Asian expatriate's salary (Nagaraj, 2013). The presence of a hierarchy based on nationalities within the UAE's labour market has implications for the career experiences of SIEs working in the country. SIE professional accountants from the Asian subcontinent, for example, may experience discrimination based on their nationality; however, linked with the concept of subjective boundaries this discrimination may not function as a boundary if they do not perceive this discrimination as being a limit to their career opportunities (Gunz et al., 2000). Consistent with Gunz et al.'s (2000) conceptualizations of career boundaries, subjective boundaries may become self-fulfilling boundaries only if the individual perceives

them as such. In this manner, the presence of a racial and social hierarchy is only important insofar as it is perceived and experienced.

2.6. “MODES OF ENGAGEMENT”

Kaulisch and Enders’ (2005) neo-institutional framework, offers an understanding of how SIE accountants from the Asian subcontinent experience boundaries within their professional, organizational, and national contexts. However, taking a cue from existing studies, it is important to provide a more balanced perspective of the role of agency and structure by examining how individuals engage with and navigate these career boundaries (e.g. Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; Duberley et al., 2006; Richardson, 2009). In particular, Duberley et al.’s (2006) ‘modes of engagement’ framework considers the interplay between institutional contexts (i.e. professional, organizational, and national) and individual agency. While individuals may be faced with specific institutional boundaries, they do have room to navigate these boundaries through maintenance or transformation ‘modes of engagement’ (Duberley et al., 2006).

Inspired by the theoretical frameworks of structuration, which considers the reproduction of social systems “not as a mechanical outcome; rather as an active constituting process, accomplished by and constituting in, the doings of active subjects” (Giddens, 1993, p. 121), careers scholars have examined the interdependence of institutional structures and individual agency (e.g., Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; Duberley et al., 2006; Forrier et al., 2009; Tams & Arthur, 2010). Rather than treating structural forces and individual agency as mutually independent in studying careers, it is important to consider their interdependencies in understanding career mobility (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; Duberley et al., 2006; Eaton & Bailyn, 2000; Forrier et al, 2009; Inkson, 2012; Tams & Arthur, 2010).

Drawing on Barley's (1989) structuration model of career, Duberley et al. (2006) considered the ways in which research scientists in the United Kingdom and New Zealand navigate their way within their organizational, policy, social, and cultural contexts. However, as an extension to Kaulisch and Enders (2005), Duberley et al. (2006) considered the role of individual action within these institutional contexts. When faced with contextual boundaries, Duberley et al. (2006) suggested that individuals may engage in different modes of engagement, or different approaches or "orientations" individuals take with respect to "the social structures in which they are situated" (p. 1141). The two modes of engagement identified by Duberley et al.'s (2006) study are proactive, transformation-oriented engagement and reactive, maintenance-oriented engagement. In transformation-oriented engagement, individuals take on a more "questioning approach" by reflecting on the contexts in which they are situated (Duberley et al., 2006, p. 1141), whereas in maintenance-oriented engagement, individuals take on a "routine orientation" and accept the social structures in place (Duberley et al., 2006, p. 1141). However, as Duberley et al. (2006) noted, these two modes of engagement are not necessarily distinct since individuals can move "swiftly between the two" (p. 1141). Their study, therefore, "elucidates not only the dynamism of the contexts in which careers are embedded, but also the complex interaction between context, interpretation, and action" (Duberley et al., 2006, p. 1145).

In a similar manner, Richardson's (2009) study, centered on the international career experiences of British academics, revealed a connection between the ways in which individuals enact their careers based on the institutional, national, and organizational contexts in which they are situated. Richardson (2009) also found that when faced with specific contextual constraints, individuals engaged in either transformation- or maintenance-oriented behaviors. In order to enhance their own geographic flexibility, Richardson (2009) reported that some individuals

actively practiced transformation-oriented behaviors by engaging with the social structures within which they operate. For example, by understanding the importance of networks within their professional context, some individuals actively sought out other individuals to encourage their geographic flexibility. They learned to play the game of networking that is considered important within the professional context. On the other hand, some individuals who were situated in a specific national context that had strict employment policies engaged in a maintenance mode of engagement such as adhering to the already established strict university policies surrounding international hiring, or simply not applying for international positions because they believed that employment laws within these countries were simply too difficult to question. Rather than “actively seeking to transform national policy” these individuals “worked within its constraints” (Richardson, 2009, p. 166).

Both Duberley et al. (2006) and Richardson’s (2009) findings are particularly relevant for this study. For instance, due to laws regarding citizenship in the UAE, many SIEs may feel that their status in the country is precarious, and as a result, they may have concerns regarding the longevity of their career there. To address these concerns, individuals could take a proactive, transformation-oriented mode of engagement, such as actively looking to emigrate elsewhere or making alternative arrangements prior to being released by an organization. On the other hand, SIEs could address these concerns by engaging in a maintenance-oriented mode of engagement and either accepting or normalizing structural barriers by not doing anything at all. This idea is reinforced by Scurry et al. (2013) whose study indicated SIEs find ways to cope when faced with particular boundaries. Moreover, their study suggested that individuals “(re)create” and “(re)articulate” their narratives in relation to the institutional and structural arrangements with which they may be faced (Scurry et al., 2013, p. 25). This finding is significant for this study as it

demonstrates that while individual agency is embedded within institutional and structural contexts, it is also fluid in the sense that individuals find ways to navigate their way through this contextual web.

Fernando and Cohen (2011) have shown “individuals’ careers are both enabled and constrained by their contexts” and have illustrated “people’s career thinking and enactment is shaped by these contexts” (p. 556). What is significant is that these contexts may be intimately connected and sometimes even competing. As Duberley et al. (2006) suggested, contexts “intersect and overlap with one another to form a thickly textured web, within which the individual is at once suspended, and is actively weaving” (p. 1145). Therefore, while there may be context-specific factors that constrain or enable individuals’ career experiences, research should also consider the decisions of individuals who ultimately are embedded in and constitutive of the contexts.

The way in which participants perceive their boundaries can also have the ability to enable their careers. Drawing on Duberley et al.’s (2006) ‘modes of engagement’, this study assumes individuals engage in various strategies to leverage perceived boundaries just as they would manage constraining boundaries. This assumption not only notes boundaries are not only constraining and recognizes different notions of the term “boundary” (e.g. Guest & Rodrigues, 2014; Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2007; Gunz et al., 2007; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010), but also extends Duberley’s (2006) ‘modes of engagement’ beyond boundaries that are perceived as being constraining. The way in which participants capitalize and/or maximise the value of enabling boundaries to support their careers is therefore an area that will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6.

2.7. CONCEPTUALIZING AMBIVALENCE

Ambivalence has traditionally been defined as “simultaneously positive and negative orientations toward an object” (Ashforth et al., 2014, p. 1454). These orientations can involve both cognitive (i.e. “I think about X” and/or emotional (i.e. “I feel about X”) elements and as a result ambivalence is often associated with having “mixed feelings,” being “torn between conflicting impulses,” and being “pulled in different directions” (Ashforth et al., 2014, p. 1454). While ambivalence has traditionally been rooted within the psychological research, for the purposes of this study, ambivalence is conceptualized as having both psychological and sociological components (Adler, 2012; Connidis & McMullen, 2002; Hillcoat-Nalletamby & Phillips, 2011). Both of these components will be discussed in turn in the following sections.

2.7.1. Psychological ambivalence

Psychological ambivalence refers to the coexistence of an individual’s conflicting attitudes or feelings towards someone or something (Ashforth et al., 2014). More specifically, it refers to the “mixed feelings we have toward an object, such as attraction and repulsion at the same time” (Weigert, 1991, p. 17). As Weisbrode (2012) has argued, ambivalence can therefore result from a desire to “have it both ways” since ambivalence “joins doubt with confinement, appetite with volition, while at the same time dividing them from one another, and from their opposites, in practice” (p. 5). Given these contradictory emotions, individuals are therefore left with feelings of uncertainty or indecisiveness, wavering between which course of action to follow (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Hillcoat-Nalletamby & Phillips, 2011; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). It is important to note that these feelings of uncertainty (or lack of clarity) is not ambivalence itself as ambivalence “is the experience of two clear but opposing thoughts and/or feelings toward an object” (Ashforth et al., 2014, p. 1455). Instead, this uncertainty appears to be

a by-product of ambivalence; in other words, it is a manifestation of having mixed feelings, or being torn between conflicting impulses.

Smelser (1998) suggested that ambivalence provides an alternative approach to rational choice theory by allowing us to consider the “non-rational forces in individual, group and institutional behavior” (p. 3). However, some sociologists have argued that a psychological approach to ambivalence is incomplete as we cannot reduce ambivalence to an individual experience; rather, it belongs to the social environments in which people are embedded (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Hillcoat-Nalletamby & Phillips, 2011). For this reason, it is also essential to consider sociological ambivalence to understand individuals’ career experiences.

2.7.2. Sociological ambivalence

Unlike psychological ambivalence, which examines the affective experiences of mixed feelings and focuses on the contradictions embedded in human psychology, sociological ambivalence assesses the contradictions embedded in the structure of human society (Adler, 2012; Merton, 1976). Sociological ambivalence is created from contradictions within the social system itself (Merton, 1976): “it arises when an actor is faced with a specific situation that simultaneously values opposing courses of action that are rooted within the social structure” (Connidis & McMullin, 2002, p. 563). Drawing on the work of Merton (1976), Connidis and McMullin (2002) have suggested that these structural contradictions are often manifested in social interactions and reflect “[t]he contradiction and paradox that are characteristic of social experience” (p. 558). Taking a sociological approach, the locus of ambivalence is then moved away from the individual to their relationships with others (Hillcoat-Nalletamby & Phillips, 2011) within their social milieu. By extension, Connidis and McMullin (2002) have suggested

that ambivalence is most explicit when it stems from incompatible normative expectations about how individuals “should act” (p. 558). These incompatible expectations, reflected in the social definition of roles, therefore place conflicting demands on individuals resulting in “contradictions between opposite pulls” (Baxter et al., 1997, p. 659). Individuals may therefore find themselves in structurally ambivalent situations when they are expected to perform a behaviour that may be contrary to their prescribed social role.

2.8. SUMMARY

This chapter has considered some of the key themes within boundaryless careers research. In light of the study’s objectives I have also identified theoretical and substantive gaps associated with the boundaryless career framework and provided a comprehensive argument to the importance of ‘bringing back boundaries’ to the careers literature. In order to emphasize the salience of career boundaries, I have offered a discussion not only of the importance of studying careers in context but also in considering the interplay between the individual and structure when dealing with his/her identified career boundaries. Finally, I have provided an overview of the literature associated with ambivalence – a key theme that emerged during the data analysis. In light of the discussion surrounding ambivalence and a presentation of the ‘modes of engagement’ literature this study attempts to present a framework that explains how individuals may ambivalently cope with their perceived career boundaries, and accounts for the relationship between agency and structure. I use ‘modes of engagement’ as a sensitizing device but build on this theoretical framework by exploring the uncertain, difficult and ambiguous experiences associated with enacting a career generally (chapter 5) and dealing with perceived career boundaries specifically (chapter 6).

Chapter 3: Research Design & Methodology

Building on the discussion in Chapters 1 and 2, in this chapter I outline this study's research design. This study, which examines how SIE professional accountants from the Asian subcontinent identify, perceive, and experience career boundaries within their professional, organizational, and national contexts, is rooted in a qualitative (Cassell & Symon, 1994) and interpretive interactionist (Denzin (1989a) methodology. Interpretive interactionists contend that "there is no outside, detached standpoint from which to gather and present brute data" (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979, p. 6). Consequently, it is important to get a "close up view" so researchers "can see and hear what is going on in the interaction process between individuals" (Wallace & Wolf, 1999, p. 219). Given its central concern with interpretation of individual subjective experience (Denzin, 1989a; Burrell & Morgan, 1998), interpretive interactionism provides a useful methodological framework for exploring the study's research questions.

In this chapter, I discuss interpretive interactionism, the methodological framework within which this study is located, and I address the methodological implications of adopting this interpretive ontology in particular. Next, I explain the research process; specifically, I discuss issues relating to accessing the study's sample, interviewing participants, and analysing the data. Finally, I discuss how I interpreted the data to ensure quality and robustness.

3.1. INTERPRETIVE INTERACTIONISM

Interpretive interactionists view the social world as an emergent process constructed and lived by individuals through social interactions (Denzin, 1989a). Based on this assumption, interpretive interactionists are interested in accessing individuals' subjective meanings and

experiences within a social context (Denzin, 1989a). As Blumer (1969) contended, “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them” (p. 2). In contrast with structuralist assumptions which argue that “the social world exists independently of an individual’s appreciation of it” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 4), interpretive interactionists argue that the world is not ‘out there’ to be discovered, independent of the individual actors who live in it (Burrell & Morgan, 1979); rather, human behaviour is shaped and re-shaped based on individual experience and interpretations of the world (Mead, 1934). According to interpretivists, individuals engage in ‘mind action’ (Charron, 2001), which suggests that meaning is not a given; instead, meaning making is a social process in which meanings are created through interactions between individuals via the use of symbols, such as language and gestures, to understand and appreciate the social world. Meanings are therefore, “internalized because they have the same meaning for all individual members of a given society or social group” (Mead, 1934, p. 47). In order to capture the way in which individuals identify and experience career boundaries (either constraining and/or enabling) and how they cope with them, it is important to engage with study participants at a personal level to understand just how they construct these meanings through their lived experiences. Consequently, accessing individual meaning and experience is a primary concern in achieving this study’s objectives.

However, Denzin (1989b) argued that individuals’ experiences must be understood within their larger historical, sociocultural, and institutional contexts. Borrowing ideas from Mills (1959), Denzin (1989b) has suggested that in order to understand personal troubles, it is important to connect them with public issues, which are structural. In contrast to structuralists, who would privilege the impact of structural forces on individual experiences (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), interpretive interactionists view these experiences as mutually constitutive:

structures are “reified, patterned regularities of [individual] thought and action” (Denzin, 1983, p. 136). According to interpretive interactionists, social structures guide human behavior, rather than rigidly determining it, and individual agency occurs within structures and/or contexts, which are both influenced and created by individual action. This line of thinking complements this study’s research objectives and mirrors this study’s approach, which does not attempt to study career experiences from simply a “structural/institutional or individual perspective alone, but as a relational construct that is at the interplay of individual and institutions and as a multi-layer and multi-faceted phenomenon” (Fossland, 2013, p. 195). As this study’s methodology is guided by the principles of interpretive interactionism, in the next sections, I will turn to the key features of this theoretical paradigm, including the study of meanings, action, and experience; self and identity; the importance of significant others in the construction of the self; and the importance of social structures in contextualizing individuals’ experiences.

3.1.1. Meaning, Action, and Experience

Drawing heavily on the work of Mead (1934), interpretive interactionists contend that social reality is “not only developed through interactions, but it is also the way in which we *define* the situations, by assigning meaning, and the way we do this is influenced by social life” (Charon, 1998, p. 25). Meaning, therefore, is derived from and influenced by experience (Blumer, 1969). In other words, meanings do not inhere in “things,” but are constructed and modified through an “interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things he [or she] encounters” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). However, it is important to highlight that “meaning is never fixed and immutable; rather it is always shifting, emergent and ultimately ambiguous” (Plummer, 2000, p. 194). As such, meaning is never static; it is in a constant state of flux, influenced by shifts in individual interpretation and action.

The complexity and dynamism of meaning being created through experience and action is an important idea for this study as it not only informed the way I interviewed participants, but also determined the way I analyzed the data. Specifically, when participants discussed and described the boundaries they experienced and how they dealt with them, it was important for me to note that what these experiences meant to them may have been different in the past and may be different in the future. Giving participants an opportunity to explain how and why a particular experience led them to perceive a particular boundary, based on their respective contexts, was important. Further, when analyzing the data, I remained open to the idea that the impact of the boundary may differ based on the individual experiencing it, the specific point in time in which he/she experienced it, and the context in which he/she was situated when she experienced it (see Chapter 4).

3.1.2. The Self and Identity

The self has traditionally been used as a key construct in understanding careers (Super, 1957). Specifically, research attention has focused on understanding the influence of the self and identity in relation to an individual's career experiences and career transitions (e.g., Briscoe & Hall, 2006; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004). The self is a social object that arises through social interaction (Mead, 1934). As such, the self is not a static entity, but is "created and re-created in every social situation one enters" (Berger, 1963, p. 106). Interpretive interactionism contends that the context in which individuals live and act shapes their sense of self. The focus of the self being judged by others through interactions within a particular context in which he/she is situated is important for this study as it provides a framework for exploring how participants within particular social contexts think about their careers. According to Young and Collin (2004), "career represents a unique interaction of self

and social experience” (p. 381). It is through these social interactions and experiences that participants will assign meaning to their career experiences in their professional, organizational, and national contexts. Interpretive interactionism and the emphasis it places on individuals’ interactions with others and within contexts directs the way in which careers are treated in this study.

Nazar et al. (2012) have contended studies of career-related transitions or turning points within a sequence of events are a “useful way to understand how identities shift over time” (p. 143). Further, and in line with a social construction approach to studying careers (section 1.6.) some careers researchers have adopted a narrative approach to studying career (e.g., Cohen et al., 2004; LaPointe, 2010). Through a narrative approach, career is understood within a context of doing, whereby an individual experiences “on-going struggles. . . and providing temporary answers to the question ‘who am I (or ‘who are we’) and what do I (we) stand for?’” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1164). Based on this narrative approach, this study allows participants to craft a personal narrative of themselves in order to derive meaning from their career experiences. This narrative approach is particularly relevant for this study’s objectives since it can help explore how individuals interpret their identified career boundaries within their current context(s) and may illuminate the extent to which they feel the boundary is imposed onto them or created by them (as discussed in Chapter 2).

Further, career scholars use narratives of self to consider not only the salience of an individual’s current sense of self, but also the significance of an individual’s sense of future self (Markus & Nurius, 1986), particularly as a motivating force behind career behavior, particularly during career transitions (e.g., Fugate et al., 2004; Ibarra, 2005). The notion of a future self is relevant for this study as it considers an individual’s ideas of what they hope to become and fears

surrounding this future becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Linking this idea of future self to notions of the subjective career, a desired or a feared possible self may impact the way an individual thinks about his/her career options and may alter the way he/she perceives and experiences a career boundary. Finding a way to cope with identified career boundaries can therefore be considered a means of preparing for future career planning in terms of an ongoing negotiation with an individual's narrative of the self.

3.1.3. Significant Others

Within the interpretive interactionist school of thought, *significant others* play an important role in the development of the self and identity through individuals' experiences. According to Charon (2001), significant others "take on importance to the individual, those whom the individual desires to impress; they might be those he or she respects, those who he or she wants acceptance from, those that he or she fears, or those with whom he or she identifies" (p. 76). Through social interaction with others, individuals shape their sense of self. The idea of "the looking glass self" (Cooley, 1972) is also relevant to this study. Cooley (1972) argued that individuals' sense of self is shaped largely through their *interpretations* of their interactions with others. This point is important as it suggests that individual's sense of self is not shaped simply by the judgments of others, but our interpretations of what we think others think of us.

Consequently, the ways in which participants think about their careers and the boundaries they identify may be shaped by their own interpretations of their interactions with significant others in the workplace. Gatekeepers may be an example of a significant other in the context of this study. Inkson et al. (2012) have suggested that career boundaries are *social creations* career gatekeepers and individuals make "through recursive organizing processes" (p. 331). Boundaries, therefore, are created, maintained, and have the potential to be eradicated through

social interaction. For example, while gatekeepers (such as employment agencies, and individuals in professional or educational contexts) may restrict career opportunities to individuals based on job-related requirements (King et al., 2005; Zeitz, et al., 2009; Zikic et al., 2010), Ituma and Simpson (2009) indicated career constraints may also be due, in part, to the *perceptions* individuals have regarding educational qualifications. Perceptions concerning job-related requirements and educational qualifications are thus important when considering the role significant others play in studying participants' experience and in the meaning participants assigned to their identified boundaries. These thoughts surrounding significant others may offer some useful insights for this study, especially with respect to the way in which family, friends, employers, colleagues, locals, and other expatriates may be influential in shaping the lived and felt experiences of the career of SIE accountants.

3.1.4. Social Structures

Interpretive interactionism paradigm acknowledges that social structures “interact in concrete interactional sites and locales to produce specific forms of subjectivity, emotionality and lived experience” (Denzin, 1992, p. 62). In other words, it offers a “link between localized, face-to-face issues and wider structural features against which interpersonal dealings take place” (Layder, 1994; p. 74). Thus, interpretive interactionism shows an appreciation of the importance of the interaction between the individual and his/her environment. However, it is important to note that “although our behavioral choices are constrained by context, history, and social structures, they are not determined by them” (Oliver, 2012, p. 410). At the same time, it is important not to privilege structure over the idea that human action is responsible for creating, recreating and reifying these structures. Rather than privileging one view over the other, it is important to consider the “constant meshing” of individual agency and structural constraints

(Dany et al., 2011, p. 972). This distinction is an important point made within interpretive interactionist thought, particularly in relation to the objectives of this study, as it considers the interplay between the individual and his/her context. Such an approach will allow for a deeper understanding of how individuals identify and experience their career boundaries, the meanings they assign to these boundaries (i.e., enabling or constraining), and how they cope with these boundaries given specific structural and institutional forces within their professional, organizational, and national contexts.

3.2. RESEARCH CONTEXT: SITUATING CAREER EXPERIENCES OF SIES IN THE UAE

The oil sector is a primary source of income for Persian Gulf states; to develop this industry, the GCC has attracted an influx of foreign workers (Edwards, 2011). Economic developments in the oil industry have led to a high demand for foreign labour with various skill-sets (Forstenlechner, 2010) in countries throughout the GCC, including the UAE. Currently, approximately 85% of the UAE's population is made up of expatriates from all parts of the world (Edwards, 2011). Asians and Arabs make up the largest expatriate group, comprising more than two-thirds of the total UAE population (Caplin, 2009). The UAE's high reliance on foreign workers (predominately from Arab and Asian countries) to contribute to and sustain its economy, coupled with its labour laws, creates a fertile ground for research within both the careers and expatriate fields of study. Even though the arrival of these internationally mobile professionals began when oil was discovered nearly fifty years ago, research focused on foreign workers within this region is quite recent (e.g., Forstenlechner, 2010; Forstenlechner, Lettice, & Özbilgin, 2012; Richardson & McKenna, 2010; Scurry et al., 2013). For these reasons, the UAE is an important context for understanding career boundaries and their implications.

At the same time, it is important to highlight that expatriates in the UAE are often faced with several “peculiarities” (Forstenlechner, 2010, p. 238) that may differentiate their experiences from those of expatriates in other parts of the world. One of the peculiarities described by Forstenlechner (2010) surrounds the laws that govern naturalization and make citizenship unattainable to expatriates. In addition, all foreigners working in the UAE operate under a system of employment called the Kafala system. Under this legal system, all foreigners who wish to move to the UAE to work must enter into a contractual agreement with a GCC national, institution or employer, also known as their sponsor, to obtain an entry visa and residence permit (Barria, 2008). As a result of the Kafala system, employment visas need constant renewal¹³ (Longva, 1997; Nagy, 2008). These peculiar employer-sponsorship and immigration laws create an environment that restricts the movement of individuals between organizations (Fernandes & Awamleh, 2006) since expatriates wishing to change organizations are required to obtain a no objection certificate¹⁴ (NOC) from their current employer to be able to work elsewhere, under another sponsor. Further, like other GCC countries, the UAE has started to strongly encourage localization and has developed “Emiratization” programs designed to increase participation of UAE nationals in the workforce. While the Emiratization project allows for the development of skills in locals, it also has the potential to decrease job opportunities available to foreign workers (Forstenlechner, 2008, 2010; Forstenlechner et al., 2012). A consideration of the specific characteristics of the UAE’s labour market, therefore, provides a

¹³ It is important to note that the Kafala system is not unique to the UAE since these laws apply to other GCC and non-GCC countries, such as Singapore, as well. However, it is important to consider this system in the UAE since this is where the study is situated.

¹⁴ The no-objection letter, provided by an employee’s current employer must state that they have no objection for the employee to join another employer in the UAE.

context for understanding how individuals' perceived boundaries may shape their career experiences in this particular part of the world.

3.3. THE RESEARCH PROCESS

In the next sections I outline the various steps I took in the research process. The intention of this section is to make the research process adopted here more accessible to the reader; however, it is important to note that just because they are presented in a neat and linear fashion, as is often the case with qualitative research, the process I took was essentially iterative, moving back and forth between data collection and analysis.

3.3.1. Preliminary Discussions with SIE Accountants – Pilot Study

As a precursor to the main study, I conducted informal interviews with SIEs from Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, India, and Pakistan. My conversations with them revealed a broad range of issues which helped me in refining my research agenda for the main study. One issue these informal interviews revealed was the important roles nationality and race play in understanding boundaries. Originally, my intention was that the larger study would include professional SIE accountants who lived and worked in the UAE, but their nationality was from the entire Asian continent. However, during the interviews it became clear to me that nationality, particularly being Arab in an Arab country (i.e. the UAE), could have a strong impact on how an individual may identify and experience career boundaries. This preliminary finding not only echoed the extant literature, which highlights that the presence of boundaries may be based on nationality and race (e.g., Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Qureshi et al., 2013), but also signalled to me that honing in on individuals from somewhat culturally similar countries

(i.e., India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) was practical and may offer a deeper level of analysis and interpretation of my findings since I could focus on common themes reported by participants.

In addition, these interviews revealed the importance of focusing on a specific type of career. Rather than investigating professionals in a general sense, the specific composition of this sample allowed for a fine-grained investigation into a particular professional context and an examination of the way *accountants* experience their careers within the UAE. Accounting researchers Cooper and Robson (2006) noted that it is useful to “explore the specificity of what being an accounting professional means in different countries, whether they carry out the same sort of work, which groups (racial, class or gender) aspire to work as accountants across countries, and what is the comparative social status (and legitimacy) of accountants and accounting rules” (p. 432). Therefore, uncovering the lived experiences of a well-defined occupational group in the context of the UAE provided the opportunity to examine important career-related boundaries specific to the accounting industry and offer a contribution to the accounting literature. Based on these interview findings, I was able to create a study that complements work on SIEs, such as studies of engineers, academics, nurses, and teachers (e.g., Bozionelos, 2009; Fu, Shaffer, & Harrison, 2005; Richardson, 2008; Richardson & McKenna, 2010), and contributes to accounting literature (e.g., Anderson-Gough, Grey & Robson, 1998, 2001; Grey, 1994, 1998). This series of pilot interviews also helped me in addressing any weaknesses in my own interview style. In addition, these pilot interviews highlighted some problems with the initial interview agenda and identified other significant issues worthy of exploration (Sampson, 2004) particularly with respect to how participants learned to cope with their identified career boundaries.

3.3.2. Defining the SIE professional accountant from the Asian Subcontinent

For the purposes of this study, the SIE professional accountant from the Asian subcontinent is defined as a professional expatriate working in the field of accounting who has self-initiated their expatriation into the UAE rather than being sent by an organization (i.e. the ‘organization assigned expatriate’). After initial interviews via the pilot study, this study was conducted with a group of professional SIE accountants who originate from India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. All participants hold a professional designation in the field of accounting (e.g., CA, CMA, ACCA, and CPA¹⁵) and are working and residing in the UAE.

3.3.3. Accessing the sample

It was important to establish boundaries and parameters in the selection of research participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Participants were initially drawn from Dubai since it has the largest financial sector in the UAE (Edwards, 2011). However, as the study progressed, I expanded my sampling frame to include other Emirates in order to ensure that I had a representative sample across the UAE (see Appendix A for demographic information). A snowball sampling strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Seidman, 1998) was employed to access participants. This strategy is a non-probability referral sampling technique where current participants are asked to facilitate the recruitment of other participants from their social network (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). While snowball sampling has been criticized for yielding a sample group that may be too homogenous or like-minded, I felt that given the parameters and objectives of this study’s research agenda, it was the most appropriate sampling strategy. In addition, individuals’ concerns about being too critical about either their employer or the host

¹⁵ Chartered Accountant (CA), Certified Management Accountant (CMA), Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), Chartered Professional Accountant (CPA)

country meant that many were hesitant to participate in the research; thus, a snowballing approach was able to mitigate this issue since participants were more willing to participate if they had a friend or colleague who also was interviewed and could vouch for the study.

Further, as suggested by several scholars in the field, research in an international context can be challenging and the use of personal contacts may help alleviate some of the difficulties associated with generating a sample and may help gain access to an organization (Hutchings, 2003; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Richardson & Zikic, 2007; Von Glinow, Drost & Teagarden, 2002). Consequently, access to gatekeepers (i.e., partners and/or senior management) in relevant organization(s) were arranged through existing personal contacts, such as former classmates, friends, and family. Once organizational access was obtained, invitations to participate in the study and an accompanying information sheet were circulated to employees via email (Appendices B and C). This method allowed participants to identify themselves as an SIE accountant from the Asian subcontinent (as set out in the definition provided in section 3.3.2) and thus facilitated their inclusion in the study and helped generate other suitable participants through further referrals.

By the 30th interview, it was clear that I was no longer discovering any new or significant information and had reached an acceptable “theoretical saturation” point (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, the final sample consists of 30 participants – 22 males and eight females. While I acknowledge there are a higher proportion of males in this study, this sample is indicative of the accounting profession, which is characterized as being very male-dominated (Lyonette & Crompton, 2008; Whiting, Gammie, & Herbohn, 2015). The participants in the sample all hold a professional designation in the field of accounting (e.g., CA, CMA, ACCA, and CPA) and are all originally from three countries in South East Asia: India, Pakistan, and Sri

Lanka. Three of the participants have dual nationality – Canadian, British, and American, respectively. A majority of the participants ($n=17$) worked in public accounting or professional services firms, with the remainder working in industry ($n=13$), occupying positions that support the internal accounting and/or finance departments of an organization. As Appendix A indicates, participants' job titles differ based on the type of organization for which they worked. Job titles among public accounting firms tend to be standardized; however, in 'industry' these titles vary depending on the organization. All participants are between the ages of 25-56+ years (see Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of the sample). With respect to the length of time living in the UAE, participants' experience ranged from six months to 28 years¹⁶. Even though there is a wide age range with respect to the amount of time participants have spent living in the UAE, given the exploratory nature of my study, I felt it was important to not be too restrictive and instead to cast a wide net. My approach was to interview a variety of participants who matched my criteria in order to understand their identified career boundaries and how they cope with them. As the findings chapters (chapters 4-6) reveal, through this approach I was able to gain multiple perspectives with respect to how individuals identify and cope with career boundaries in their professional, organizational, and national contexts.

3.3.4. Data Collection: the qualitative interview

Gunz et al. (2000) have called for more studies using qualitative methodologies, such as interviews, to allow for the discovery of rich and detailed accounts of the career experiences of

¹⁶ It is important to note that even though some participants have been living in the UAE for 28 years, they are still labelled as expatriates. As discussed in Chapter 1, while migration into the UAE is possible, citizenship is not. Nagy (2010) stated that these individuals are "well entrenched" in the country and often stay even beyond ten years (p. 59). As a result, foreign workers in the UAE have been described as "perpetual visitors" (Nagy, 2006, p. 122).

individuals. Therefore, given the study's objectives, in-depth semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method for data collection for this study. In line with interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1989a), in-depth interviews allow for an opportunity to gather descriptions of "deep meaning of experience in the participants' own words" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 55). My focus was to collect data with this kind of deep meaning and thick descriptions (Prus, 1996) of participants' career experiences because "without it, authentic understanding would not be possible" (Denzin, 1989, p. 33). This approach is not only consistent with other studies of career barriers (e.g., Ituma & Simpson, 2009; McElwee & Al-Riyami, 2003), but also it moves the study beyond the simple reporting of facts. Instead, in-depth semi-structured interviews provide for an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which individuals' careers may be constrained and/or enabled by professional, organizational, and national contexts and how they cope with these identified boundaries.

The specific value of this method is that it supported a more personalized account of participants' sense of their career within the UAE. Specifically, the interviews allowed participants to engage in story-telling, providing detailed narratives of how their experiences have shaped the meaning that their career has for *them*. As Cohen et al. (2004) argued, "[T]he idea of careers as continuous narratives, merging past and present is central to new definitions of career" (p. 411). In a similar vein, Inkson's (2007) understanding of a career as a story implies that individuals need to be provided with the opportunity to be the narrators of their own experiences. The interviews accessed participants' experiences in the way that *they* choose to express them and allowed participants to discuss facets of their career which they chose to identify and which they felt were important, such as particular career boundaries which they found to be both enabling and/or constraining, aspects of the context(s) they found to be

significant, and actions (if any) they take to cope with these boundaries. This study, therefore, does not treat the idea of boundarylessness as a career 'ideal-type' (Weber, 1949) towards which participants *should* strive (if that is even possible). Instead, in a methodologically Weberian (1949) fashion, the study examines how participants experience career boundaries as communicated in their own words.

Interviews were conducted between June 2012-May 2013 in the UAE and each interview lasted 40-90 minutes. Twenty-eight participants consented to recorded interviews (see Appendix D for informed consent form) and I transcribed these interviews verbatim. Two participants preferred not to have their interviews recorded due to concerns about retaliation for being too critical of their organizations and their host country. For these participants, I took extensive notes after the interview and brief notes during the interview. I chose not to take too many notes during the interviews because I wanted to be present for the participants and be actively engaged in our conversations. During all of the interviews, participants were provided with an overview of the study, which expanded on the initial email they received. They also were advised that all information collected would be both confidential and anonymous. The interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' own narratives regarding their experiences of their accounting careers and their experiences working in the UAE.

I accept the principle that "knowledge is created 'inter' the points of view of the interviewer and interviewee" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 123). Using the metaphors of miner and traveller, derived from Kvale and Brinkman (2009), it was important to not only to mine the data for key themes, but also not lose sight of the research objectives; at the same time, it was essential to be a traveller into the territory of SIE career experiences and perceived career boundaries situated in their context, and to allow for the discovery of new, interesting, and

exciting career knowledge. In order to act as miner and traveller, I therefore did not want to constrain or shackle the interview; instead I created and utilized an interview agenda (see Appendix E) to guide the conversation and to ensure the interview covered the study's research questions. Therefore, themes were identified a priori, drawn from the study's research objectives, existing literature primarily related to international careers and career boundaries, and preliminary pilot interview responses. Participants were asked to trace their career history, with particular emphasis on why they went into the accounting profession as well as why they choose to move to the UAE. This guide also reflected Marshall and Rossman's (2006) suggestion to start the interview by putting participants at ease. My interviews began by asking participants non-threatening or "easy" questions, such as "Why did you move to the UAE?" The intent of these first questions was to create a comfortable, unthreatening environment to allow for a good dialogue between participants and myself. With questions deliberately designed as open-ended, participants were also asked to reflect on anything they felt may have facilitated or inhibited their career, paying close attention to any significant events they wanted to elaborate. Therefore, while the study is focused on how participants experience and cope with their identified career boundaries in their professional, organizational, and national contexts, the nature of interviews allowed for other themes to emerge.

Further, the ideas that emerged from the first interviews helped guide the direction of subsequent interviews. Due to the iterative nature of qualitative research, the first few interviews and subsequent preliminary analyses led me back to the literature and to re-examine new themes that I may not have initially considered. Going back and forth between my data and the literature was important as it sometimes resulted in the adjustment of my research agenda. Remaining flexible throughout the process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) was therefore critical during my

study. In order to retain confidentiality and anonymity, all participant and organization names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

3.3.5. Data Analysis

As mentioned, a key principle of interpretive interactionism is the notion that “human actions cannot be understood unless meaning that humans assign to them is understood” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53). Further, “reality does not impose itself on us without us taking a role in interpreting it” (Charon, 1998, p. 29). With this interpretive focus, the study attempts to unravel the meanings participants assigned to their career boundaries and to understand how participants coped with these boundaries “in their particularity and complex texture” (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979, p. 4). Consequently, my data analysis process was abductive and iterative, moving back and forth between the findings and extant literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). All interviews were taped and then transcribed verbatim. During my transcriptions I was able to make notes of any themes that were emerging and refine interview questions for subsequent interviews. A template analysis, or the grouping of data among similar codes (King, 2004) was used to aid in the development of themes. NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) tool, was used to create and revise the template used for this study. Through the use of “tree nodes” provided by NVivo, I independently coded the data for main sub-themes, with the scholarly literature on career boundaries and modes of engagement (Duberley et al. 2006) serving as a broad sensitizing device.

3.3.5.1. Computers in qualitative data analysis

I acknowledge that views regarding CAQDAS within the qualitative methods community are mixed: some academics believe CAQDAS “contradicts the epistemological and ontological

axioms underpinning the chosen research approach” (Morison & Moir, 1998, p. 115). This criticism is based on the idea that the neutrality created through the use of a software tool removes the researcher from the analysis process and loses the subjectivity that underpins qualitative research (Atherton & Elsmore, 2007). Also, some researchers have concerns regarding the standardized, generic formats found in software tools and feel software does not allow for a customizable approach to data organization.

While these concerns have some merit, I argue that researchers still *own* the research process and the use of NVivo simply facilitates the collection and organization of data. As Lee and Esterhuizen (2000) argue, CAQDAS helps researchers manage large amounts of information and takes away “the drudgery of handling qualitative data” (p. 237). It is also important to note that the software tool itself is never doing the analysis (Bringer et al., 2006); rather, researchers using software remain very active as they “interpret [data], conceptualize [ideas], examine relationships, document decisions, and develop theory” (Bringer et al., 2006, p. 249). NVivo and other CAQDAS programs are research tools, but the choices regarding how to use the programs are inevitably up to researchers.

In addition, as Sinkovics, Penz, and Ghauri (2008) have suggested, the formalization inherent in CAQDAS programs encourages methodological rigor and enhances the transparency of data since the software allows for information to be organized into specific themes or nodes. This organization allows researchers to “extract insights from the data by ordering it in more searchable and manipulatable forms and formats” (Atherton & Elsmore, 2007, p. 67). Software can also enhance the research process: “rather than requiring that all the data be collected before analysis can start, the program has been intentionally designed to encourage researchers to

analyze data as they are collected” (Bringer et al., 2006, p. 248). These features of CAQDAS do not contradict, but rather complement, the iterative nature of qualitative research.

3.3.5.2. Developing the template and initial coding

As Marshall and Rossman (2011) have suggested, “the researcher does not search for the exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories of the statistician, but, instead identifies the salient, grounded categories of meaning held by participants in the setting” (p. 215). Therefore, a template analysis (King, 2004b) was used to aid in the development of themes. Hierarchy coding was conducted whereby groups of similar themes (tree nodes) are clustered together to produce more general nodes (King, 2004b). The higher-order nodes were identified a priori and were based on the study’s research objectives. These themes determined four nodes: “career boundary: constraint,” “career boundary: enabler,” “managing constraining boundaries,” and “leveraging off enabling boundaries.” However, as my study looks at how participants experience and negotiate boundaries in their professional, organizational, and national contexts it was necessary to include an additional three sub-categories of contexts under each of the higher nodes. The initial template was deliberately kept broad and was only based on the four stated higher-order nodes to allow for the systematic identification of key themes participants expressed.

During the initial coding, or 1st-order analysis (Gioia et al., 2012), I remained open to new ideas to allow for a variety of categories to emerge. At one stage of the research process, I had approximately 60 1st-order categories and admittedly was concerned with managing such a large number of categories. However, as Gioia et al., (2012) have suggested, “[Y]ou gotta get lost before you can get found” (p. 20). This process was important since only after the identification of many categories was I able to start identifying similarities or clusters among the

many codes. This identification and clustering process allowed for me to engage in 2nd-order analysis (Gioia et al, 2012). During this second stage, I aggregated my 1st order categories both with existing ideas found in the relevant literature and with new ideas and themes that emerged from the data. Even though some scholars have argued this process may involve some “data reduction” (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 27), I used this process to simplify and focus the raw data into manageable themes that reflected the study’s research objectives.

3.3.5.3. Revising and finalizing the template

After coding many interviews and having discussions with members of my dissertation committee, it became evident that the theme of *ambivalence* underpinned all participants’ accounts. While the experience of ambivalence was not an initial research focus, its salience in all interviews warranted a re-reading of the data and required me to visit the related literature to incorporate the categorization of additional themes. I therefore went back to my data and revised the template to incorporate the theme of ambivalence, identifying two additional sub-themes: psychological and sociological ambivalence. By re-reading all the data through the lens of ambivalence, which is defined and explained in more detail in chapters 2 and 5, a potential theoretical contribution of the study emerged that was novel to the careers literature, particularly the literature on career boundaries.

3.4. ACHIEVING STANDARDS OF ROBUSTNESS

As Weber (1949) suggested when conducting research, any analyses made from the findings must be “adequate at the level of meaning” (p. 99). Following this precept, it is not the intent of the study to impose an interpretation or analysis that does not “reflect the realities of the social settings as they were understood by those involved with them” (Weber, 1949, p. 99).

Instead, as mentioned earlier, this study draws on the key assumptions of interpretive interactionism and has the intent of accounting for the subjective meaning individuals place on their perceived career boundaries and to understand their decisions regarding how to cope with these boundaries in relation to their professional, organizational, and national contexts.

Despite my efforts to represent the meanings and experiences of the participants in the way they intended, in a Weberian-like fashion, it is acknowledged that the mere act of writing about their experiences creates a distance between what they *truly* meant and how these meanings are portrayed. As stated by Rabinow and Sullivan (1979), “when trying to understand the cultural world, we are dealing with interpretations and interpretations of interpretations” (p. 6). It can be argued that the *real* meaning of study data somehow gets lost or distorted as data goes through each stage in the methodological process (i.e., listening, transcribing, coding, analyzing, interpreting). As suggested by Ellis and Bochner (1992), it is paramount to reduce the distance between the lived experiences of participants and their accounts of these experiences.

In doing so, I admit that there is a current critique within qualitative researchers who have argued that search for universal criteria to evaluate methodological quality is often found within positivist thinking (Amis & Silk, 2008) and can oftentimes be unhelpful and even “silly” (Bochner, 2000, p. 268). Further, Tracy (2010) has argued, “applying traditional criteria like generalizability, objectivity, and reliability is illegitimate” since it stems from positivist research thinking (p. 838). Counter to these critiques Tracy (2010) does acknowledge the argument that criteria can actually be quite useful because it can “serve as shorthand about the core values of a certain craft” and encourage dialogue within the scientific community (p. 838). With that being said, I am cognizant of Van Mannen’s (1995) concerns that universal criteria within qualitative research could result in “technocratic unimaginativeness” (p. 139). Therefore, instead of offering

specific hard criteria, I focused on “big tent” guidelines (Tracy, 2010, p. 839), which are broadly defined as “key markers for quality in qualitative research” (Tracy, 2010, p. 837). The big tent guidelines I incorporated to ensure methodological robustness in my study are rich rigor, credibility and sincerity.

In order to demonstrate rigor, Tracy (2010) has suggested that the study should provide “face validity” that is, the research process must appear to be “reasonable and appropriate” (p. 341). To meet this criterion, I have ensured that I explained my research process in detail. For example, in this chapter, I outlined my sampling process and described how I gained access to participants and how I collected, recorded, and analysed the data (Amis & Silk, 2008; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). In addition to outlining the research process, in this chapter I demonstrate credibility by providing thick and detailed data (Geertz, 1973; Gephart, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010) to describe participants’ experiences as they described them. The descriptions I include demonstrate Tracy’s (2010) counsel to illustrate the data’s complexity by “*show[ing]* meaning” versus “*telling* the reader what to think” (p. 843). In order to do so, in the findings chapters of this study (chapters 4-6) I ensured that I focused on “proximity to the life worlds of those studied” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, p. 423) and provided sufficient contextual detail when presenting the findings so that the “readers may come to their own conclusion about the scene” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). In addition, in order to ensure that I understood what participants meant, I “backtrack[ed]” (Gioia et al., 2012) during the transcription process and contacted some participants to get some clarification on what they were saying. Further, to mitigate the problems of single-coder bias, I discussed the findings and my interpretation of these findings with my committee. Doing so provided some level of agreement regarding and justification for my interpretation and coding.

This chapter also demonstrates my level of sincerity with the research process (Tracy, 2010). Tracy (2010) has suggested that in order to be sincere it is necessary to be both earnest and vulnerable throughout the research process. This includes being both transparent about the methods I have used and the challenges faced in conducting this study as well as being self-reflexive of my own potential biases and/or subjective inclinations (Amis & Silk, 2008; Tracy, 2010) Firstly, in contrast to some researchers who have proposed that one can be transparent by providing an audit trail (e.g., Amis & Silk, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000), I chose to keep a diary, jotting down issues I had with gaining access to participants¹⁷ as well as document the logic and rationale behind my data analysis. I also promoted transparency by holding regular meetings with my dissertation committee members and disclosing to them the challenges I was experiencing with data collection during my time in the UAE.

Secondly, with respect to being self-reflexive, as Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) have suggested, reflection can involve “the launching of critical self-exploration of one’s own interpretations of empirical material” (p. 9). Other researchers also emphasize the importance of self-reflexivity in the research process (e.g., Ellis & Bochner, 2000, Richardson, 2000; Van Maanen, 1988) and Tracy (2010) has argued that being self-reflexive is critical to ensure research sincerity. Since the interview process has the capability of impacting the researcher as much as participants, it is acknowledged that personal experience puts the researchers “in a position of experiencing an experience that can reveal to them not only how it was for us but how it could be or once was for them” (Ellis & Bochner, 1992, p. 98). However, it was important that I maintained “empathic neutrality” (Patton, 2002, p. 49) and was both reflective and

¹⁷ The data from my diary pertaining to difficulties in gaining access to participants has been published: Peticca-Harris, A., deGama, N., & Elias, S. (2016). A dynamic model for finding informants and gaining access in qualitative research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 19, 376-401.

reflexive during the entire research process (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). In order to do so I continued to make use of my diary to maintain detailed field notes. In my field notes I jotted down any presuppositions at the start of the study (King, 2004a), assumptions I had about the participants, thoughts about the interviews themselves, any concerns I had about my own interviewing style or the way the interview was conducted, and ideas for future interviews. I also noted how I felt during the interviews in order to reflect upon these experiences. This was an important step in the research process as the act of writing my thoughts in a diary allowed for deeper thought during the data analysis and forced me to consider why I made any “particular interpretations before forming any opinions of ‘reality’ as such” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 10). It is important to note that even though I have dedicated a section in this chapter to discuss how I engaged in self-critique, I have incorporated elements of reflexivity throughout this research project, highlighting wherever necessary not only my challenges and shortcomings, but also any subjective biases or inclinations. Similar to how the act of being self-reflexive permeates every step of the research process, it also was salient in every step of writing up this dissertation.

3.5. SUMMARY

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the study’s research design and methodology. Interpretive interactionism provides the study with both paradigmatic and methodological guidance. Consequently, the first section of this chapter describes interpretive interactionism and explains the link between this framework and the study’s methodology. I provided an in-depth explanation for the generation of and access to my sample, a rationale behind my choice of method (in-depth, semi-structured interviews), and an overview of how the career accounts unfolded. Further, I have also provided a detailed account behind my data

analysis procedures, explaining the value of NVivo and the way in which my data was organized into nodes. Given that the research process has now been laid out, in the next three chapters (4-6) I will focus on the study's findings, organized by each research question.

Chapter 4: Career Boundaries

In this chapter I explore the boundaries perceived and experienced by participants and the extent to which these boundaries may constrain and/or enable their careers. The findings in this chapter answer the following questions:

- How do study participants (SIE accountants from the Asian subcontinent) perceive and experience boundaries in the context of their career?
- To what extent do study participants identify these boundaries as being constraining and/or enabling forces on their career experiences?

When analysing responses to these questions, this study does not treat career boundaries as “limits to career moves” (Bagdadli et al., 2003, p. 789). Instead, this study contends boundaries can constrain *and* enable individuals’ career experiences (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2011) and follows the logic of Gunz and Mayrhofer (2011), who suggested that boundaries play a role in structuring individuals’ career passages. These scholars indicated specific organizational boundaries, such as strict promotion criteria, can be enabling to an individual’s career since they give him/her a sense of structure and direction in the development of their career. Furthermore, this study argues boundaries are *social creations* that are created “through recursive organizing processes” of both career gatekeepers and career actors (Inkson et al., 2012, p. 331). The focus of this chapter is to examine how boundaries are perceived subjectively and how they constrain or enable a career from the perspective of SIEs in the UAE. It is important to note that while Gunz and Mayrhofer (2011) identify three roles of career boundaries: constrain, enable and punctuate the findings of this study only point to the constraining and enabling elements of career boundaries. For the purposes of this study, participants perceive boundaries as constraining if they block or limit career opportunities and/or mobility and they perceive boundaries as enabling when they provide

some form of structure and/or direction to their career experiences. This chapter is organized based on the main boundaries identified by participants¹⁸. In each section, I highlight factors participants attribute to the boundary itself and consider the extent to which participants feel these boundaries enable or constrain their career experiences in the context of the UAE.

4.1. LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Many participants reported limited opportunities to develop and/or utilize their skills were a constraining force on their careers. It is important to note that when discussing this particular boundary, participants not only referred to factors in the environment which they felt were imposed onto them but also discussed perceptions surrounding their own capabilities, which, they felt, were also a constraint on their career experiences.

4.1.1. Factors in the environment: taxation laws and accounting procedures

While there are rules regarding corporate tax for foreign banks and foreign oil companies there is no personal taxation or withholding tax provisions in the UAE; as a result, the country has the need for only limited accounting procedures. Many participants felt that because the UAE does not have a complex tax system (like other countries where they had worked) they were not able to utilize their accounting knowledge and skills. This feedback reinforced Gunz et al. (2000) who have argued that a perceived deficit in experience and/or skills creates a “demand-side” boundary. This sentiment was exemplified by some study participants. For instance, Shaaz explained:

¹⁸ It is important to note that all the boundaries I introduce in this chapter are based on participants’ perceptions of them. In contrast to a realist ontology, which takes the perspective that the world is ‘out there’ to be discovered, I emphasise that the boundaries are based on the perceptions of the participants themselves. While participants may perceive that a boundary may be ‘external’ to them (i.e., an objective boundary), the key is that they have perceived the boundary as such.

I would say that the job here is much easier. In the finance field, there is no tax; the laws are very simple. And their labour laws are hardly 60 or 70 pages—that is basically the law we have to follow. And the commercial law is also very simple—there is no bankruptcy law or anything [. . .] so basically you have to focus on financial management, and the legal stuff is very simple. So basically cash-flows and make sure that your customers are paying you on time [. . .] there's not much challenge. (Shaaz)

Similarly, Ifraz revealed his frustration associated with not being able to fully use his skills:

See, professionally I have lost. Compared with what I was two years back, I'm not that good right now, because my qualifications [are not being fully utilized]. Here the issues are not that technical. Professionally the market is not at the level, so when issues comes [*sic*] up, like fraud or complex transactions – anyone can manipulate this. So, professionally, I didn't gain much. (Ifraz)

Like Shaaz, Ifraz suggested that due to the lack of a tax system in the UAE, he was unable to fully utilize his skills as a Chartered Accountant. Shaaz and Ifraz were not the only participants to voice this perception of boundaries. Fahad gave a very similar account:

Oh, it's [the financial laws] very lenient. And that's a good thing as well because it makes my job very easy, because there's not really much responsibility [. . .] So ultimately if there is no tax, and companies misstate their profits by a few hundred thousand here and there, then nobody really cares. The government doesn't care, the companies don't care [. . .] On the plus side, it really makes my job very easy—nobody cares. On the bad side, career-wise, it doesn't give me much of an opportunity to exercise my skills as an

auditor, right? I mean, ultimately people could say if I was to come for a career, I don't think the UAE is the best place to come to have a career (Fahad)

Fahad moved from positive to negative attributions with respect to the impact of not being able to fully utilize his skills, thus signalling the fluid way in which participants may perceive a career boundary. It is also significant how Fahad's shifted between a short- and long-term perspective when assessing the impact of this boundary on his career: on one hand, he reflected upon his current job, yet on the other hand, he considered the future of his career. The way in which Fahad accounted for his career experiences by drawing out comparisons between different points in time is an important finding for this study as it suggests that the perceived influence of a boundary can become more or less salient depending on the lens (that is, "now" orientation versus a "future" orientation) through which boundaries are examined. For example, some participants focused on how a limited utilization of skills may impact their *current* career, whereas other participants reported that they felt a limited utilization of skills may impact their *future* career options, particularly with respect to future mobility. Nisha is one participant who reflected on future career implications: "Yeah, yeah, it does get difficult because if you need to penetrate into those markets, or those regions, or those companies, it becomes very difficult, because at some point in time you become stagnant in one place" (Nisha). Nisha voiced concern surrounding the idea that limited opportunities to utilize and/or develop her skills in her current situation may negatively impact future opportunities. Shaaz communicated a similar concern:

So, if you want to go back also to India, the problem will be, you know, in legal issues, you will become very weak here. So going back and even if you want to join some company – some big company – basically you will be joining as a Finance Manager, where you will be focused on reporting, all of these kinds of things. (Shaaz)

Both Nisha and Shaaz conveyed disquiet about their future career options; they felt that their auditing skills may decay while working in the UAE since they are not provided with the opportunity within this national context to fully utilize their skills.

As discussed in Chapter 2, boundaries may also be based on individuals' own subjective perceptions of *themselves*. Some participants discussed how the limited opportunities to develop their skills in the UAE affected their confidence; as a result, they were uncertain about their own abilities with respect to career opportunities or future mobility. Saamia exemplified this concern:

I just sometimes feel that I hope I am able to work under extreme types of pressure that I used to work [under] in India—those kind[s] of work pressures there [are] very high, and the complexity of the work that is done there; so, that's the only thing I think about sometimes [. . .] just the confidence—if I had to move back to India tomorrow, I might be a little worried about how I'll be able to pick up—the timings, the pressures, the complex work we have there [. . .] it is a major concern, definitely. (Saamia)

Another participant, Saaqib, was also concerned about future career opportunities:

I would say that this [the less challenging tax structure in the UAE] is a disadvantage in a sense and an advantage also in a sense that by designation I'm an audit manager, but if you compare my knowledge and my experience, frankly, to an audit manager in the UK firm or US firm, I would be far below because I'm not exposed to those [tax] technicalities...this worries me for moving in the future. (Saaqib)

Both Saamia and Saaqib hinted at the idea that they were uncertain and worried about their current abilities given the limited exposure they have to auditing while working in the UAE with respect to future mobility. It is important to note however, that the accounts provided are based

on the perceptions participants have of themselves and it seems they may be reluctant to pursue future career opportunities based on these current perceptions of their abilities. This finding is similar to the findings of Bagdadli et al. (2003) who observed that individuals were reluctant to look for another career opportunity due to concerns of whether their skills or firm-specific competencies would be of value in the labour market.

This concern about their own knowledge, experience, skills and competencies is reinforced by Saaqib, who continued to explain that his current career success is merely due to “*luck*” rather than his own abilities:

[I have progressed] according to my good luck because at certain times my immediate senior resigned or they moved away and I was the best candidate to go up, so that kept happening for last four to five years, and I frankly think I’m not worth it, but I want to rise in the position. I always think that because I’m not given that exposure over here, I am unsure of how well I’ll do elsewhere. (Saaqib)

Saaqib’s account points to his lack of confidence based on his person-centered boundary (Ituma & Simpson, 2009); he doubted his ability for future mobility and career growth because of his perceptions surrounding his lack of experience in the UAE. Once again, we see a connection between the present and the future as Saaqib explained that his current, limited exposure may impact future career opportunities outside of the UAE. The way in which participants make sense of their perceived career boundaries (as enablers and/or constraints) appears to be affected by comparisons made with something else – either another context or even another point in time.

4.2. UAE LABOUR LAWS

Many participants reported that government policy, particularly with respect to labour laws, was a salient and constraining dimension on their careers. What is important in these accounts is how labour laws can be seen as both enabling and constraining the labour market.

4.2.1. Kafala system

As discussed in Chapter 1, all foreigners working in the UAE operate under a system of employment called the Kafala system. Under this legal system, all foreigners who wish to move to the UAE to work must enter into a contractual agreement with a GCC national, institution, or employer, also known as a sponsor, to obtain an entry visa, employment visa, and residence permit (Barria, 2008). As a result of the Kafala system, employment visas need constant renewal (Longva, 1997; Nagy, 2008;). Several participants spoke about the perceived impact of the Kafala system, specifically with respect to *career stability* and *career mobility*. This concern is illustrated in the following comment:

Job mobility is quite tough. Jobs in the UAE are like a gamble—you don't know where you're going to end. Sometimes you end up with a good company, sometimes you don't. And getting out of it [a Kafala contract] is tough. There are restrictions—restrictions are there, like you can't move after two years, so if you get a good offer, you cannot go, or you are not happy, you cannot go [. . .] So that's the impediment in this region (Ragesh).

Ragesh's account points to the significance of the UAE's labour laws (i.e. a Kafala contract) on restricting his ability to voluntarily change jobs in the country. In contrast to Scurry et al.'s (2013) study which found that SIEs in Qatar do not tend to problematize the constraints of Qatari labour laws on their career prospects, Ragesh does acknowledge the link between restrictions

relating to the UAE's labour laws and his career progression. He continues to discuss how this restriction may be exacerbated when you lose your job in the country:

That happened when I was in (company A)—we as a team had to leave the company, and virtually we were on the streets because we had to vacate the house and the next job would take another couple of months [. . .] and then what about schooling? The children and all that [. . .] So I had to send off my family back to India and then my eldest daughter was put in Chennai, and another daughter was in my village [. . .] So, and my wife was travelling, shuffling between these two, and I was in Sharjah looking for a job. But this is typical here—most of the Indians, professionals have undergone this you know, where suddenly your job is finished [. . .] If you see my career, after Abu Dhabi I had a stable five years, then I came to Dubai, and then I had another five stable years [. . .] but those one to two years if you've seen my profile, there were a lot of these kinds of things—very anxious time. (Ragesh)

Ragesh's account not only illustrates the unnerving experiences associated with losing a job, but also it captures the impact of labour laws on participants' legal status in the UAE. He speaks to the anxiety experienced by himself and his family due to the instability. This finding supports that of Rodriguez and Scurry (2014) whose study on SIEs in Qatar argued that SIEs lack a sense of permanency in the country, and are considered as “outsiders” who only come into the country “in order to perform a job” (p. 204). It appears that this “transactional economic” (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014) relationship, that is, simply coming into the country to perform a job, which has been experienced by many participants, leaves them uncertain about their career stability in the country (p. 201). This idea is further demonstrated in a response from Hameed:

You feel like just a worker here, more like someone who is replaceable. Once again going back to the law, and the way society is structured, the fact that everyone is here on a visa, and everyone, especially Pakistanis and Indians, are very replaceable [. . .] Everything is short-term, from the way people invest, to the way people plan their careers, it's all very short-term. (Hameed)

Ifraz offered a similar perspective:

So the Dubai market has some issues. Issues like, you are here for a job, fine. Tomorrow you could be given a letter saying, we don't need you – go home. So, here, hiring is done very quickly, and you are also fired very quickly. This is part of the Dubai market—there is a lot of hiring going on, but there are a lot of people moving out, so it's very volatile; especially recently, we have seen that Dubai is not that stable. You have a job and you aren't guaranteed to stay for 10 years—you must always think of alternatives. (Ifraz)

These accounts point to the way in which a boundary can be both constraining and enabling forces on individuals' career experiences: on one hand, the Kafala system restricts an SIE's ability to move between employers, yet on the other hand, the presence of this sponsor system allows an SIE to legally work in the UAE.

In addition to discussing how the Kafala system influences their feelings of career stability, a few participants also explained how the UAE's labour laws restrict their career mobility in the country. For instance, Rohan states:

Generally, it isn't very easy to resign and move to other companies here in Dubai because most of the companies have a very high notice period – the notice period ranges from two months, three months, which is very high [. . .] moreover, there are bans upon a person's

visa. Basically, because if you join an organization and leave, they [the government] can issue a ban upon your visa and you won't be getting a job in the Middle East within the next two years. Many people, even when they join an organization, they understand that this isn't the kind of job I wanted, but they can't leave the organization because a ban can be put on their visa. So they can't look for other opportunities also. (Rohan)

Like Rohan, several other participants discussed how the UAE's labour laws restrict their ability to switch employers. However, there appears to be a contradictory element to their accounts: many participants reported a desire to have a commitment from their employers, particularly through discussions surrounding permanency, yet they also complained about not being able to move around and switch employers when they want. This theme of ambivalence will be further explored in Chapter 5.

4.2.2. Quota systems

The UAE's localization initiative, Emiratization, is designed to increase labour force participation among Emiratis (discussion offered in Chapter 2). One method of increasing local workers is through a quota system, which restricts the issuance of working visas and/or resident permits to certain nationalities (Forstenlechner, Lettice, & Özbilgin, 2012). While quota systems may imply a potentially constraining effect on an SIE's career options, particularly when working in a host country, some participants felt the UAE's quota system was actually an enabling force since it helped them get their jobs in the UAE. This perspective is demonstrated below:

So there is a high concentration of Indian people and it's because predominantly the firm is Indian and now we are expanding more and getting to more nationalities. In fact, I would say the reason why I came, why I was selected, is because of the UAE regulations,

which requires a company to have different nationality visas otherwise, probably I would never have [been hired . . .] Yeah, cause probably at that time they exceeded the quota for Indian visas and they were forced to go to Pakistan and recruit somebody and then Sri Lanka and then Bangladesh [. . .] So this probably was a big factor behind my recruitment. (Saaqib)

Saaqib, who is a Pakistani national, felt his move to the UAE and his current job can be attributed to the UAE's quota set on Indian nationals. In other words, while the UAE's quota system may be a constraining force on an Indian national's career experience, Saaqib felt it enabled him to move to the UAE. It is important to point out that Saaqib's experience was not widespread among participants; however, his particular example reinforces the idea that even though certain boundaries may apply to everybody, not everyone will identify and/or experience them in the same way.

4.3. DISCRIMINATION

A majority of participants pointed out that they perceived a sense of discrimination, either due to their nationality or gender, when working in organizations in the UAE. It is important to highlight here that this study does not examine whether the discrimination is real or institutionalized within the organization itself; rather, it focuses on participants' perceptions of discrimination in relation to their careers.

4.3.1. Discrimination based on nationality

Nearly all participants, either directly or indirectly, felt that their managers' or co-workers' perceptions around their nationality acted as a constraining force on their careers. For example, when asked whether he felt anything was a hurdle in his career advancement, Rohan answered with the following remark:

There is the political work environment [which gives] – unnecessary preference to Arabs and Emiratis, which is then misused by employers in their favour at the cost of other expats. This isn't good for the company and for employees' careers in the long-term.

(Rohan)

Ahsan had similar sentiments:

I am concerned with working in Dubai because there is a little discrimination between Arabs and non-Arabs [. . .] I have some reservations about this—I don't like discrimination in my workplace, I don't like inequality between the people [. . .] The degree of discrimination is higher if you say Arabic people compared to expats from the West, from Europe and US. So that is a negative aspect; there are a lot of positive things, but this is a negative point that I want to mention. (Ahsan)

Both Rohan and Ahsan point to their perceptions of a hierarchy in the UAE based mainly on nationality (Malecki & Ewers, 2007; Naithani & Jha, 2010), which, in turn, seems to manifest into a perceived career boundary. This perceived discrimination appears to have started right from the time they secured a job. Other participants provided similar responses. For instance, Haaris mentioned, “there is a bit of discrimination that happens...like in the negotiation stages and all” and he suggested this discrimination continues after hiring. Similarly, Hameed mentioned he has experienced a “pecking order” based on nationality and this experience has impacted his exposure to certain clients:

We were pitching for work, and there was an emphasis on putting more white people, white senior people on the proposal [. . .] It wasn't explicitly said, but you know, it was

unspoken—everyone knew why this was being done [. . .] So yeah, there is definitely and emphasis on Western experience. (Hameed)

Working in an industry that is heavily based and rewarded on client work, Hameed reported that he felt that this preference for Western experience adversely affected his career progression (and arguably an ‘enabler’ to the ‘Western’¹⁹ SIE). He continues to explain how perceptions surrounding nationality continue to impact his career in the UAE: “There, there are just too many glass ceilings. I mean, there’s the White thing, there’s the local thing. There’s the language. And there are just too many things [. . .] it gets in the way of my career goals” (Hameed). This feeling is echoed by Basheer, who explained certain factors he felt constrain his career: “maybe my nationality [. . .] because, in my firm, the top management are European, mainly Brits, so they prefer advancing Brit people” (Basheer). These accounts point to the apparent social division of labour based on nationality (Naithani & Jha, 2010) and demonstrate how gatekeepers may restrict career opportunities of some individuals by not placing them on certain client files. These comments corroborate Scurry et al. (2013) who have argued that “workers are not on a level playing field” due to the “impositions and constructions that use nationality, citizenship and regulations to establish differences between individuals” (p. 13). The findings demonstrate that while one individual may feel that a boundary has a constraining effect on the career experiences (i.e. perceived discrimination based on their nationality) in one group, another individual may feel this same boundary may serve to support the careers of individuals in other groups (e.g., “Brits,” from the perspective of Basheer).

¹⁹ It is important to note that I am not trying to define a ‘Western’ SIE here. I am using Hameed’s language (provided in his interview excerpt) to argue that boundaries are unique to the individuals who perceive and experience them.

While the accounts thus far have demonstrated how participants experience a sense of discrimination mainly due to nationality, it is important to note discrimination may be based on multiple factors. For example, Hameed's experienced pecking order based on his organization's preference for "Western experience," while Rohan and Ahsan experienced discrimination based on being non-Arab and an expatriate. These findings therefore suggest that participants' perceived career boundaries associated with discrimination should not be reduced to a single factor; rather, discrimination is based on an intersectionality of variations of nationality and expatriate status, and gender (further discussion on gender in section 4.3.2).

Despite acknowledging his perceived discrimination, when asked whether he would want to continue working in the UAE, Basheer responded:

I would love to continue working here. It is much easier, much better client exposure, and I think that the time I've spent here, I've learnt – I know the culture, I know the people, I know the clients – so I can really capitalize on that. (Basheer)

By oscillating between differing viewpoints related to the negative effects of discrimination and the positive effects of working in the UAE it appears that Basheer may actually be unsure about the extent to which perceptions surrounding his nationality may actually be a constraint to his career. This finding signals an element of contradiction in Basheer's narrative and may therefore point to the fluidity of ways in which career boundaries are perceived—they may not always be 'set in stone,' but may fluctuate as people encounter different career experiences.

In addition to discussing how discrimination based on nationality impacted their current careers, several participants reported that they felt their nationality would act as a barrier to future mobility. Restrictions surrounding working visas based on nationality is another boundary

participants perceived. Saamia voiced this concern when she explained the difficulties with trying to move to another country due to her nationality:

given the situation—the visa situation, the immigration in the UK, it is again difficult to move at the moment, so I would say that it would only be this country—the UAE or India [where I could live . . .] no other place. I mean, because London is somewhere where any finance professional would want to be [. . .] but right now it is difficult to get a visa there, so it [nationality] is definitely a barrier, yes. (Saamia)

Even though these participants are a highly skilled group of individuals, they perceived that opportunities to move to other countries beyond the UAE may not be attainable to them. This concern is particularly salient in a profession where international work is considered an important career script (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Shaffer et al., 2012). Not being able to respond to this institutional cue (Barley, 1989) may limit an individual's career mobility if not moving means an individual is unable to prescribe to and behave in accordance with necessary promotion-related behaviors (Dany et al., 2011).

4.3.2. Gender discrimination

Many females in the study stated that they experienced a “glass-ceiling” effect on their careers while working in the UAE. For instance, when asked to describe her career experience thus far, Usha responded with the following remark:

[Working in the UAE is] a huge nightmare, because this is where I think I felt very much [discriminated against] as a female professional in this industry. You get really short changed over here. Company D was so sexist, or my boss was so sexist, it was horrible. (Usha)

However, when Usha was asked why she continued to stay given these concerns, she responded as follows:

Comfort. I mean not just comfort, but the money. I mean we're being paid a hell of a lot more than you would in India. You've got two kids, you have to send them to school, college [. . .] everything. So you keep saying, "let me not rock the boat." If I get a good job in India, then I will move. (Usha)

Usha's experience signifies how gender discrimination can be a constraining boundary, but can also be enabling because it occurs in a job that pays well. Another gender-related concern related to career boundaries is the idea of career compromise. Usha voiced this concern as well:

But then who's to go if both husband and wife are working, who's to give up their job and goes and sets up home. That becomes the challenge of working couples. That's a whole other issue I find, that somebody has to make a compromise. And who is that person going to be [. . .] there's ways to think about it in terms of who's earning a better salary or who's got an easier job. (Usha)

There appears to be uneasiness in Usha's interview as she discussed the theme of career compromise, an area that only females in this study explicitly discussed. For example, Natalia explained how the long hours and pressures of being a professional accountant alongside the roles of being a mother or wife acted as a negative force in her career:

...if I want to actually really earn what I should be earning according to my degree, I have to put in the extra hours, which I cannot afford to do right now [. . .] There are so many compromises you have to make as a lady [. . .] but then you just say, okay, fine, if I get a job which doesn't require much more time and it doesn't require that much intense

kind of you know, updates and developments you need to do with your career [. . .] so it's better you join something like this [job] (laughs) [. . .] and be happy about it!

(Natalia)

Natalia's account touches upon the theme of career compromise as she explains that while her chosen career path may not be reflective of her qualifications, it is less onerous with respect to time and pressure. Also, inherent in Natalia's account is the impact of perceived gender role expectations. Other female participants communicated similar feelings:

In Asia, the women are expected to do everything—you take care of the house, you take care of the kids, even if you're working. Fine, work, but then you need to give sufficient time to home as well [. . .] And if you're at a Partner level of senior management level, you can't do it; it's impossible to do that. (Rashmi)

Nisha had similar comments:

It [accounting] is a male-dominated industry [. . .] It is a male-dominated society, and male-dominated industry also [. . . and] women have to choose between family and work. When you have young kids, at a particular age, it's going to be an issue anywhere you go.

(Nisha)

While the statements these participants made reinforced earlier studies of many females ('western' or 'non-western') working in the accounting industry (e.g., Lyonette & Crompton, 2008), the comments made by female participants once again pointed to the ways in which career boundaries are individually experienced. Gender may work in favour of men in this context, but

it may work against women at the same time. Female participants identified gender as a force of discrimination against female SIE accountants.

Again, the way in which participants made comparisons to identify a career boundary is illustrated. For example, Nisha made a comparison between her current situation and an envisioned possibility: like prior studies have demonstrated (e.g. Karam & Afiouni, 2014; Van den Bergh & Du Plessis, 2013), even though Nisha discussed the impact of caregiving responsibilities and child-bearing, which felt limits her career options, she did mention that it is a “personal choice,” thus suggesting that she was taking responsibility for her choice or acknowledging a sense of complicity with the boundary she had identified.

4.4. ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES

Larsen (2004) reminded us that individuals’ careers are still heavily dependent on their organizations. Findings from this study reinforce Larsen’s (2004) argument and reveal that participants still draw upon their organization’s policies to make sense of their career experiences. It is important to highlight that the organizational policies presented in this section are based on participants’ perceptions and interpretations of them, not the actual policies themselves. To address organizational policy issues, I examined how participants felt these specific policies constrained and/or enabled their careers.

4.4.1. Human Resources Policies and Programs

Several participants explained how specific Human Resources (HR) policies and programs acted as an enabler to their career. Urmila, for example, suggested HR policies helped her in her career:

I work with (Company B), one of the Big 4 international auditing firms. Company B's Professional Development Programme (PDP) is designed to help fresh graduates mould into young business professionals. The programme teaches individuals the basics of auditing and helps them grow in the field year on year. This program has really helped me progress in my firm (Urmila).

Urmila's account demonstrates the importance of training programs, which she felt were an enabler in her career. This sentiment is echoed by Basheer, who states:

Our firm has a formal mentorship program [. . .] they communicate and manage what the expectations [are] and they collect feedback about me [. . .] they listen to what people are chatting about me, and they combine and get feedback, communicate it to me, how I can improve, how I should improve, what are the things they are looking for. How to improve in writing, how to improve in speaking [. . .] all of these things has really helped me move to the next level in my career—it has been very useful. (Basheer)

Basheer considered the presence of formal learning opportunities salient in his ability to acquire career capital (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), particularly with respect to knowing-how competencies. Parker, Arthur, and Inkson (2004) have suggested the organizational community provides individuals with knowing how in the form of formal learning agendas and training programs.

However, as discussed earlier, individuals' career experiences are unique and dependant on their respective contexts: while some participants feel HR programs and policies can enable their careers, other participants feel that they may restrict their career experiences. Rohan, for example, found HR programs and policies to be constraining:

I'm frustrated because of significant time delays in promotions and pay revisions... There is also favouritism in the company as certain individuals given preference on the basis of their personal relationship with superiors. I think we have an unfair system of performance management and career development – superiors don't really bother about it or are insecure with the upcoming new staff promotions. The only thing I want to get rid of unfairness and inequity in my workplace, which is wasting my precious efforts and hard work required to move on my designated career path. (Rohan)

In comparison to other participants, Rohan feels that his company's HR processes, such as promotion and pay revisions, are not implemented fairly, thus hindering his career goals.

At the same time, other participants found benefit in HR policies and programs. The findings of this study suggest that HR policies may also provide order to individuals' careers in the form of structure and orientation (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2011). This idea is illustrated by Arif:

My firm values mobility—they have a secondment program, but they have strict performance criteria for doing so [. . .] they also have strict performance criteria for promotions—they hardly steer away from that. I think having strict performance criteria is good because it makes the process fair and I know where I stand and what I need to do to move forward. (Arif)

For Arif, having clear HR policies in place was important because they acted as markers to his career progression: At the same time, Arif also noted, "I don't think I will be applying for the secondment program because their criteria are too strict" (Arif). While Arif identifies the benefits of his company's selection and performance criteria, his remarks may signal a contradiction in the value he places on it because he may not choose to engage in the process due to his

perceptions regarding how “strict” they may be. This contradiction is important for this study on careers because, as already mentioned, it indicates that individuals may often be left unsure about their own perceptions of a career boundary.

Such contradiction was also found in other participants’ accounts. Several participants appeared to be uncertain about the usefulness of specific HR policies on their career experiences.

Haaris, for example, commented:

When I’m working over here, it entirely depends on your performance— [the performance management system] is very fair. The more you work, the more you perform, the more responsibilities are being loaded upon you—that is what I have been experiencing ‘til date. But again, you know, you have to perform, and you have to get your work done. You can be good at the management side of things, but at the time of giving promotions, or at the time of giving compensation, it always comes down to performance (Haaris).

Haaris started off with a positive account of his company’s performance management system; however, as he continued to discuss the process, he started discussing the potential pitfalls associated with HR decisions surrounding seniority, particularly his concern that he did not feel fairly rewarded for his performance. Haaris felt the way in which his company exhibited an implicit policy of “keeping him back” just so that his senior counterparts could play “catch up” (Haaris) was a problematic HR decision:

Let’s say there is another Chartered Accountant before your batch [. . .] Now that since I have performed very well, I should be getting a promotion—my bonuses and all should be better [. . .] but sometimes if those people [other Chartered Accountants] have not

performed very well, but I have performed well, they say, we can give you a promotion next year, your compensation will increase next year—we'll match it up. So those kinds of things I have experienced, which can be a bit unfair, especially if I'm working hard.

(Haaris)

While the literature discusses the salience of promotion policies on providing order to individuals' careers (e.g., Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2011), Haaris felt that unless these policies are enacted fairly, they can be a constraint. This study extends the work of Gunz and Mayrhofer (2011) to suggest that even though some factors may enable an individual's career by giving them a sense of structure and direction, there is still the possibility that individuals may perceive these factors as being constraining. Individuals may not perceive a career boundary to be explicitly enabling or constraining; rather, an individual's perceptions exist on a continuum – in this case, it is not the existence of a policy or system itself which is significant, but its perceived enactment.

4.4.2. (Lack of) Opportunities for Learning

Echoing much of the existing literature on international assignments (e.g., Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Jokinen, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2003), the majority of participants in this study mentioned their move to the UAE provided them with opportunities to learn and develop their repertoire of personal²⁰ and professional skills. In particular, most participants stated how their move to the UAE was directly or indirectly beneficial to their learning. For example, Sunil explained, “I think this is a learning experience, and you know, this is one of the benefits [. . .]

²⁰ Personal learning in this study is understood as supporting some kind of self-development such as learning to adapt to new situations

somebody who works in this part of the world has” (Sunil). He likened his learning experience in the UAE to being on a dirt road:

As opposed to North America, which is like a road with all kinds of signs and directions and whatnot, this [the UAE] is a dirt road [. . . and] a person who can navigate in a dirt road will find it very easy to find in a road with signs [. . .] But a person who is living in a road with signs will find it very difficult to navigate in a dirt road [. . .] and the reality is the world is a dirt road [. . .] so if you can navigate people here, if you can really deal with them and figure out how they work, then I think you stand a very good chance career-wise anywhere in the world. (Sunil)

On one hand, Sunil explained the frustrations that come with working in the UAE, particularly the impact this environment had on his career; on the other hand, he discussed what he felt were some of the benefits of this work environment on his career. As discussed in section 4.1., many participants discussed that the UAE does not provide as many opportunities for them to utilize their skills because of the country’s limited taxation laws and accounting procedures. However, the “dirt road” metaphor Sunil provided is useful as it suggests that participants still benefit from their UAE experience by learning how to adapt to new and sometimes ambiguous situations as a result of the absence of clear accounting procedures.

With respect to professional learning, many participants discussed how in the UAE they have developed skills and abilities to perform their job more effectively and to help with future career advancement. For instance, Rahim, who works in a public accounting firm, pointed to the importance of acquiring both hard and soft skills:

The main thing I learned in Dubai is the good project management skills and communication skills. These are the two, the two key skills you require here, to get a promotion or an enhancement in your career. I mean, no matter if you have a very good knowledge of auditing or accounting, but if you are good in communication and project management, then definitely, you will survive, and you will improve, you will enhance in your career. (Rahim)

However, participants who are currently working in public accounting firms explained that the nature of the work required in this type of organizational context limited opportunities for learning. Haaris, for example, suggested he had limited learning opportunities:

Compared with working in industry, in professional services firms²¹ your client base is kind of decided—you know that you will be working with this client, so that client might appeal to you for one or two years; might be three years maximum, but then there won't be much to learn about those clients. Basically, you'll be knowing everything about those clients. And you can only basically appreciate what has been done, I mean, if they have introduced new finance things, which are good in nature, then you can only learn what had been done, but you can never plan for those things. (Haaris)

Through a comparison with working in “industry” (i.e. private accounting), Haaris explains that in public accounting individuals may be placed on a certain client file for years, and after a while there appears to be an element of learning saturation if you continue to work with that particular client. In a similar vein, Ahsan voices concern with respect to the limitations on available learning opportunities in public accounting firms:

²¹ Public accounting firms are often referred to as professional services firms

We are restricted to the areas we are working on. If we are working on budgeting, for example, we are restricted to budgeting. We will be working on budgeting for the whole year—[we] will be comparing budgets, and giving explanations for the variances, and will be presenting this to management. So we are restricted to this area only. We therefore don't get to learn about other areas—we are not aware, not in touch, so my professional capacity reduces day-by-day. (Ahsan)

The nature of work within a specific organizational context is therefore an important career boundary identified by participants. Both Haaris and Ahsan drew on their respective organizational contexts and explained that the nature of work in a professional services firm can sometimes lead to being confined to one area of expertise. They felt these factors inhibited their ability to learn about different work functions. These accounts appear to be in contrast to their comments made earlier in the interview about public accounting firms being “learning organizations” (Haaris) where employees are given “many opportunities to learn and better [their] skills – and many of these are institutionalized so they are aware of what is required to move up the next level” (Ahsan). Even though Ahsan discussed how his organization offered formal training programs, he still communicated his concern regarding limits to learning simply due to the nature of work inherent in a professional services organization.

Even though many participants discussed the formal learning opportunities provided by their firms, these accounts suggest participants may place more of an emphasis on informal learning within the accounting profession, specifically tacit knowledge and un-codified rules that are often linked with learning through others (e.g. Anderson-Gough et al., 1998, 2001; Lyonette & Crompton, 2008).

4.5. IMPLICIT RULES

Drawing on Barley's (1989) notion of career scripts, as discussed in Chapter 2, there are rules attached to enacting a certain career and individuals must learn to play within these rules. Several participants drew upon the idea of the rules of the game as boundaries when working in a) the UAE, b) the accounting industry, or c) their organization. The identification of these boundaries seems to be based on participants' awareness of certain forms of career capital needed to succeed in their careers and the implication that not having this capital can act as a career constraint.

4.5.1. Professional designation

Acquiring a professional designation is considered not only to be a form of 'career capital' but individuals who do so conform to a specific career script. Professional designations usually act as an entry ticket into a country for immigration purposes. However, research has shown that the country of one's professional designation can be restrictive to one's career mobility and career success; many skilled migrants often experience a devaluation of their qualifications after they move to a new country (e.g., Jones, Thomson, & McKenna, 2013; Qureshi, Varghese, & Osella, 2013; Zikic et al., 2010). In particular, research conducted on individuals from developing parts of the world moving to developed countries suggests a sort of hierarchy with respect to home country designations (e.g. Jones et al., 2013). However, when examined within a UAE context, the findings were mixed: some participants did not feel that the country in which they earned their designation was a hindrance to their career opportunities—simply having a designation was sufficient in attaining employment and being assigned to certain client files—whereas others felt the country in which they earned their designation was

problematic. For example, Sunil did not feel the country where he earned his designation hindered his career in the UAE:

The CPA is a big thing. But, you know, looking from my firm's perspective, as long as you have *a* designation, that's good enough for them [. . .] But I think any designation has value [. . .] I don't think they're as picky here—as long as you have some designation, the firms kind of just want to send you out and say, he's got his CPA or his ACCA or whatever—he's qualified. (Sunil)

In a profession where a central part of your career is attaining your accounting designation (Kornberger, Justesen, & Mouritsen, 2011), the fact that organizations in the UAE are willing to hire individuals with an accounting designation from any country acts as an enabler to SIE accountants' career experiences. This is in contrast to earlier studies which found that some countries have a preference for the country in which you attained your accounting designation (e.g. Jones et al., 2013). However, some participants demonstrated a concern over this impartiality towards the specific accounting designation acquired by individuals, as indicated by Sunil: "I think they don't really care about quality over here—it's like they're milking the brand, and then filling it with bodies, right, like designated bodies—that's what they care about" (Sunil). Sunil discusses the benefits of the UAE treating all chartered accountant designations equally, but he feels it is done at the sacrifice of quality. This idea is reinforced by Aman, who feels that firms simply hire chartered accountants because they "need fodder to do the donkey work" (Aman). While the implications of this particular finding go beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that it reflects professional accounting firms' new commercial orientation with a focus on corporate profits, efficiency, and client service (Anderson-Gough et al., 2000; Mueller et al., 2011).

However, as mentioned, some participants did explain that their organizations had specific preferences on the country in which their employees attained their designation (CPA, CA, ACCA) and may have restricted access to professionals with designations from certain countries (e.g., Jones et al., 2013) they felt were considered more marketable or valuable to their firm. For instance, some participants felt that in their firms, the CPA, a designation founded in the United States, was valued more. Participants had this perception because more of the partners of these accounting firms had CPAs. As a result of this preference for the CPA designation, they explained that they were often not assigned to certain clients because they did not have this particular designation:

Well, 90% of the cases they don't care where you are from, but definitely Pakistani Chartered Accountants are preferred due to our body has agreements with professional bodies around the world and second thing they are recognised—other bodies like Indian bodies are not that much not recognised worldwide. Here also, the Pakistan Chartered Accountants are much recognised and much preferred to Indian Chartered Accountants who some come as an associate, but Pakistani Chartered Accountants qualified never comes as an associate[, but] always come as a Senior or assistant Manager. (Ifraz)

Ifraz's account suggests that many participants not only felt that they were impacted by perceptions around their nationality (Section 4.3.1.), but also by the country in which they received their CA designation. Many participants revealed that they felt partners in their firms had a preference for a designation from certain countries and they felt that many times this preference was based on the country in which they attained their designation. This finding

reinforces existing studies which suggest that individuals' careers may be constrained by gatekeepers who may impose certain career rules based what is deemed suitable; these career rules may limit an individual's ability to enter and progress in a specific industry (e.g., Currie et al., 2006; Fang et al., 2009; Ituma & Simpson, 2009; King et al., 2005; Zikic et al., 2010).

Preferences based on the country in which individuals attained their designation can therefore act as either enablers or constraints on career development.

4.5.2. Linguistic ability

The majority of study participants emphasized the importance of linguistic competency in Arabic when working in the UAE. In particular, many of these participants suggested that they were aware that not speaking Arabic could actually be a hindrance to their careers. This concern was exemplified by Vikesh, who stated, "I think my career has been bounded because I am the only guy who doesn't speak Arabic" (Vikesh). Vikesh compared himself with his Arab speaking co-workers and continued to explain that he felt he missed out on opportunities because he is unable to speak the local language. In a similar manner, Rashmi explicitly mentioned that there is preference for Arabic speakers, specifically with respect to opportunities for work: "There's bias because they prefer people who can speak Arabic—because the banks you know—because of the whole localization process, there are a lot of Arabic people there" (Rashmi). Rashmi's account demonstrates how broader factors within the national context (i.e., Arabic being the official language of the UAE) are interconnected with working practices in the organizational context, particularly with respect to choosing employees to work on certain client files. However, it is important to point out that some participants seem to take some sort of accountability for not speaking the Arabic language. This sentiment is exemplified by Aman who communicates his frustration with not being able to speak Arabic:

If you really want to integrate yourself into a culture and you really want to understand what you're surrounded by, not having the language is a barrier to understanding. You don't know what you're missing until you don't know what you're missing. In the sense that if you had the language you would know what you are missing [. . .] I think you create a barrier by not having the language because you don't catch the banter [. . .] This is important for your career because a lot of interactions can happen in the majlises²². So I think language is probably the big one. If you're in this part of the world, I think you should learn Arabic. (Aman)

Aman's account supports existing research on qualified migrants that stresses the importance of linguistic competence for integration into the host country's labour market (Csedo, 2008; Fossland, 2013). Moreover, Aman's account demonstrates how different forms of career capital may be interlinked with one another. For instance, not knowing the Arabic language limits his opportunities to develop relationships with the local Emiratis and thus limits his ability to acquire knowing-whom career capital (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). In addition, it points to the importance of culturally specific knowing how career capital (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) as a potential enabler to individuals' careers. These findings suggest that not having this type of career capital can actually be a constraint to individuals' careers.

While many participants acknowledged that not speaking Arabic limited their opportunities, only two participants in the study stated that they have attempted to learn the language, and even then, with very limited utility. Aman reported:

²² Majlises is an Arabic term meaning "place of sitting." This term describes a formal legislative assembly and also a place for social gathering. Traditionally, it was one of the major facets of social life in the Gulf countries (www.gulfnews.com).

You know what the sad part is, I've tried twice and I've never succeeded. And I think the big problem is that even if you do learn to speak it, you're not forced to speak it, so you don't actually develop it. I remember my Arabic teacher saying this to me. I was very enthusiastic the first year I was here [. . .] When it was quiet in the office, I took a week, full time intensive, and we did really well for about a week. And then she said, 'you know what the sad part is, and it happens with all my students and it breaks my heart, is I'll teach you all of this, you'll learn, and then you'll walk out of there and you won't have a single opportunity to practice it and you'll lose it.' And she was right. (Aman)

Like many other participants, Aman reveals a sense of regret in not successfully learning Arabic. In particular, on one hand, he appeared to be aware of the importance of speaking Arabic in the UAE, yet on the other hand, he explained that he did not have many opportunities (or perhaps drive) to actually speak it to help him learn the language. In this way, participants may be both a victim of and complicit in the boundaries they perceive.

4.5.2.1. Perceptions surrounding speaking English with a foreign accent

When discussing linguistic competency as potential boundary to their careers, some participants discussed a perceived preference for accents. This preference is exemplified through Saamia's and Natalia's accounts. As Saamia explained:

I think that if you are a Westerner, or if I studied in a Western school, I would have had a different accent and better communication skillset than what I have today...You are able to express yourself better...So again, I cannot generalize that Asians will not have that, but I can attribute that communication skills, I definitely lack - in terms of expressing

things, I really find that, because there are, like I said a couple of nationalities in my office, and where I work, it makes a lot of difference with the way they communicate and the way I communicate... so at times when a person has a Western accent but is not prepared for the meeting, the way he would put that across is way better than the way we would who have actually prepared and done all of the hard work. (Saamia)

Through a comparison with other co-workers, Saamia perceived that due to her accent, she lacked the type of verbal communication skills needed to “stand out” in a meeting. It appears that her perceptions regarding her accent limited her confidence, and therefore may have become a self-fulfilling career boundary. Natalia communicated similar sentiments:

If you are European educated, or if you have a foreign degree and if you have a good accent, you will be able to impress people more. In India, this all doesn't matter—what matters is actually your knowledge, I guess. Sometimes I get a bit worried to speak up in meetings because of my accent. (Natalia)

Natalia's interview suggested that her own perceptions (and perhaps biases) surrounding a preference for certain accents limited her behaviour in the workplace, particularly surrounding “speaking up” at work. This an important finding as visibility and exposure (linked with “speaking up” are “discursive resources that people draw upon” to be successful in accounting firms (Mueller, Carter, and Ross-Smith, 2011 p. 557). Mueller et al.'s, (2011) study, based on a Big 4²³ accounting firm argues that “good work alone will not make a career” and points to

²³ “Big 4 usually refers to the four largest accounting and auditing firms: PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, Ernst & Young, and KPMG” <http://www.accountingcoach.com/blog/big-4-accounting>

another career script, that is the need to “make noise” to make themselves known to partners. Natalia is honest about her perceptions surrounding how speaking English with a foreign accent may be considered a constraint to her career in the professional context of the accounting industry. It is also important to point out that this perception is shaped by comparing her time working in India with her time working in the UAE. She perceived this criterion of having an accent was not important in India whereas she felt this criterion was valued in the UAE.

4.5.3. Social capital

While the benefits of networking are commonplace in both the careers and expatriate literature, the findings of this study point to the ways in which not having access to a network can be a career constraint. Many participants drew on their professional networks to account for their career experiences. These participants often described the accounting profession as being a “small pond” (Kabir) and explained that developing and maintaining international networks was central to their career development. Nisha, for instance, explained “The networking really helps with finding a job. People whom you are working with really know each other – so that, I think is useful” (Nisha). Likewise, Gopal articulated, “Networks depend on the personal or professional circle you create. Sometimes it really helps to expand your career boundary or help with the job hunt” (Gopal). Finally, Urmila expressed, “Personal networks are the most convenient way of finding a job. It helps you place yourself in desirable roles without the hassle of sacrificing your own personal goals” (Urmila). These findings echo the current expatriate literature, which points to the significance of professional and personal networks in helping individuals find and secure a job in an international setting (e.g., Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2012,

2014; Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010). In particular, some participants drew upon the globally connected nature of their organizations. As Hameed illustrated:

So the way our firm is structured, it's a network. I mean, all the firms are independent, but they are related. So, I was referred. Well, I expressed an interest in moving to my boss, who referred me to the guy here, and that's how the connection happened. I feel being in this profession facilitates mobility thanks to the people you know. (Hameed)

In a similar way, Pavan teased out the difference between Big Four and mid-sized firms to discuss the positive impact networking has had on his career:

You know it was more controlled when working in Big Four, whereas over here it is more independent. I could meet so many different type of people with different cultures, I could visit so many places, like we go for conferences where I could meet other Company C colleagues so that way I was able to get international experience plus meet diverse, cultured people. Conferences are very, very helpful in building your network; without them, I would not have met or I would not have interacted with any significant foreign people. (Pavan)

Pavan's experience not only highlights the importance of organizational context (i.e., perceived benefits of working in a mid-sized firm), but demonstrates how professional activities, such as attending conferences, helped expand his professional network. This idea is further illustrated by Pramod who drew on his organizational context to describe the benefits of secondment programs offered by professional services firms. He explained he was able to network with others in his program, to "exchange emails and we know we are in touch" and how this networking made him feel "I have few guys there who can really help me" (Pramod). Even though the findings

reinforce the current research on the enabling effects of professional networks on expatriate careers (Richardson, 2009; Richardson & McKenna, 2014), it is important to point out that a lack of professional network can be perceived as a barrier to career development. This idea is consistent with the global careers literature, which has argued that expatriates may lose some of their career competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) and experience a depletion of their social network, or their knowing-whom (e.g., Bozionelos, 2009; Richardson & McKenna, 2014; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014), when they move to a new country. Unless individuals are able to acquire knowing-whom career capital (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996), they may be faced with boundaries that restrict career experiences. Therefore, not having this capital may inhibit individuals' career options.

In particular, some participants discussed the importance of and difficulties associated with “playing the networking game” to acquire knowing whom career capital in the host country. For example, Fahad discussed how he felt excluded because he did not engage with the many social activities that are commonplace within his profession:

The simple example is smoking breaks. I don't smoke, but I've seen that a lot of plans are made, a lot of work discussions over a smoke. So they'll say, let's go for a smoke. And then they discuss work, and when they come back they know more than the guy who didn't go for a smoke [. . .] So if you are socializing with somebody, you definitely get to know them more, they prefer you more, and stuff will happen. But I think that's true in any profession—even if you're at school, the people who hang out with will take care of you [. . .] it's the same thing at work. (Fahad)

In addition to smoking breaks, Fahad also explained how going out for drinks after work is a norm within his profession and he felt that he may be at a disadvantage career-wise because he does not drink:

The best position you can get is becoming a partner, where you assume a lot of responsibility, with signing the financial statements of a company, and you get a lot of money [. . .] but to get to that level you have to be very, very, social. But social means, drinking, going out, which I don't do. Like I don't drink, I don't do anything against my religion [. . .] so if I don't drink, and I don't speak Arabic, and I don't socialize in the way that they want me to socialize, that pretty much means that I cannot get to that top level of partner. (Fahad)

While Fahad felt that not engaging in social activities may constrain his career, he may be complicit in this restriction since he chooses not to engage in any behaviour to address the issues he has identified. Usha also reported similar concerns:

We won't go for a beer after work, we'll sit in the office and work late, but we won't go for a beer. We won't do business over a drink; if you're a woman, it's a hundred times worse. At this age, I'm 47, and I'm still finding it uncomfortable to say to a man, "let's go have coffee together," and it's stupid, I've been a profession[al] for about 25 years. I'm concerned about how I may be perceived. That's the whole thing—I don't want it to appear that I'm giving flirtatious signals. "You're too old not to be giving flirty signals," that's what I tell myself. (Laughs) I will actually write it in e-mail and then erase it. I am just not comfortable with it, and in a job like mine now, unfortunately that's how business gets done. (Usha)

Even though Usha felt excluded because she chose not to get involved with social activities after work, she also contributed to the exclusion by not participating in the activities. Usha also explained that she feels wary about her behaviour being construed as inappropriate because of her gender. This concern is demonstrated further below:

So that's a real mental strain for me working here. Whereas in India that probably wouldn't happen, as you would probably end up doing more business in the office; you don't have to meet up for coffee or for lunch or for dinner—it's a different lifestyle, a different way of doing business. I think Indian women in general find it difficult to do so, particularly in this male-dominated industry. For the same concerns, and if we do, do it, sometimes we end up trying too hard. It isn't very natural, so you end up sounding fake. I think it's almost like the double-edged sword, I think it's almost like if you are being too assertive, you are perceived as shrill. But if you don't do anything, you're seen as being too passive—you are damned if you do and you're damned if you don't. And in fact, I think that is the constant problem of being here. I don't feel it's a problem of being from India, I think it's here. Because if you're assertive, then you're considered a bitch, excuse my language. And if you're not, then you're a wimp and people are pushing you around. That's life. (Usha)

Usha compared her experience in India with her experience in the UAE particularly with respect to her perceptions of socializing tactics in these two national contexts. The tensions associated with these different working experiences is exacerbated for her because she is working in a “male-dominated industry,” which is often reflected within the accounting literature, particularly with respect to “old boys” networks often characteristic of this industry (Jackson & Hayday, 1997; Lyonette & Crompton, 2008). This finding is reminiscent of the extant literature in

professional services firms (e.g., Anderson-Gough et al., 2005; Bolton & Muzio, 2007; Mueller et al., 2011) where going out for a drink (as described by Usha) “will have different connotations for female as compared to male managers” (Mueller et al., 2011, p. 560). However, by ending off her statement by stating “[T]hat’s life” it seems that Usha may have resigned to these pressures because it seems that resistance in this situation may be futile.

Fahad and Usha expressed doubt in their ability to deal with the pressures associated with socializing in their profession. In particular, both accounts suggested that “doing career” (El-Sawad et al., 2004) successfully requires SIE accountants to engage in specific socializing activities, yet neither of them engage in these activities. This finding resonates with the work of other authors who have argued that the values and norms within an industry determine what is considered to be socially acceptable and rewarding behavior and may impact individuals’ career opportunities generally (e.g., Dany, Louvel, & Valette, 2011; Forrier et al., 2009) and in the professional accounting industry specifically (e.g., Mueller et al., 2011). In other words, “institutions relevant to a particular setting will manifest themselves in behaviours (i.e., scripts) characteristic of that setting” (Barley & Tolbert, 1997, p. 98).

Contrary to Dany et al.’s (2011) study, which focused on the importance of formal promotion scripts to guide individuals’ careers, this study’s findings suggest that informal promotion scripts, embedded within the accounting professional context, still can enable and/or constrain individuals’ career experiences, depending on whether individuals choose to be complicit in scripted activities or not. Despite being aware of the informal promotion scripts within their industry, Fahad and Usha still do not have the inclination to comply with these promotion scripts. This finding echoes Pang’s (2001) study which argued that sometimes individuals choose to remain voluntarily bounded; they may be aware of what is needed to

succeed in their professional context, but choose not to engage in those activities due to personal reasons.

4.6. SUMMARY

The findings reported in this chapter suggest that people's perceptions of their careers are that they are not necessarily bounded or boundaryless; rather, people's perceptions exist on a continuum and can be more or less bounded depending on the context in which we examine them. Further, the findings suggest that participants felt that "when some boundaries are removed or become more permeable, others can take their place or become stronger" (Rodrigues & Guest 2010, p. 1170). In particular, it appears that participants hold multiple and often contradictory ideas with respect to the career boundaries experienced, particularly with respect to whether they perceived these boundaries as enabling or constraining their careers. Many times these conflicting ideas were associated with participants' awareness of and experiences with the external social, legal, or economic circumstances with which they were faced. This finding echoes Fernando and Cohen (2011) who have stated that "individuals' careers are both enabled and constrained by their contexts" (p. 556). Furthermore, the findings reinforce the arguments made in Chapter 2 and suggest that the influence of a boundary not only changes over time, but also is unique to the specific context and individual who is experiencing it. Such an idea is supported by King et al. (2005) who argued that "boundaries are not static givens, but are under constant change" (p. 1001).

By extension, the findings point to an inter-temporal element to the way in which career boundaries are perceived and experienced; in other words, the perceived influence of a boundary can become more or less salient depending on the lens (i.e. "now" versus "future" orientation) through which boundaries are examined. It is important to note that despite this element of

temporality in participants' accounts, this finding is distinct from the *punctuating* role of career boundaries as identified by Gunz and Mayrhofer (2011). However, in addition to perceiving that boundaries may be imposed onto them, the findings also suggest that participants were aware that they were oftentimes complicit in their own boundary creation, thus perhaps signalling a sense of ambivalence. The theme of ambivalence will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: The Salience of Ambivalence in Enacting Self-Initiated Expatriation

“To know and not to know...to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and behaving in both of them” (Orwell, 1949).

In this chapter, I demonstrate that moving to and working in a new country can be a confusing, sometimes uncomfortable, and ambivalent process. Participants’ stories are marked with mixed feelings regarding their experiences from the moment they decided to move to the UAE, to working and adjusting to their new environment. This recognition of ambivalence is not necessarily a new finding in the careers literature; scholars have already addressed the risky and problematic nature of international careers (e.g., Richardson, 2009, Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Richardson & Zikic, 2007). In this chapter, I build on the conceptual foundation provided in Chapter 2 (section 2.7.) surrounding ambivalence and specifically focus on this theme to theoretically explore how participants were challenged by indecision on a personal level (psychological ambivalence) and structural contradictions in their respective social contexts (sociological ambivalence).

The interviews were mainly centered on three main areas: (a) moving to the UAE, (b) living in the UAE, and (c) working in the UAE. As such, the presentation of findings in this chapter is organized based on these three areas. However, El-Sawad, Arnold, and Cohen (2004) have argued that “contradiction within individuals’ accounts is rarely of itself the feature of analytic interest, representing a missed opportunity to understand the significance of such accounts” (p. 1180). They encourage us to “tease out” these contradictions and subject them to critical analysis (El-Sawad et al., 2004, p. 1179). As discussed in Chapter 2, examining how individuals experience ambivalence in their careers offers a valuable contribution to the careers

literature as little attention is paid to acknowledge uncertainties and contradictions in how individuals may perceive and experience a career and career boundaries. Therefore, the findings are presented as a set of experiences that are complex, fluid, and infused with ambivalence. This idea is reinforced by El-Sawad et al. (2004) who have argued: “As we have seen, participants in our study have more than one personal narrative. Whilst each individual narrative may be internally consistent and coherent, it frequently conflicts with and contradicts other narratives which the individual articulates” (p. 1198). Wherever possible, I explore instances of ambivalence within a participant’s interview and also between participants’ interviews. In doing so, I examine these tensions or in between spaces whereby individuals may experience “contradictions between opposite pulls” while enacting their careers (Baxter et al., 1997, p. 659). Addressing the topic of ambivalence will allow for a better understanding of how SIEs in the UAE may perceive experience boundaries in the context of their career and how ambivalence plays a role in the way SIEs negotiate their perceived career boundaries.

5.1. AMBIVALENCE ABOUT MOVING TO THE UAE

Participants were asked to discuss in broad terms how and why they decided to move to the UAE and what factors contributed to this decision. While most accounts were reminiscent of “push-pull” factors often seen within the expatriate literature (e.g., Baruch, Budhwar, & Khatri, 2007; Caulfield, 2010; McNulty, 2013), some participants expressed a sense of doubt during this decision-making process. As mentioned in Chapter 2, psychological ambivalence is characterized by the presence of positive and negative feelings about someone or something, which often results in the individual feeling unsure or indecisive about which course of action to follow (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Hillcoat-Nalletamby & Phillips, 2011; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). The reasons participants gave that contributed to their uncertainty were based on their

particular circumstances within the context(s) from which they were coming or to which they were going²⁴. An illustration of this type of ambivalence is offered by Pramod when he discussed his thoughts about moving to the UAE:

I was actually having whims and fancies as to why I should come there. I am a Chartered Accountant; I am from India; why should I go to another country? Unlike [in] India, there is no taxation in UAE [, which is a benefit, but . . .] why should I? Why, why, why? A lot of why's were there; but then I really have to give it for the foreign exchange and the taxation, the ultimate taxation factor. So the conversion's definitely - the conversion is a very big important factor and in India there is taxation - so the personal taxation is a little bit on the higher side so this prompted me to say yeah, yes, I think I have to move, and I moved. (Pramod)

Pramod wavered between the positive and negative aspects related to living and working in both the UAE and India, thus revealing his feeling of ambivalence. Like Pramod, Haaris also explained that he was unsure about moving to the UAE and provided various reasons as illustrated in the following excerpt:

I had heard from people and all that Middle East experiences are not counted well in the professional world, in Indian markets, or even in the Western markets, because work over here, there isn't any laws or regulations to govern, no accounting bodies as such, and I had this notion of the Middle East being this very conservative country, so how I'd

²⁴ As discussed in Chapter 2, the uncertainty discussed by participants stemmed from their feelings of ambivalence. Uncertainty then appears to be a by-product of ambivalence.

survive, and food and things and all, having lived with my family for almost 23 years [. . . .] I was a bit skeptical about these things. (Haaris)

Similar to Pramod, Haaris had reservations about moving to the UAE. Even though he explains earlier on in the interview that this offer would allow him to “pursue the job profile” he was looking for, he remained unsure about this move not only from a professional perspective, but also from a personal perspective.

In contrast to the married male participants in this study, all of the female participants who were married at the time of moving to the UAE²⁵ explained that they only did so to follow their husbands:

I passed the CA and as soon as I cleared it, I got married and I had to follow my husband [. . .] Working in Dubai is purely because my husband settled over here—he’s got a professional sort of job over here, so it’s my move was on a no choice basis. I had not decided that I should be moving, shifting to Dubai. I was happy working in India for a bank there, and then I got married, and then I just had to leave for Dubai—that was 10 years back. (Natalia)

Natalia’s account points to the tensions in expectations between her roles as a professional CA and as a wife. When examined through the lens of sociological ambivalence, Natalia’s feelings seem to be “anchored in social structures such as conflicting norms and expectations of women’s social role” (Campbell & van Wanrooy, 2013, p. 1138).

²⁵ Usha, Priya, Nisha, and Natalia.

The examples provided demonstrate that even though participants' decisions to move from their home countries to the UAE is a difficult choice characterized by mixed feelings and conflict, yet they still go ahead with it. These decisions to act in the face of uncertainty have implications for career literature. Amidst the discussion surrounding globalization and mobility, these findings may suggest that the rhetoric within the global careers literature surrounding people moving seamlessly and with ease (e.g., Dickmann & Baruch, 2011) may be overplayed. There seems to be a discourse of free-will and fluidity that is embedded within our current understandings of the SIE, but this sense of fluidity is not evident in this study's findings. The literature posits SIEs "can decide for themselves where to apply and which job offer in which country to accept in order to promote their careers" (Biemann & Andresen, 2010, p. 434). Such depictions can be problematic because they not only ignore the importance of structural factors in shaping careers, but also, as the findings from this study show, they do not examine the in-between spaces whereby individuals may be fraught with ambivalence in deciding on their next career move.

Throughout these narratives lies another important finding, namely, the way in which participants make comparisons between their home and host countries in order to help them come to a decision about moving. This approach is an important finding since the use of comparisons is salient in all of the study's research questions; understanding how participants make comparisons may offer a useful understanding of how individuals make sense of their overseas experiences. Many participants used comparisons to make sense of their decisions. For example, as indicated in the excerpt above, Pramod made comparisons between aspects in India and the UAE, such as taxation and foreign exchange, to help him make a decision about moving to the UAE. Similarly, Philip also compared the Middle East and India:

when I qualified, it was '82/'83, when things were quite dismal in India; relatively taxes were high, the boom hadn't hit at all [. . .] So relatively, the Middle East was, you know, was a much better place to, at least, you know, financially a better place, to start working.

(Philip)

Like many other participants, Philip drew from features within his two national contexts (i.e., home and host country) to describe how he made the decision to move to the UAE. He also used this comparison to explain how he attempted to assuage his conflicted feelings. While the reasons provided by participants may be reminiscent of push-pull factors often seen within the expatriate literature (e.g., Baruch, Budhwar, & Khatri, 2007; Caulfield, 2010; McNulty, 2013), the way in which they juxtapose factors within their home and host countries is important. For example, not only does Philip's account reinforce the idea that participants' experiences are shaped by both the contexts to and from which they are moving, in particular, his decision to move to the UAE was considered in relation to factors in another context: India. While individuals who spend their entire career in one country may compare employers or different regions within one country, it is noteworthy that the level of comparison for participants in this study is national. The use of comparison making was salient among all interviews and permeates this study's core research questions (as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5).

5.2. AMBIVALENCE ABOUT LIVING IN THE UAE

Participants also stated that they were ambivalent about living in the UAE. They revealed their own conflicted feelings or doubts (psychological ambivalence) and/or felt contradictions within institutional arrangements at the national level (sociological ambivalence). Even though the literature on expatriate adjustment is already well established (e.g., Begley & Collings, 2008;

Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), examining these experiences via the framework of ambivalence can offer an alternative perspective to the feelings and experiences expatriates may have when they move abroad. As Weigert (1991) has suggested, change is the “soil for ambivalence” (p. 35) and can often be the catalyst in shifting expectations as a result of new circumstances (Hillcoat-Nalletamby & Phillips, 2011). These themes are discussed below.

5.2.1. Permanence and Transience

The majority of participants expressed concerns regarding their precarious status in the UAE. For example, in the account below, Adam discussed his apprehension regarding the ease with which he may be told to leave the UAE: “This is not my country. Anytime, if I lose my job [. . .] anytime they will tell you *khalas*²⁶, it’s time to move.... So this is my main worry” (Adam). Hameed raise similar concerns:

I mean, I saw that happen with my Dad. So when my Dad retired, you know, it was the same story, where he was left with nothing, and he had to leave, he had to sort out his visa, after like 30 years [. . .] I don’t want that to happen to me. (Hameed)

Like many other participants in this study, Hameed and Adam discussed their concerns surrounding transience in the UAE and not knowing when they may be told to leave, yet this key factor is something all participants were very aware of before moving to the country. These accounts suggest the psychological ambivalence participants felt may be associated with conflicting ideas between desirability and feasibility²⁷ (Campbell & van Wanrooy, 2013). On one

²⁶ ‘*Khalas*’ is an Arabic word meaning ‘finish’

²⁷ The alignment/misalignment between what is desirable and what is feasible is identified as a type of ambivalence which will be explored further in Chapter 6 with respect to the way in which this type of ambivalence may influence the strategy a participant takes to negotiate an identified career boundary

hand, participants expressed the desire for something more permanent, yet on the other hand, they knew this stability was not feasible. As Hameed expressed:

I guess the key characteristic [of an SIE] is that everyone is here temporarily, and everyone is here just to work. So yeah, if I was to introduce myself, I'd say my job title: I'm a financial analyst, I'm an expat. You know it's funny, but I never introduce myself as you know, I'm someone from Dubai [. . .] I do say, I live here. But I'm not from here. Even though I've lived here for like 20 years [. . .] so yeah, that [feeling of temporariness] doesn't really factor into my definition of my identity. (Hameed)

Although many participants commented on the temporariness of their situation, it appears that their time in the UAE was actually more permanent than they suggested²⁸. This idea supports Edwards' (2011) argument whereby "the 'temporariness' of labour immigration into the UAE (and the GCC) can be questioned" because many expatriates living in the UAE are "perpetual visitors" due to the long time they have spent in the country (p. 32). This permanent yet temporary situation gives rise to sociological ambivalence. Even though many participants expressed concerns about their temporary status in the UAE, it is important to note that this temporary status is an aspect of the labour environment of which they were all aware prior to moving and yet they still went. Their ambivalence may be associated with not only their own conflicted feelings about living and working in the UAE, but also with the contradictions embedded in the UAE's labour laws. On one hand, the system allows them to stay for very long periods of time; on the other hand, they are never allowed to be officially recognized as

²⁸ 12 participants in the study had lived in the UAE for over 10 years, with 3 of these participants living in the UAE for over 20 years.

permanent. This idea is further demonstrated in the two accounts below whereby participants' accounts of temporariness are discussed vis-à-vis descriptions of permanency. Pavan explained:

I mean, then you know, you tend to settle down as you say first one or two years when you move from India, you see that, okay, I'm going to new place, I'll earn some money, I'll do something [. . .] and then see a different place and go back; but then once you start being here, you start liking the place, you start liking the lifestyle. Then your mindset keeps on changing and as long as you know, you grow within your firm, then automatically it, it makes you more attached [. . .] the longer you stay away, the long- the harder it gets to go back. (Pavan)

Philip made a similar point:

I remember when I first came I wished my neighbour [in India] goodbye and she said, 'Philip, how long are you going for?' and I said, 'my contract is for 20 months and then I'll come back,' and she said, 'no, you'll never come back,' and every year I go back and she reminds me what I said then. You know, it's now 20 years plus (laughs). Of course I go back home, but I never planned to be out for so long. (Philip)

It appears that some participants were cognizant of their temporary status in the UAE, yet they continued to live there in a state of "permanent impermanence" (Ali, 2010, p. 9). While participants never intended on being away from their home country for as long as they have been, improvements in their lifestyle and careers made it harder for them to go back. Further, Scurry et al. (2013) have argued that individuals moving to a new place may be faced with different social expectations and cultural values and must learn to conform to these expectations

to achieve some sense of identification in this new context. However, Hillcoat-Nalletamby and Phillips (2011) have suggested that this movement may give way to sociological ambivalence:

[such individuals] remain unable to settle for life in any one place as they hold on to the relational configurations from one continent whilst trying to embed themselves within unfamiliar ones on another, confronting, as they must, the challenges of socially structured expectations about cultural identity or national affiliation. (p. 214)

This idea of not being able to settle in any one place was evident in many participants' accounts as they expressed a sense of ambivalence surrounding their sense of belonging in both their home and host countries. This idea is illustrated in Saaqib's account:

You're an alien here [. . .] you're just like a visitor. This is the biggest disappointment and [. . .] many people, my relatives, my wife, my in-laws - they always they-they used to you know advise me to move to Europe you move to States you move to Australia... but I don't prefer that because then the life gets even more difficult and it is a lot of other challenges... but UAE is still I'm staying even though you don't get a permanent residency, you get [other benefits]: it is very balanced in terms of culture, in terms of religion, in terms of its geographical proximity to the subcontinent. (Saaqib)

After that, you're an alien for your own country because now if I go back to Pakistan I'm a misfit [. . .] technically I'm a misfit, legally I'm a misfit [. . .] I am in the middle. (Saaqib)

In the left-hand extract, Saaqib voiced the same concerns as many of the other participants in the study regarding his precarious status in the UAE. Like many other participants, he made a comparison between the UAE and other countries to reflect on his experience. What is particularly significant is the idea that Saaqib used the word "*alien*" to describe himself in both the UAE (his host country) and Pakistan (his home country). This finding resonates with the SIE

literature that suggests expatriates have a confused sense of home (Richardson & McKenna, 2006; Scurry et al., 2013). For example, Saaqib considered himself an “alien” in the UAE because he does not meet the institutionally prescribed requirements to be a citizen (i.e., citizenship and/or passport). At the same time, Saaqib considered himself an “alien” in Pakistan as well: having the institutional requirements that give someone a sense of permanence (i.e., citizenship and/or passport) is not enough to make Saaqib feel at home in Pakistan. Saaqib felt “in the middle” and expressed ambivalence about his sense of home and/or belonging because institutional arrangements did not ensure this. This finding suggests that the use of static binary oppositions such as “citizenship” and “statelessness” (Ong, 2006; Richardson & McKenna, 2006; Scurry et al., 2013) may be problematic and it is therefore important for us to consider the interplay of identity with mobility particularly with how an SIE may “engage in negotiation, contestation and contestation to find their space within the “new” culture and its dynamics” (Scurry et al. 2013, p. 16).²⁹ Saaqib appears to be in a state of limbo; he suggested he felt he was in an in-between space or like someone with a hybrid or trans-border identity (Scurry et al., 2013). It appears that the ambivalence Saaqib felt was based on the way he interacted with and positioned himself in both the UAE and Pakistan; oscillating between the two narratives, Saaqib explained he feels he does not belong in either space. This idea of not feeling a sense of belonging to either space is important because it suggests the lack of citizenship in and of itself may not be worrisome to participants; rather, it appears the implications of not having citizenship, particularly with respect to legal status, and thus being in a precarious situation while living in the UAE are the primary concerns.

²⁹ It is acknowledged that identity is a complex concept and is not the focus of this study. However, I use the ideas of identity developed by Scurry et al. (2013, p. 15, p. 16) to consider the “relational quality of identity,” particularly with how an SIE may adapt in their new host culture.

5.2.2. Making sense of not belonging

As discussed in the previous section, an uncertain sense of belonging in the UAE was salient across the majority of participants' interviews. By examining instances of ambivalence within each participant's interview, it was noticeable that participants would contrast a negative experience of not belonging in the UAE, with positive features of living there, such as a good quality of life. Haaris, for example, explained:

I would never recommend moving to the UAE if it is just merely for the [compensation] package because you might be earning very high over here, but the thing is, you may never get residency. After every three years, you have to apply for residency visa—you can never be a permanent resident of this country [. . .] you can never be a part of this country. (Haaris)

The infrastructure and things and all are also very good. So at an overall level, your personal life will be more balanced and a much better life you can live over here than probably in India. And since I've been working in India, I would be home around 10:30, late nights because I would never know what could happen next [. . .] And company wise, your package would be more and you can enjoy more, and, in fact, all the facilities also available – you can hire a cook, you can hire a cleaner, there will be a person to iron your clothes also. And you can easily afford those things out here [. . .] So again, your life is very comfortable out here. (Haaris)

Priya also appears to juxtapose her negative perceptions surrounding her lack of sense of belonging in the UAE with a positive experience such as better quality of life:

But do I consider Dubai my home? As of now, yes. But deep down, because you're an expat, you're always, you know, ready to the fact that you might have to move, anytime. The lack of having a citizenship kind of makes you weary from truly feeling at home here. (Priya)

It's very good. It has been extremely convenient for us; one is that I have some family here. Second, it is very close to home for me. You know, it is very convenient for people to come and visit. Third, of course, it is just such a fantastic [Dubai]—culturally we don't miss a lot because there are so many of us [Indians] here [. . .] So, I mean, it's been

very good to live here. You don't really miss home in this part of the world, as opposed to when, for example, when we lived in Africa, I decided I wouldn't have kids there, but that was mainly because of the security issue, and of course health reasons (Priya)

While Haaris and Priya explained that they enjoy a good quality of life in the UAE, they also expressed a concern surrounding the uncertainty of their future in this country. These two feelings suggest psychological ambivalence because both Haaris and Priya seemed to be aware that the risks of living in the UAE need to be considered in light of the benefits of living there. Campbell and van Wanrooy (2013) have suggested that even though individuals may discuss aspects that are “welcome” as well as other aspects that may not be so welcomed, these trade-offs may result in ambivalent feelings and/or attitudes. Furthermore, it seems that tensions come to surface through the use of comparisons (i.e., experience with another context). While Priya and Haaris's accounts regarding their lack of sense of belonging is underpinned by the factors which constrain citizenship, it is important to note that neither of them actually expressed a desire to become Emirati; rather, they expressed concern regarding the precariousness of their legal status, which makes them concerned about the uncertainty of their futures.

For other participants, a lack of sense of belonging seemed to be associated with not being able to engage in the UAE's civil society. For these participants, a sense of belonging to a particular country seemed to be shaped by perceptions surrounding how involved they were with the community. This idea is illustrated in the following two accounts:

We are enjoying our life [. . .] we are very grateful. We're just happy with the savings. The lifestyle here is more relaxed—we are not hard pressed for time. (Pramod).

In India you are contributing a lot to the society [. . .] this is a personal feeling I have. I have in my back of mind a feeling, a feeling that I'm not contributing to the society at all.

Over here there are lot of times for charity programs, but if I participate in that I'm not getting a feeling that there is a direct contribution. If you're doing the same thing in India, then I know how the people are getting a benefit out of those contributions. I feel like I'm not contributing anything to this society at all—I feel bad, like I should give back. (Pramod)

Similar to Priya and Haaris, Pramod also juxtaposed his positive experience of a good quality of life with a negative experience of not feeling that he contributes enough to the UAE society. It seems that Pramod is feeling a sense of psychological ambivalence; in particular, he draws on a comparison between his activities in the UAE and his level of charity involvement in India to come to the conclusion that he is not doing 'enough' in the UAE. Usha also shows signs of ambivalence related to her level of involvement in the UAE:

I can't call myself a citizen. I'm an involved expatriate [. . . The] Dubai government has these volunteer works, so I've been volunteering with them for the past 10-12 years. You feel like you're part of the community. (Usha)

We're never going to vote here; we're never really going to be involved [. . .] It bothers me. in India I was very involved; I'd like to be more involved. (Usha)

While Usha considered herself to be an “involved expatriate,” she still acknowledged that all of her social and communal participation in the UAE (i.e., volunteering and charity efforts) does not override the more central form of civic participation – voting. It appears that Usha may be experiencing sociological ambivalence due to the contradictory expectations surrounding her role(s) in the UAE, influenced primarily by restrictions within the national context (i.e., law surrounding voting).

Like Pramod, Usha makes a comparison with her level of involvement in India to that of the UAE, thus reinforcing the importance of how a sense of belonging is fostered based on the

context(s) in which individuals are situated. Further, the use of comparisons between contexts appears to be a way in which participants assign meaning to these experiences.

Other participants expressed that while living in the UAE provides them with a high quality of life, they feel a sense of trepidation particularly with “being on the wrong side of the law” (Vikesh). Like Vikesh, Usha and Philip also articulated unease with their legal status:

There is a huge frustration with the laws I think [. . .] I don't know if it's because of it being the Middle East or whether it's not your country. That you really can't be sure what a legal position would be [. . .] You have no legal redress. It makes me feel very uncomfortable. It's a constant state; you constantly feel worried. God forbid, if something were to go wrong, you have nobody to speak to. (Usha)

It's that ambiguous box, when people would claim that, for example, in India you have rules, you have rights, but living here, you don't have any rules or rights [. . .] if you fall foul of the law, foul of something, [you don't have any recourse] because you don't have any safeguards, because you're not a citizen. (Philip)

Both Philip and Usha demonstrated their concern surrounding the uncertainty or ambiguity related to their legal position in the UAE. In particular, Philip drew on his expatriate status by making a comparison with not being a citizen to explain the uncertain, often worrying situation he felt he was in. This finding once again reinforces the idea that while participants may not actually want to become an Emirati, they are concerned about the related elements that citizenship would bring, such as enhanced legal status.

5.3. AMBIVALENCE ABOUT WORKING IN THE UAE

In accordance with findings of previous studies (e.g., Richardson & Zikic, 2007; Scurry et al., 2013), participants oscillated between positive and negative accounts of pursuing an international career when accounting for their experience of working in the UAE. This finding points to the “complex and contradictory nature of SIE experiences” (Scurry et al., 2013, p. 23). In this section, I focus on the ambivalence experienced by participants when accounting for their working experiences. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, my intention is to discuss the significance of ambivalence, which appears to be embedded throughout all participants’ accounts. Doing so will allow for a better understanding of how ambivalence plays a role in the way participants negotiate their perceived career boundaries (Chapter 6).

5.3.1. Doubts about entering the accounting profession

In order to get an in-depth understanding of the boundaries participants may have experienced throughout their careers to date, I felt it was important for them to report their experiences starting from when they embarked on their career as an accountant. When discussing why they entered the accounting profession, more than half of the participants were candid about their indecision, either from mixed feelings or simply being ‘torn’, which permeated their accounts. Ifraz exemplified this ambivalence:

Actually, I didn’t always want to do it. I was in the Air Force, a pilot, but I left because of a fracture [. . .] So I was thinking, ‘what should I do?’ and my friend came up with it and said, ‘chartered accountants earn a lot, and it is something not many people can do, and once you do it, your life will be like this, and this and this,’ and I was like, ‘okay, let me give it a try.’ And now I’m still suffering the effects of that injury (Ifraz)

Like many other participants, Ifraz’s account implies a serendipitous entry into accounting. Being a Chartered Accountant was never part of Ifraz’s career plans, but due to an injury, he ended up entering the profession. By saying that he is still “suffering the effects of that injury”, there appears to be a sense of regret in Ifraz’s account, thus suggesting that he may be unsure of his career choice (psychological ambivalence). This also demonstrated through Saaqib’s account:

Although I belong to an industrialist family [. . .] . . .my father was an industrialist, my uncles we have all—we have many factories in Pakistan, but I still - I was not tied into the idea that I can join my father in the business [. . .] I was more on the education side, and I wanted to establish myself, independent of him, so that’s why I decided to move here and overall, I’m satisfied with my decision. (Saaqib)

But I sometime feel I should have had helped my father in his business [. . .] . Even though it was his own wish to send me abroad, but he also, you know, sometime directly or indirectly, he would say your father is here your father has a big business and you’re sitting there, so why don’t you come and help me... then I find myself in a difficult situation [of wanting to please my father and not being prepared to work in his factory . . .] I cannot handle this. I don’t know the people, I don’t know the culture— [factory work] is quite different so that is one difficulty. (Saaqib)

While at first, Saaqib explains that he is content with his decision to be a Chartered Accountant, later on in the interview he expresses ambivalence related to not being able to please his father due to his career choice, which is different than the one his father wanted. Saaqib’s struggle appears to be anchored in social structures, such as conflicting norms and expectations of what it is to be a “good son” versus a “Chartered Accountant”. Just like the decision to move to the UAE (section 5.1.), the findings reveal that the decision to take a certain career trajectory, in this case, the Chartered Accountant profession was not an easy one for many participants; the participants’ descriptions of their experience reveal psychological and/or sociological ambivalence. The implication of this finding is that decisions regarding career choices are often marked with

ambivalence since individuals may be faced with conflicted and often contradictory choices (e.g., El-Sawad et al., 2004).

5.3.2. Working in Professional Services and Industry

When discussing their experiences working in a specific type of organization, it is important to note that participants made distinctions between professional services firms and business organizations, that is, 'industry firms. Ahsan illustrated this distinction:

So there is a difference between two professional accountants [. . . Accountants in industry firms] are restricted to their areas only if they are working [. . .] if they are working on budgeting, maybe, for example, one person is working on budgeting, he's restricted to the budgeting, he will be working on budgeting for the whole year [. . .] so he is restricted to that area only. He does not know about the other areas. (Ahsan)

However, when I asked Ahsan whether he had any plans to move to an industry position, he said that he does want to move out of professional services firms "because people want an extension in life," meaning a career structure. This finding may point to psychological ambivalence because on one hand, he explains how industry is restrictive, yet on the other hand, he feels that he would like to work in this type of organization. This idea reinforces the current literature on accounting professionals (i.e., Anderson-Gough et al., 1998; Kornberger, Justesen, & Mouritsen, 2011), particularly the notion that professional services firms are often described as having a "steeply pyramidal structure" (Anderson-Gough et al., 1998, p. 576), and due to the very limited positions available for partnership within professional services firms, many individuals at the Senior Accountant stage choose to opt out of professional services firms and to work in industry organizations instead. While it is not an explicit organizational policy, Anderson-Gough

et al., (1998) found that there appears to be a “tacit norm” whereby individuals must be promoted each year, otherwise they are “encouraged” to leave the firm (p. 576). Due to the specific boundaries faced (such as strict promotion criteria) in professional services firms, it appears that for Ahsan, despite expressing a critique of the “restrictive” nature of work in industry firms, moving to this type of organization may be his only option. Ahsan appears to be experiencing a sense of ambivalence associated with free versus constrained choices³⁰ because even though he would prefer to work in a professional services firm environment, he is faced with the norms of promotion within this organizational context that do not guarantee career longevity.

Participants’ accounts with respect to working in a professional services firm versus working in industry reflect a fundamental uncertainty. This ambivalence can be traced back to the idea that most participants hold multiple and even conflicting ideas on working in these two types of organizational contexts. In particular, when making these comparisons between professional services and industry jobs, participants drew on pertinent factors within the organizational context itself, such as the scope of work and client relationships.

5.3.3. Experiences of cross-cultural interaction

When participants were asked to discuss their experiences associated with living in the so called “multicultural environment” of the UAE, there seemed to be a contradiction in their accounts when they discussed this diversity within a work context versus within a social context.

Pramod illustrated this contradiction:

I get to know about different nationalities. I am working with about 29 nationalities [. . .] I would not have got this much opportunity to work with different nationalities. So catching

When you go out of the professional atmosphere, the interactions are only between certain friends; you are not interacting with the other expats or other, other nationalities.

³⁰ Perceptions of free versus constrained choice is identified as a type of ambivalence which will be explored further in Chapter 6 with respect to the way in which this type of ambivalence may influence the strategy a participant takes to negotiate identified career boundaries.

up with them—different culture, different mentality, different work styles, and different pronunciations—this is a good experience that I have in UAE. (Pramod)

To be honest, I don't even know who lives in the next flat of mine [. . .] which is one thing which we may have to look into because in India it's like a close family you know. If you're staying in a building, you will be knowing who and all is there in that building. That social atmosphere is bit lagging behind; it might be because of different nationalities and different cultures. (Pramod)

Pramod discussed the positive features that stem from working with people from many different nationalities and he explained that they provide him opportunities for learning. However, Pramod also noted that these interactions do not continue when out of the organizational context. This finding suggests that when examined within the organizational context, the degree of interaction among different nationalities is high, but when examined within the national context more broadly, it is very low, or non-existent. Participants' experiences can be quite different when examined within different contextual lenses (i.e., organizational, professional, and national). Rather than focus solely on the individual-organization dichotomy, this finding suggests that individuals' perceptions of their careers evolve and are shaped within several contexts: professional, organizational, national, and global (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; Duberley et al., 2006; Kaulisch & Enders, 2005; Richardson, 2009).

Further, when accounting for the level of interaction among people outside of work, Pramod made a comparison with his experience living in India. Once again we see that participants make use of comparisons as a tool to assign meaning to their current experiences in the UAE. Pramod explained that in contrast to his experience in India, he does not even know who lives in the next flat to him in the UAE. While he does not explicitly state it as such, it is interesting to connect this idea with the participants' lack of sense of belonging in the UAE

(section 5.2.3). As a result, participants may simply not be willing to connect with other people in a place in which they feel that they do not belong.

5.3.4. Perceptions surrounding superiority and inferiority

With respect to working in the UAE, some participants explained there was a sense of prestige associated with it. This idea is illustrated by Basheer, who explained: “Yeah, so the image is, ‘oh he’s working in Dubai, he’s making big money, and he’s quite educated, so he must have a good job there’ [. . .] So there is a bit of respect” (Basheer). What is particularly noteworthy is the idea that Basheer drew on a specific context to ascribe a sense of professional and personal identity. It seems as though his sense of self is shaped based on the respective national context, as well as the broader public rhetoric and image about what it means to be an expatriate. Basheer discussed how his friends and family in Pakistan believe there to be prestige associated with working in the UAE and being an expatriate. However, when examined within the context of the UAE, Basheer alluded to a perceived status difference between expatriates and locals within the UAE:

It doesn’t matter if it is a Pakistani or a Brit, if you are an expat, you are treated as a third-class citizen without the same benefits as Emiratis. I would not say Emiratis would have done that, but it is just becoming part of the culture, and I’m really afraid. (Basheer)

As seen in the above example, Basheer described himself as being a “third-class citizen” because he felt he did not have the same rights and privileges as a local Emirati would have. Basheer’s perceptions are significant for this study; they highlight the ways in which participants’ experiences are shaped by factors within the national context.

Similar to Basheer's perspective, Fahad's account also points to the contradictory experience of feeling superior and/or inferior, depending on context. In particular, Fahad contextualized his experience within the accounting industry:

I actually really like it. I mean, there is a lot of respect in it [. . .] like, socially speaking, if I do say I was working in Deloitte as a Senior Auditor, I do get a lot of impressive nods, like 'oh yeah, that's good, that's good.' Professionally speaking, it [working as a Senior Auditor] is also very much valued in the industry. If I go somewhere else, in the UAE or in the Middle East, everyone asks for experience from the Big 4, so that's a big, big plus point for me [. . .] So that's a good thing. (Fahad)

It gets frustrating sometimes because in this country you don't have the authority [. . .] Let's say I go to the client and say, 'this is the problem, you've made a mistake, you've made a problem, there's an error, you need to change it'; all he could say, like best case scenario [is] 'oh yeah, yeah, I agree and I think it's fine'. But more often than I'd like, they come back to me and say, 'no, no big deal, just talk to my Manager—they'll talk to your Partner,' and nothing comes out of it. It's an authority thing. (Fahad)

Fahad's first comment points to the status associated with professional accountancy in the eyes of the wider public. As Fahad suggested, not only is this profession highly respected in general, but also working in a Big 4 auditing firm is highly valued in the industry. However, Fahad offered another perspective based on his experience working with a client. As he explained, he felt a sense of inferiority when the on-site the client did not seem to hold much regard for his work. Once again we see that participants may experience ambivalence as they are faced with a conflicted set of experiences surrounding the value of their work. Moreover, the influence of context is reinforced as these conflicted experiences appear to be embedded within different contexts (i.e., national (home/host) context, professional context, or organizational context). Chapter 6 examines how SIEs in the UAE make sense of and cope with these contradictory experiences in more detail.

5.3.5. Professional Loss and Personal Gain

A significant theme throughout all of the interviews surrounds the notion that when working in the UAE, individuals “weigh up”³¹ a professional loss against a personal gain (Campbell & van Wanrooy, 2013), which often created a sense of ambivalence or uncertainty about whether or not working in the UAE was beneficial from a career perspective. In turn, it was evident throughout the interviews that participants were ambivalent about the concessions and/or compromises they were making, even though they continued to live with them³². As Blustein et al. (2004) have argued, “multiple truths exist in the way in which people construct their perceptions and narratives about their working experiences” (p. 424). Therefore, the notion of professional loss versus personal gain is idiosyncratic and means something different for everyone. In this section, I focus on a range of interpretations about professional loss versus personal gain. For instance, when Ifraz was asked to evaluate his experience working in the UAE, he seems to weigh up the benefits of higher earnings versus a loss of professional skills:

See, professionally I have lost. Like what I was two years back, I’m not that good right now, because my qualifications are not fully utilized [...] here the issues are not that technical [. . . .] Professionally, they are not at the [same standards as in Pakistan]—the market is not at the level, so when issues come up, like fraud or complex transactions, anyone can manipulate this. So, professionally, I didn’t gain much. Yes, financially, I definitely gained, and personally, I’ve done a lot, contact wise, I’ve gained a lot of

³¹ Weighing up pros and cons is a strategy participants may adopt in trying to negotiate their perceived career boundaries. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6

³² Compromising is a strategy participants may adopt in trying to negotiate their perceived career boundaries. This topic will be discussed further in Chapter 6

friends here from different nationalities [. . .] professionally, I didn't gain, but in other areas, I have (Ifraz).

Ifraz tried to balance out his negative career experiences with positive experiences, such as gaining financially and increasing his personal network. This swing between positive and negative experiences suggests that Ifraz is experiencing a sense of psychological ambivalence in evaluating his time spent in the UAE.

As the findings have indicated, a comparative other can be a place (i.e., comparisons made between a home/host country), but it can also be a time (i.e., past, present or future). While Ifraz did not compare his experience in the UAE with his experience in another country, in this instance, it is significant that his criterion for comparison is not a place, but time as he compared his professional skills to what it was “two years back.”

In other instances, ideas of personal gain versus professional loss emerged through discussions regarding a higher quality of life in the UAE offset by the lack of challenging work. This idea is demonstrated in the following account:

In terms of what work we used to do in India, well, here it is more formalized—all the documents are properly numbered, you know, they are kept properly. All those things are much more systematic. Even usage of IT platforms, like technology, is much more in Dubai than in India [. . .] so there is not so much of a challenge. In India, it used to be more pressure—more pressure on work, more pressure due to travel time, you know, traffic situations, the hardship of commuting. You know, if I work until 8pm here, then within 20 minutes I am home. There is not much traffic, there's no stress, you know. In Bombay, if I would end at 8pm, by the time I reach home it is like 9:30, and then next

day again in the morning I had to start. Even though you're very close to social life, like you know, friends and other family [. . .] there is not much time to spend with them.

(Pavan)

Pavan's evaluation of his working experience appears to be shaped by the national contexts of Dubai and Bombay³³ as well as by the organizational contexts. Pavan appears to oscillate between positive and negative features of working in Dubai (less challenging work, but also less traffic) by making comparisons with working in India (more challenging work, but also more traffic). These comparisons suggest a sense of psychological ambivalence about his time in the UAE and reinforces the idea that SIE experiences are often complex and contradictory (Scurry et al., 2013). Usha evaluated her career experience in the UAE and echoed Pavan's sentiments: "from a career perspective, it's [the move to the UAE has] been a bit of a waste. I'm just not challenged. I used to be very challenged in Delhi—I enjoyed my work there" (Usha). However, when I asked her, "what made you guys stay then?" Usha explained that they are paid "a hell of a lot more than [they would] in India". Usha's response demonstrates that while she felt she was not challenged while working in the UAE, she felt compelled to stay for a better quality of life.

In contrast to any of the males interviewed, Usha's account pointed to a certain amount of compromise that is needed among working couples. This idea of compromise appeared to be the most salient among female participants who were married and had children. Like Usha, other female participants reported similar experiences:

I would say that I just have a job.... I-I have a career, provided I'd still tell him that I want a shift job and he keeps on telling me that see - if you're should move into a better

³³ Currently known as Mumbai

job only thing you have to sacrifice is your- I mean family life, and already uh, I mean I have a daughter and I'm so attached to her and already am a working woman so I feel that she's with the maid all the time, I don't want her to be, you know because if I move to a better job I- it will be very demanding (Natalia).

Natalia's account reflects a certain level of sociological ambivalence as she appears to be faced with uncertainty and conflict regarding her role as a professional, wife, and mother, all of which may be contradictory roles. Through Natalia's account, we can sense her ambivalence and perhaps role conflict with respect to wanting more challenges from her career and wanting more time with her daughter. As discussed in Chapter 2, sociological ambivalence may be experienced when, "norms require contradictory attitudes and actions" (Connidis & McMullin, 2002, p. 561). Due to incompatible expectations surrounding what it entails to be a professional accountant and a mother, Natalia appears to be faced with contradictory demands stemming from opposing normative views of these roles. The findings suggest that female SIE accountants often try to mitigate "pangs of conscience" (Weigert, 1991) resulting from the contradictory normative expectations surrounding their roles as professionals, wives, and mothers (p. 40). As Weigert (1991, p. 19) has argued, when experiencing ambivalence, individuals engage in an emotional tug-of-war and these "social contradictions become personal inadequacies" (p. 19). Based on the comments made during their interviews, it appears that Natalia constructed her roles as professional, wife, and mother as roles that need to be separate. This idea is echoed by El-Sawad et al. (2004) who has contended that "separating" may be a strategy used to "resolve any conflicts produced by maintaining connections between them" (p. 1196)³⁴.

³⁴ While I do not use El-Sawad et al.'s (2004) concept of "separating", in Chapter 6 I explore the theme of detachment further and examine how participants may adopt this as a strategy to attempt to mitigate this struggle.

5.4. SUMMARY

The significance of ambivalence in career studies has been overlooked. This chapter introduces the concept of ambivalence and its significance in understanding how participants assign meaning to their experiences living and working in the UAE. Through participants' accounts, conflicting feelings and/or attitudes about living and working in the UAE emerged. The significance of this ambivalence can be traced back to the idea that individuals often do hold uncertain and/or contradictory ideas about working and living in the UAE. I not only highlight the experience of feeling ambivalent in a general sense, but also I identify what participants may be ambivalent about. Further, I provide an interpretation of the study's findings that highlight how career experiences are often fluid and contradictory. Underpinning participants' accounts is the salience of national, organizational, and professional contexts (Kaulisch & Enders, 2005). The importance of these three contexts warrants special attention as the findings indicate that participants experience this ambivalence as they make comparisons between contexts (national, organizational, and/or professional), people, or points in time. As the objective of this chapter was to highlight how individuals experience ambivalence in their careers, the next chapter looks at the different types of ambivalence experienced by individuals and explores various strategies that they may adopt when coping with their perceived career boundaries.

Chapter 6: Negotiating Perceived Career Boundaries

“Ambivalence hurts. Life for most of us, sadly, is not a halcyon succession of pauses and new beginnings. And if we do not have a clear image of the destination, we are in for a rough ride” (Weisbrode, 2010, p. 30).

Chapter 4 demonstrated that participants felt their careers can be both constrained and enabled by factors within their national, organizational, and professional contexts. However, as Chapter 5 suggested, they were often ambivalent about their career experiences. Using Duberley et al.’s (2006) modes of engagement as a sensitizing device, this chapter further explores ambivalence and career experiences and answers the following questions:

- How do SIE accountants from the Asian subcontinent negotiate their perceived constraining and/or enabling career boundaries while working in the UAE?
- What particular orientations or strategies do they adopt when negotiating these career boundaries and why?

In order to develop a more nuanced view of how participants negotiated career boundaries via different strategies, it is important to consider not only the “constant meshing” of individual agency and structural constraints (Dany, Louvel & Valette, 2011, p. 972), but also the role of ambivalence in shaping these decisions. In this chapter I use the lens of ambivalence to consider what particular strategies participants adopt when they negotiated their perceived constraining and/or enabling career boundaries. These strategies refer to the way in which participants acknowledged the impact of their perceived boundaries on their career experiences and found ways to live with or work around them. It is important to note that in contrast to earlier studies (e.g., Duberley et al., 2006; Fernando & Cohen, 2011; Richardson, 2009), there was no evidence in this study to suggest that participants challenged, changed, and/or eradicated any of their

perceived boundaries. Instead, the findings of this study demonstrate all participants maintained their perceived boundaries; in other words, they took on a “routine orientation” and accepted the social structures in place (Duberley et al., 2006, p. 1141). In their accounts, participants explained how they sought to live with their perceived career boundaries, sometimes by trying to minimize or detach themselves from the boundaries’ effects, adapting their lives to their new environments by finding alternative strategies or trying to find ways to exit a particular context (e.g. national, organizational, or professional).

However, in contrast to earlier studies (e.g., Duberley et al., Fernando & Cohen, 2011; Richardson, 2009), the strategies participants in this study adopted did not appear to be enacted in a neat manner. Instead, there appears to be a messiness involved as they tried to make sense of or order their career experiences given their perceptions of their career boundaries. In many of the interviews, participants’ discussion of strategies in dealing with these boundaries lacked clarity and were often vague, indistinct, and sometimes contradictory. Specifically, there was evidence to suggest that participants were ambivalent about their choice of strategy, either because they were faced with psychological ambivalence, often manifested in the form of doubt or uncertainty, or because they faced contradictions within the system (sociological ambivalence) which enabled them to take on an alternative strategy.

Participants demonstrated ambivalence when faced with both constraining and enabling boundaries. To this end, participants did not intend on maintaining their perceived constraining boundaries, but their actions (i.e., minimizing the impact of the boundaries; detaching themselves from the boundaries; compromising with themselves; weighing the pros and cons; explaining how they sought to live with the boundaries; and finding alternatives to live with the boundaries; and intending on exiting the UAE context) maintained the boundaries anyhow. However, as

discussed in Chapter 4, participants also identified career boundaries that they felt enabled their careers. In instances when participants perceived a boundary as enabling, participants leveraged the boundary by networking and utilizing their knowledge of career scripts. Based on this finding, this chapter focuses on a) how participants managed their perceived constraining boundaries and b) how they sought to capitalize on their perceived enabling boundaries³⁵. Throughout this discussion I highlight how the experience of ambivalence permeates every decision participants make; in other words, the ambivalence individuals feel may not only influence their choice of strategy, but also, their choice of strategy could then, in turn create more feelings of ambivalence.

6.1. LIVING WITH THE BOUNDARY

6.1.1. Living with the UAE's Labour Laws

As discussed in Chapter 4, due to specific labour and immigration laws within the UAE, many participants felt their status in the country was precarious; this feeling had an impact on their perceived career stability and career mobility. In their accounts, many participants discussed how they sought to live with their perceived constraining career boundaries surrounding the UAE's labour and immigration laws (either due to low perceptions of their individual agency or fear of repercussions from transforming career boundaries). For example, when Philip was asked how he felt about never been granted UAE citizenship, he responded as follows:

So it's [lack of citizenship] not been a mega issue in terms of living in this place and you're not a citizen. It's just that we live life—there is neither an expectation [of becoming a citizen] on your part or there was never an offer made [. . .] it's not like

³⁵ I use italics to signal the identified strategy.

somebody promised you anything. So, yeah, it is the state you are in and you accept it and get on with it. (Philip)

Despite airing concerns regarding his expatriate status on his career stability earlier on in the interview, Philip appeared to deal with this boundary through a *minimizing* strategy, explaining being an expatriate is not a “mega issue” because, he said, he never expected to become a citizen. This sentiment was echoed by several other participants as well. For example, Sunil stated the following when he was discussing his concerns surrounding career instability:

I don't really care about citizenship to be honest with you. I think it's not citizenship that's the big problem—I think the big problem is the fact that people have to get up and leave after having worked here after so many years. I think without giving citizenship, you can still give them some sort of, you know, for having worked for so many years, we give you an honorary visa to stay for as long as you please. Because I think the worst thing is that if you've lived here all of your life, and once you get laid off or you've done your time, you have to go back to your home country [. . .] and because they have lived here for so many years, they consider this as home [. . .] so I think if they had something of that sort, that would be nice. (Sunil)

Similar to Philip, Sunil's account highlights the salience of expectations about living with their perceived boundaries; in other words, the absence of any expectation surrounding citizenship makes it easier for some participants to accept the status quo and deal with the lack of career stability. It is important to note that both accounts point to a feeling of ambivalence as participants attempted to make sense of what is desirable versus what is feasible³⁶ regarding

³⁶ Identified as a 'type of ambivalence' which will be discussed in Chapter 7

citizenship (Campbell & van Wanrooy, 2013). In this manner, the findings extend the modes of engagement literature by suggesting that while participants felt they had to accept the employment conditions in their host country because they were “pretty much unassailable” (Richardson, 2009, p. 166), they also felt ambivalent about accepting them because they had a desire for permanent status, yet they knew this status was not feasible.

In addition, some participants reported that they were able to accept the constraining career boundaries associated with the UAE’s labor laws if they knew they had other options available to them. As Vikesh explained:

I feel like I am in the middle because you’ll never be able to get permanency here and we don’t mind that. You want to stay here as long as you can and then if things don’t work out, then you go back to, say, India (Vikesh).

Vikesh’s account suggests SIEs may be more willing to live with an experienced boundary if they know that they may have another option of moving elsewhere or that their time in the UAE need not be permanent. However, despite this positive, certain outlook, his comments were consistent with many of the other interviews, which expressed ambivalence. Vikesh seemed to be ambivalent about his current situation since he stated he was in a state of limbo. This finding is echoed by Scurry et al. (2013) who argued that individuals may often struggle with “the binary opposition between citizenship and statelessness [. . .] and are unable to navigate either end of the spectrum” (p.21). As a result of occupying this in-between space, many participants appeared to be unsure about whether they had an ability to negotiate this career boundary and therefore they resigned to live with it.

Underpinning much of this argument is participants' perceptions of the impact of Emirati structures and institutional arrangements, which are central to what is possible and acceptable for SIEs, particularly in relation to the opportunities for career development and progression.

Situated in the UAE, most participants appeared to live with the strict labour and immigration law boundaries because they felt these laws were just too difficult to question or impossible to change. For example, Vikesh notes:

Because here, if you conform to the boundaries so no one will trouble you, you can do what you want. The other thing is obviously the [compensation] packages are better—it's tax free; so if you conform and know how to stay out of trouble, then it is a great place to stay. (Vikesh)

As discussed in Chapter 5, participants displayed a sense of psychological ambivalence as they discussed their awareness of the risks associated with living in the UAE in light of the benefits. Vikesh acknowledged he made concessions in order to gain something else; this comment suggests Vikesh engaged in transactional behaviour and his account hints at Fernando and Cohen's (2011) notion of a '*compromise*' strategy, which is defined as making concessions in order to gain something else. However, in Vikesh's case, he does not problematize this situation; rather, he is willing to live with his perceived career boundary (the restrictive nature of the UAE's labour laws) in order to attain a higher compensation package. This idea is reinforced by Rodriquez and Scurry (2013) who have argued that SIEs in their study often disregarded or discounted the impact the restrictive nature of working in the GCC and its associated "disadvantaged working conditions" on their careers (p. 204). However, as examined through the lens of Fernando and Cohen's (2011) compromise strategy, Vikesh's choice of strategy does not

appear to have occurred voluntarily; rather, his actions reveal his strategy was the result of having to choose between constrained options.

Further, the findings demonstrate that participants found ways to deal with their perceived boundary of career instability by engaging in a *detaching* strategy. A detaching strategy refers to the ways in which participants tried to not form any attachment to the UAE. One example of this was not engaging in any long-term planning during the time they were currently situated in the country. Philip commented on this approach:

You take each day as it comes, you do a good job, you do things you enjoy [. . .] Yeah, so, you play it by ear, take it as it comes, and you know, there is no point in trying to plan too far ahead, you know, there is always the curve balls that comes, especially living here. But the only thing is that the longer you've lived here, the better off you are to deal with everything with unexpected circumstances. (Philip)

Saamia made a similar observation:

We never plan for the long-term (laughs). We can't—it's all short-term. So for now, it is easy to just say that we'll stay here because nothing is predictable [. . .] but it's been a challenging and exciting journey (Saamia)

Due to their concerns about their career (in)stability while working in the UAE, Philip's and Saamia's accounts suggest that the lack of any long-term planning is a strategy of detachment, allowing them to deal with the precarious and unpredictable working conditions in this national context. These accounts reflect the way in which participants in Rodriguez and Scurry's (2014) study seemed to have a unique understanding of their careers, "where they construct the meaning of career, career development and career success ambiguously and mostly in terms that engaged with the restrictions in the context" (p. 204). Like the SIEs in Rodriguez and Scurry's (2014)

study, many participants in this study seemed to focus on the “social reality and how it fits in with their wishes and expectations” (p. 204). The meaning they assigned to their career and the way they chose to deal with their perceived career boundaries appear to be borne out of the specific context(s) in which they were situated.

Further, there were a few participants who seemed to negotiate their ambivalence about living with the perceived career boundary associated with the UAE’s labour laws and therefore career instability by symbolically *detaching* themselves from the country and embracing “statelessness” (Scurry et al., 2013, p. 21). For example, when they were asked what they would label themselves, some participants provided the following responses: “I just go with an expat. I consider myself an expat and nothing else as I don’t know where I belong” (Rashmi). Sunil reported a similar label:

I really consider myself a global citizen. I kind of fit in wherever, so, like I’ve lived in about five different countries. I think it’s got to do with attachment. I think most people stay in one place for a long period of time, and when they make the moves they feel homesick. I’ve been moving around for a very long period of time, so for me, I need the change. I actually like it, I prefer it. Otherwise, I think it gets very mundane. (Sunil)

Lastly, Aman explained, “I’m a foreigner in all these places, so I don’t naturally fit in to any of these markets [. . .] but the common theme is that you’re an outsider. So that is consistent” (Aman). These findings suggest that “the combination of structural constraints that lead to temporariness” may impact the way in which “individuals establish a relationship with place” and can destabilize any feelings of belonging (Scurry et al., 2013, p. 21). Rather than trying to find a way to challenge this feeling of not belonging, participants seemed to be more likely to

detach themselves, probably because they were faced with constrained choices in confronting the perceived barrier(s) associated with the UAE's labour laws.

Another finding that emerged from this study was that participants continued to live with their perceived boundaries surrounding the UAE labour laws by *weighing the pros and cons* associated with that boundary. Vikesh, for example, explained the pros and cons of living and working in the UAE:

So, you know, this place is good in terms of, you know, it gives you a bump up initially of the tax rate at least by 30% and then because of the hardship area and lack of skill labor [. . .] It's a struggle there [in India] in terms of water, electricity, and travelling [. . .] whereas here you normally take it for granted [. . .] so you got to choose between living in free India or living in a bounded place like Dubai. (Vikesh)

Vikesh appears to be weighing up the pros associated with living in the UAE including a better quality of life (i.e. higher pay, better infrastructure) compared with India. However, his comment also points to the notion that consideration of these pros is carefully weighed up against the cons of living in a country he considers 'bounded' particularly with respect to the UAE's labor laws. Similarly, Philip also engages in a tactic where he weighs up the pros and cons of living and working in the UAE:

It wasn't that I gave up a lot. I think, I presume, with the benefit of hindsight, I had a reasonably good run [with my career in the UAE] in the sense that I've had not any brushes with the law, or with the system [. . .] so it's been fairly easy. And I suppose as you are here longer, not only do you adapt, you get to know more people, you get things done, so you know, it is far easier than if you were at home. (Philip)

Vikesh's and Philip's accounts highlight an assessment of risk versus reward and again point to the idea that they may not only be weighing up the pros and cons of living in the UAE but may also be making *compromises* in doing so. As discussed in Chapter 5, Vikesh's evaluation of his time in the UAE is based on a comparison with India. The accounts in this study echo the work of Rodriguez and Scurry (2014) who have argued, "SIEs reside rhetorically within complex dualities" (p. 199). On one hand, SIEs recognize the "price to pay" for being an SIE and the impact many national and organizational policies have on their careers; on the other hand, they still "express frustration with the limited opportunities" (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014, p. 199). As this study shows, participants appeared to make many compromises as they made concessions; they discussed giving up one thing to gain another³⁷ (Fernandes & Cohen, 2011).

6.1.2. Living with perceptions of discrimination surrounding nationality

As mentioned in Chapter 4, participants felt that being discriminated against based on nationality was a career constraint for them. When asked how they dealt with this perceived career boundary, participants responded in a few ways. Aman, for example, noted discrimination based on nationality is rooted in stereotypes:

In this part of the world, there's a lot of culture and history behind it, right. So part of it is the colonial past, part of it is frankly who came here to do what kinds of work 10, 20, 50, 100 years ago and those roles and stereotypes have developed into the positions they are. So you know, very broadly an Indian or a Pakistani was generally a labourer. A Filipino was either generally a maid or a shop assistant, a white person was usually the manager

³⁷ As discussed, their choice of strategy is not a voluntary or 'free' one and seems to be based on constrained choices

and an Emirati was usually the owner. And the Arab national was the Emirati's right hand guy or the white guy's translator to help him get through the day. That's broadly what this society has experienced, and it's kind of stereotypical, but that's what it has evolved from. (Aman)

Kabir, on the other hand, noted the role nationality plays in establishing social roles:

the explorers when they were exploring the world initially [established hierarchies based on nationality]. So if the Dutch got somewhere first, or the Britishers [sic]—I believe that the European market infiltrated the UAE earlier here, so that's why they [. . .] are well positioned; they have the history, they have the precedence, and that's why they're all in key positions. (Kabir)

Kabir also suggested discrimination occurs based on familiarity and comfort level:

I mean, if you have people that have been [. . .] in the UAE or GCC for 20 years [. . .] it makes things easier. If I'm working with someone, I'd rather have someone that works in the same professional environment that I have and knows how things are done, and it just makes things progress smoothly. (Kabir)

Both Aman and Kabir appear to be living with their perceived discrimination rather than confronting it. By drawing on a colonial discourse, Aman and Kabir appeared to be making sense of their perceptions surrounding discrimination. They continued to maintain the perceived career boundary of discrimination by engaging in what Fernando and Cohen (2011) would describe as an *explanation* strategy, that is, trying to provide an explanation that may be considered acceptable (Fernando & Cohen, 2011). Basheer also explained how he lived with the perceived preferential treatment given to certain nationalities in his workplace. Rather than

drawing on a colonial discourse, Basheer explained the situation based on his perceptions of the education systems in Pakistan versus the United Kingdom:

I won't blame them [management]100%.... Because, of course, there is a difference in competence level. The education you receive in Pakistani schools and ACCA, although I'm ACCA, but the ACCA who is Pakistani experienced, and the ACCA who has UK experience, of course, there would be a gap. I expect that. I agree with that [. . .] but developing, giving it time, is in their hands [. . .] so they should understand that gap and manage it that way [. . .] rather than thoroughly recruiting people from the UK who are more expensive (laughs). (Basheer)

Even though Basheer perceived the presence of discrimination may limit his career opportunities, he continued to live with this boundary by trying to come to some acceptable *explanation*. As Fernando and Cohen (2011) have argued, individuals may sometimes engage in explanatory tactics by making “an idea or situation understandable to someone by describing it in depth or detail and/or justifying an event or act by reason which is seen as acceptable” (p. 563). Despite not agreeing with these hiring practices, Basheer attempted to find an acceptable explanation to explain his perceptions surrounding discrimination by drawing on what he felt may be differences in skill level between certain nationalities. Building on Fernando and Cohen's (2011) study, “explaining” as a tactic may not only be a way for individuals to make an idea or situation understandable to someone else, but also may be a way to make an idea understandable to themselves in order to make it easier for them to live with their perceived boundaries. Further, it is noteworthy that Basheer mentioned that any attempt to change this perceived structural discrimination would be “in their [management's hands,” suggesting a sense of ambivalence surrounding his individual agency and what may be avoidable versus

unavoidable. As Campbell and van Wanrooy (2013) have suggested, individual choice is grounded in social context; as such, a person may experience ambivalence upon a realization that he/she is left with no choice but to “expect that [boundary . . .] agree with that [boundary]” (Basheer).

Further, there was evidence in the data to demonstrate that some participants dealt with their perceived pecking order associated with nationality by minimizing its constraining effects. As highlighted in Chapter 4, Ahsan discussed how he felt a hierarchy based on nationality and/or ethnicity has been a constraining force on his career and has limited career opportunities. However, soon after he communicated his feelings on this matter, he quickly went on to say: “This [discrimination] is a very small thing. I don’t think that this should be mentioned [. . .] But it’s still [here, although] Dubai is still much better than other GCC countries” (Ahsan). Ahsan’s response is pitted with ambivalence because while it seems that he is attempting to *minimize* his experience of a perceived racial hierarchy as a way to cope with this perceived career boundary, he also stated that he did not feel this boundary should be mentioned, perhaps actually signals the importance of it.

6.1.3. Living with perceptions of gender discrimination

Chapter 4 highlighted that female participants who were married and/or had children experienced career barriers that were specifically associated with their gender. However, in contrast to Duberley et al.’s (2006) study, rather than trying to alleviate and/or transform these boundaries, participants in this study explained how they maintained them through *compromising* behaviours. As Natalia illustrated:

There are so many compromises you have to make as a lady [. . .] So I've just, I've just given up, I've just given up [. . .] But I'm happy [. . .] You just have to say, okay, fine, if I get a job, which is doesn't require much more time and it doesn't require that much intense kind of, you know, your updates and developments that you need to do with your career, [it is okay. . . .] so it's better you join something like this (laughs) [. . .] and be happy about it! (Natalia)

Natalia demonstrates how the theme of *compromise* is salient in explaining how individuals live with their perceived career boundaries. Natalia's account reveals she lived with gender prescriptions by moving back-and-forth between positive and negative feelings. Her account also points to ambivalence about putting her career to the side and, in particular, the difficult and uneasy feelings she had regarding compromise as a tactic.

Priya, another professional accountant who is both a wife and a mother, also explained how she made compromises and maintained the career boundaries associated with gender discrimination:

For me it [working in the UAE] has always been a good experience. Okay, I could also be biased because of the fact that I have knowingly at this point in time taken the decision to not pursue career growth that aggressively, or at least I had taken until a year back. If I want to actually really earn what I should be earning according to my degree, I have to put extra hours, which I cannot afford to do right now [. . . . This is] the typical setback where women have to choose between family and work. When you have young kids, at a particular age, it's going to be an issue anywhere. (Priya)

Like Natalia, Priya moved back and forth between positive and negative evaluations of her career decisions given the normative expectations surrounding gender roles. Consistent with the literature on professional accountants, the findings suggest that due to the impact of work on family and vice versa, many female accountants take a step back in their career to prioritize their families (Lyonette & Campbell, 2008; Twomey et al., 2002). As Lyonette and Campbell (2008) have argued, “normative and organizational pressures mean that women will ‘choose’ either not to pursue a career, or to pursue a career only up to the limits at which they feel they can combine paid work with their domestic responsibilities” (p. 514). Both Natalia’s and Priya’s decisions seem to have been influenced by the amount of choice they perceived to have. Their accounts demonstrate they made concessions and lived with the boundary of gender discrimination.

6.2. FINDING ALTERNATIVES

There is also evidence in the data to suggest that at times participants attempted to find alternatives to their identified constraining boundaries. This finding resonates with King et al. (2005) who have argued that “individuals use a range of behaviors to overcome the boundaries imposed by others” (p. 1001). It is important to note that in contrast to earlier studies, (e.g. Duberley et al., 2006; Fernando & Cohen, 2011) when finding alternatives to their perceived career boundaries, participants did not alter or eradicate their perceived constraining boundaries; rather, they tried to better position themselves in dealing with their boundaries. Compared with participants who simply lived with their identified career boundaries, it seems some participants felt there may be more of an alignment between what is desirable versus what is feasible (Campbell & van Wanrooy, 2013). These strategies will be highlighted below.

6.2.1. Learning

As discussed in Chapter 4, Urmila discussed her perception that limited opportunities to develop and utilize her skills as a professional accountant in the UAE led to limited experience. She felt lack of experience was a career constraint. When asked how she deals with this constraint, Urmila explained:

As of now, I've already given my resignation [. . .] I'm moving to the UK to do my MBA [. . .] so that is the next step. I've always wanted to do it [. . .] I want to explore my options once I go there I see what else is lying. I want to discuss with them and see what's there after audit. I know a lot of people go to industry, but I'm very strict on that that I'm not going into industry I do not want to work in the accounting department. I don't care how big the company is, but like, you know, a stagnant job where you have no challenges, I don't want that. (Urmila)

Earlier on in her interview, Urmila acknowledged that she may experience limited opportunities to develop her skills (see Chapter 4) and tries to deal with it by acquiring additional skills that can equip her for future career opportunities and mobility. Urmila not only managed this perceived constraining boundary by engaging in further *learning*, but also has chosen to deal with it by discussing her intentions to leave the UAE. In a similar vein, Saamia explained how she felt she needed to seek out opportunities to *learn* and/or upgrade her skills:

I feel it is really up to me on how I would like it [limited opportunities to develop her skills] to impact my career, so on a daily basis I am trying to learn from things, and I am upgrading my skills, and that is the only impact it can have—regardless of where I am working, I should have the right attitude and believe that my career should always be on

the right path and the right track. So, I think the impact that it [limited opportunities to develop her skills] would have really would depend on what company I work for, what work I do, the experience or new skills set I acquire. (Saamia)

For Urmila and Saamia, acquiring capital, specifically ‘knowing-how’ competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996), becomes a tactic that enables them to deal with their perceived career boundary regarding limited opportunities to develop her skills in the UAE. While there was no evidence in the data to suggest that participants completely overcame their perceived boundaries, the findings suggest that individuals did try to deal with their boundaries by *learning* and acquiring additional skills. This strategy reinforces King et al.’s (2005) assertions that individuals can be “ahead of the game” with respect to coping with their perceived career boundaries if they anticipate future demand and skill development options (p. 985).

In comparison to some other participants who chose to develop their skill-set as a means of dealing with their perceived constraining career boundaries, other participants felt it was important to *learn* the ‘ins’ and ‘outs’ of their organization and to understand organizational career scripts. In addition to acquiring skills related to the career of accounting itself, many participants discussed the importance of developing a better understanding of the “rules of the game,” (i.e., career scripts) with respect to what is required within accounting firms in order to better manage their perceived career boundaries. For example, Haaris provided the following response when he explained how he dealt with the “ambiguous” promotion policies in his organization:

I personally feel in a multinational corporation these kind of things are more ambiguous you know [. . .] it isn’t always the work which drives your promotions. You can move up

the organization not just by performing—there are some politics involved— so you need to understand those; also you need to understand who to back-hand, who not to back-hand [. . .] I believe this is the case in all organizations [. . .] you need to adopt to those ways, but mainly performing good will help you out. (Haaris)

Haaris chose to learn the rules of the game (organizational politics) as a way to deal with his perceived constraining boundary related to ambiguous promotion policies (see Chapter 4). This strategy suggests that both formal and informal *learning* are important tactics that individuals adopt when engaging with their respective constraining career boundaries. Through learning, individuals are not eradicating or even bending the boundaries, but are learning to live with them.

Like Haaris, Kabir also discussed the salience of being knowledgeable about certain contextual rules. In contrast to Haaris, who drew on the implicit rules within his organizational context, Kabir drew on the importance of *learning* the career scripts within the national context of the UAE. As Kabir explained:

Relationships matter here—relationships and respect. For example, in the US, you were meeting with a client and it was just a casual discussion, you could sit cross-legged. Over here, it's [sitting cross-legged is] considered completely rude, regardless of how casual the environment is [. . .] – if you're next to a Minister or whatever, it's considered extremely rude. So it's just one of those things they have to make sure, because if that happens, and if the client gets offended, it doesn't matter how good you are, you just need to make sure that you respect and value their cultural and social beliefs [. . .] these

things matter in your career, especially when they are thinking about putting you on certain files, you know, also during your performance appraisal. (Kabir)

Kabir reported the importance of understanding the implicit cultural rules in the UAE and he explained his feeling that not having this form of career capital can be a career constraint.

However, he chose to engage with it by learning the cultural nuances that are deemed important in forging relationships with clients, particularly with the local Emiratis. Kabir's discussion of rules is reminiscent of promotion scripts examined in the careers literature, which discusses "the rules and norms that individuals have in mind when they think about their careers" (Dany et al., 2011, p. 976). It appears that some participants are aware that *not* having this type of career capital can act as a career boundary and they therefore attempt to acquire the appropriate 'know-how' to deal with this potential boundary.

6.2.2. 'Browning out'

As discussed in Chapter 4, some participants explained how they felt that the UAE's labour laws, particularly surrounding its implications on their precarious legal status and permanency, were a factor that contributed to their career instability. They identified this as a perceived constraining career boundary in their interviews. Rather than directly challenging this perceived career boundary, participants found ways to "stick with it" (Lanier, 1979, p. 160). However, in contrast to 'living with the boundary', which implies an element of resigning to the boundary and not taking adopting any behaviours to minimize and/or capitalize on the perceived boundary's effects, 'browning out' still involved some level of agency whereby participants tried to better position themselves in dealing with their perceived boundary. For example, Fahad states:

I don't worry about deadlines as much as I used to [. . .] because when I joined, for two years, I worked really hard to impress people [. . .] but if I was to work really, really, really hard, I'd get appreciated, maybe 9 out of 10, and if I don't work really hard, or if I just go along, I get appreciated 8 out of 10, you know [. . .] it's really doesn't make much of a difference. If we have an option of staying here permanently, and getting passports and whatnot, it might change our perspective [. . .] but since we know that we'll always, always [. . .] and even after living here for 35 years of whatever, we will be sent back, then why bother? (Fahad)

Due to perceptions of injustice—not only from an organizational perspective, as suggested in his references to his hard work being underappreciated, but also from a national perspective because he may be “sent back” to his home country—Fahad appeared to be engaging in a *browning out* strategy of putting less effort into his work. This strategy echoes the earlier work of Richardson (2001), whose study found that expatriates who may be experiencing adjustment issues start to under-perform since underperformance would arguably require less effort than adjusting to a new location and/or prematurely returning to their home location. This strategy appears to be a way of exerting some form of agency and control given the unassailable nature of the UAE's labour laws (Richardson, 2009). While he may not necessarily be trying to eradicate or transform the boundary (e.g. Duberley et al., 2006; Fernando & Cohen, 2011; Richardson, 2009), this tactic demonstrates Fahad still does not agree with it and perhaps may be a very subtle form of individual resistance to a coercive control strategy. Hameed communicated similar sentiments when he was asked how he felt about his perceptions surrounding discrimination:

But, obviously if I know that I'm not going to be the top of this company someday, it doesn't really make me want to work hard. I just go along with it, and if there is ever a

time that someone gives me a good job offer in the industry [. . .] if anyone calls me and says, Hameed, work for me for this amount of money,' and if it's a good company, I'd say 'khalas³⁸, no I'll go.' (Hameed)

Hameed echoes Fahad and suggests that he will not put in much effort into his job because his perceptions regarding discrimination based on nationality leads him to believe he will never be at the top of his company anyway. While Fahad deals with his perceptions of unfairness by putting in less effort at work, Hameed appears to be dealing with his perceptions of discrimination based on nationality (see Chapter 4) by lowering his level of organizational loyalty and commitment. This is an important finding as it points to a consideration of what may be avoidable versus unavoidable (Campbell & van Wanrooy, 2013). Both Fahad and Hameed suggest that even though they may not feel that they have much power to confront their respective career boundaries head on, they find subtle ways to resist and cope with these career constraints via *browning out*.

6.2.3. Networking

Networking was another strategy that some participants adopted to deal with their perceived constraining career boundaries. It is important to note that networking also appears as a tactic that participants adopted in capitalizing on their enabling boundaries, which will be discussed later on in this sub-section. There appears to be a key difference in how this tactic is adopted when participants used it to manage their perceived constraining boundary versus when they used it to capitalize on their perceived enabling boundary. In the case of perceived constraining boundaries, participants used networking to increase their 'knowing-whom' career

³⁸ Arabic word meaning "finish."

competency (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). Given the salience of networking in the UAE, having and maintaining networks is considered to be an important career script that individuals are expected to follow. For example, Vikesh explained networking and knowing whom (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996) was important for dealing with racial discrimination. Vikesh used networking, particularly with respect to UAE nationals, to “raise [his] pecking order” (Vikesh). Specifically, he explained, “We [Indians] have to make an effort with the UAE nationals [. . .] everybody has to make lots of effort to equate to them” socially in order to reap career benefits (Vikesh). He continues:

We have to do something out of the office to raise your pecking order. . . . I think a lot of people make that effort here because they know that’s the way you need to move and you need to get your work done otherwise you can be left behind. So Indians have to put more of than effort than, for example, Canadians or Australians. (Vikesh)

It is important to note that Vikesh made no reference to try to eradicate the perceived boundary; instead, he decided to live within it by acquiring social capital in the form of knowing whom. It is significant that some participants explained that they network with the local Emirati population as a way to deal with their perceived discrimination related to nationality, which is associated with their status in their host country. Even though a majority of participants explained they perceived discrimination by nationality, and expressed this perceived discrimination negatively impacted their career experiences, their nationality itself is not the only marker of their status in the UAE. For them, maintaining close relationships with the Emirati population was a way to circumnavigate any perceptions of nationality-based discrimination. While it is debatable whether raising one’s pecking order is actually a sustainable networking strategy in dealing with the perceived career constraining boundary of discrimination based on

nationality (since this strategy is arguably perpetuating discrimination), it appears participants used strategies like networking to deal with perceived boundaries because due to a set of constrained choices, it may be their only option.

While the use of networks was presented as a way in which participants deal with perceived constraining career boundaries, many participants acknowledged that the strategy of networking was as a way in which they capitalized on their perceived enabling career boundaries – as a way of finding and securing alternatives. Compared with some participants who engaged in networking simply due to constrained choices, possibly triggered out of necessity, in the case of perceived enabling boundaries, it seemed that the severity of their ambivalence was less. In other words, there was more of an alignment between what participants perceived to be feasible and what they perceive to be desirable.

It is important to highlight that only some participants chose to proactively capitalize on the benefits that networking could offer them. For example, being aware that the accounting professional context is a “small pond”, Kabir chose to maintain his relationships with his contacts in the industry to allow for future opportunities:

Actually, it is a very simple answer: when I was in Deloitte, I used to work with a Partner that we have here. We have a great relationship, I worked well with him, really enjoyed it. Then I left Firm A and moved to Firm B, but we still maintained our friendship, our relationship. He moved from DC to Dubai in 2008/2009 and he gave me a call in 2010 and said, ‘we have started up this new practice called the ABC projects’ [and . . .] basically he created a new practice for his own specialized field, which is the real estate environment. And he gave me a call saying, ‘I’ve started this –would you want to come to Dubai to help this grow, to work on this?’ [and I said,] ‘absolutely.’ (Kabir)

In addition to capitalizing on *networks* to help secure a position in the UAE, some participants also expressed that they proactively maintained their network as a fall-back option – as a way to keep their options open. As Haaris demonstrated:

Had it [my move to Firm E] been a bad move, I would have moved back [to Pakistan] because I had already worked at Firm D, I had made a few connections within industry also, and also within Firm D. So if I had to move back, Firm D would also always take me because I had developed that kind of reputation with my seniors and with people in the organization. (Haaris)

The findings demonstrate that it is not simply enough to have a network; an individual must maintain this network through ongoing effort. Only some participants reported that they actively sought out to increase or maintain their networks as a way to capitalize on their identified enabling boundaries, and this finding may suggest that only some participants are aware of its importance.

6.2.4. Utilizing knowledge of career scripts

There was evidence in the data that pointed to the importance of being aware of important career scripts or “having your finger on the pulse” when attempting to capitalize on perceived enabling boundaries. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 4, specific organizational boundaries, such as HR policies and procedures, gave some participants a sense of structure and direction since these boundaries set out certain criteria to help individuals navigate and develop their careers. Many participants expressed that they were aware of their organizations’ HR initiatives and the implicit assumption that they should partake in these initiatives. For example, Pramod discussed how he made the most out of his company’s performance appraisal process:

We have something called Engagement Performance Review 10 minutes feedback and we have these presentations and know it will be reviewed and we also give lot of our comments and we used to take comments from the partners as well in terms of how the project is run, how is it managed, whether the advisory is good—everything will be reviewed and every year there will be an appraisal meeting both for the staff and for the managers [. . .] promotions are decided based on the opinions they gather from the different managers. (Pramod)

In a similar manner, Urmila reported she chose to get involved with her organization's professional development program due to the enabling effects it has had on her career:

I work with Company B, one of the Big 4 international auditing firms. Company B's Professional Development Programme (PDP) is designed to help fresh graduates mould into young business professionals. The programme teaches individuals the basics of auditing and helps them grow in the field year on year. This program has really helped me progress in my firm. (Urmila)

In contrast to the discourse surrounding the boundaryless career (Chapter 2) the findings suggest that the organization is still a salient feature in shaping individuals' career experiences and participants demonstrate that they are aware of the career script surrounding the importance on capitalizing on their organization's programs to help them enable their careers.

In addition, participants reported that they were aware of the career script associated with getting more qualifications and they therefore “jumped on the bandwagon” in the quest to get more “letters” behind their names. This is exemplified by Pramod:

For some other reasons, I just want to complete that [degree] maybe it will add to your CV, not only for your personal purpose, but also for the company's profile [. . .] it is not like something new to the new subject or something like that; it is just another degree [. . .]it will add to the CV. (Pramod)

Even though he already has his CA, Pramod demonstrated that he was aware of his organizational career script with respect to attaining more designations as it provided him with more alternatives for the future. In a professional context that is very client focused, Pramod later reported that employees with more designations are more likely to secure a desired file or project. By earning an additional designation, Pramod took advantage of the career script associated with skill accreditation to improve the company's profile, while also making himself more marketable from a personal perspective.

6.3. INTENDING TO EXIT

6.3.1. Intending to leave the UAE

Exiting refers to making a decision to leave the context entirely because the perceived constraining career boundaries may be too difficult for participants to handle (see Al Ariss, 2010, Fernando & Cohen, 2011). While some participants stated that they were willing to work within the constraining boundaries by adapting and/or making compromises in order to continue to live and work in the UAE, many reported that they were considering leaving the UAE and moving elsewhere - opting out of this environment altogether. Ifraz, for example, discussed moving, saying, "I always have to keep my options open" (Ifraz). He noted his thoughts about moving relate to the precariousness of jobs in the UAE:

The Dubai market has some issues, issues like, you are here for a job, fine. Tomorrow you could be given a letter saying, ‘we don’t need you—go home.’ So, here, hiring is done very quickly, and you are also fired very quickly. This is part of the Dubai market: there is a lot of hiring going on, but there are a lot of people moving out, so it’s very volatile. Especially recently, we have seen that Dubai is not that stable. You have a job and you aren’t guaranteed to stay for 10 years—you must always think of alternative places to move to. (Ifraz)

Ifraz discussed the importance of always thinking of the possibility of leaving the UAE as it’s a way in which he can “regain a sense of oneself” (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 420) due to factors within the national context that may contribute to career instability (as mentioned in Chapter 4). In a similar manner, Basheer drew on factors within different national contexts to discuss his thoughts surrounding departure:

It is always a thing here in the UAE that you have to go back. Given the political condition in Pakistan, I am thinking of immigrating to some other country – to get a dual nationality. Because I don’t want to lose Pakistan nationality, because that is my home, but of course I would look somewhere to work where I can get dual nationality; I would have citizenship rights” (Basheer).

Rahim also noted the important role citizenship would play in a decision to move:

Probably in one year or two years, then I plan, then I will definitely move ahead. I’m planning to move somewhere to the US or Canada as an immigrant. I see Dubai as a sort of a stepping stone to help me get there, but [. . .] I’m just thinking out loud because the UAE is not a place where you can [stay long term since] they, they do not offer you any sort of citizenship or something like this. (Rahim)

In this same discussion, Rahim mentioned career stability was another important reason for moving:

I'm planning to move ahead, to have a stable career or, long-term benefits as well—a long-term stable career. I think that's an issue for everyone living in the GCC right, the idea that you make a life, but then the chance being told to leave could be any day. You know, that sense is always there—that's the main risk that everyone is facing, so everyone is trying to find alternative things. (Rahim)

It is important to note that even though some participants reported they wanted to leave the UAE, they had not yet done so. This finding is an important since it suggests the participants' intended strategy may actually differ from the actual strategy they end up taking. Participants' discussions of exiting and their intention to withdraw themselves from their present context may be a way for them to cope with their experienced career constraints in the UAE. Through an on-going comparison of different places and points in time, it is evident that the strategies that participants took is not a solution with an ending, but a way for them to deal with their present situations.

6.3.2. Intending to leave current organization/employer

Similar to how some participants reported their intention of opting out of working in the UAE altogether, other participants reported they would like to opt out of their current organization. However, when these participants spoke about finding alternative work in the UAE, they only did so after carefully considering their options. For example, Shaaz discusses his reticence to talk about finding alternative work in the UAE:

I always jumped jobs when I was still in the previous job [. . .] once I know, 'okay, this is going to finish in another six months,' I will start looking for another job. Even now, I'm

waiting for a very good opportunity [. . .] let the market pick up and then I'll jump. I've always had a job in hand when I had jumped [. . .] that is very critical—you have to be very careful when you threaten your company [. . .] you have to be realistic about the [labour] market [. . .] you have to be very careful about whether the company is a lasting company: how long they have been here, whether they will be there next year [. . . .] don't put all of your eggs in one basket. You have to be realistic—you should not fall for you know the hype. (Shaaz)

Shaaz's account is important because it demonstrates that an individual's decision to leave an organization may not necessarily be based on simply reacting to career constraints, but may involve careful consideration of alternative, constrained choices and perhaps other potential career boundaries (i.e. the state of the labour market, the financial position of the company). Shaaz's account also suggests that individuals may not always react based on emotions, but shows people think about the utility of withdrawing from one organizational context to join another. Shaaz's comment demonstrates individuals weigh their options as an attempt to alleviate their uncertainty.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, many female participants also spoke about how they experienced dilemmas when trying to balance their professional and family lives. In discussing how they have tried to deal with this issue, some female participants explained how they have chosen to move out of a professional accounting firm into accounting industry jobs since this strategy provides greater work-life flexibility. Natalia explained:

because I had no help from my in-laws, I had to again leave that job for one year because I—nobody could take care of my baby and I didn't want any caretaker to take care of her [. . . .] Then I got into Bank A [. . .] and Bank A was very good—they were giving me an

adequate job and I was doing good [. . .] but it was long working hours again and my baby was small and then I thought it's better I join a local bank, because local banks timings are—they are considerate and they're not that aggressive and not that demanding [. . .] so that's how I got into Bank B and last six years I'm in Bank B [. . .] all settled.

(Natalia)

Priya also discussed her choice to move from one organization to another:

Actually, it's because I had my kids [. . .] my youngest one is a little less than 2 years [. . .] so you know, I've had my kids here, both of them have been born here. And it's a time of my life where I really want to take things a bit slow, enjoy them growing up. I couldn't have done this working in the last firm [. . .] Fortunately, my company is a few in this region who gives you that kind of space [. . .] we get six months of maternity, versus one and a half month that the rest of this country gets. So, it's been lucky. I could have very easily moved to something more demanding, but I chose not to because I thought it was time to slow down. (Priya)

For Natalia and Priya, moving out of professional services firms into industry organizations was their response to dealing with their sociological ambivalence surrounding the difficulties in balancing expectations between being a “good” mother and wife with being a “good” professional accountant (discussed in Chapter 4), such as the expectation that a good employee is willing to always prioritize work and spend “visible” time in the office (Lyonette & Crompton, 2008, p. 513). Rather than live with the boundary surrounding perceptions of gender discrimination (see Chapter 4), Natalia and Priya choose to opt out of a gendered organizational system that is unfavourable to females (Fernando & Cohen, 2011; Lyonette & Crompton, 2008).

It is important to note that there was no evidence of any participant choosing to opt out of their professional context (i.e., the accounting profession). A potential explanation for this finding could be the risk assessment involved with leaving the profession entirely, especially since many participants had invested a considerable amount of time in attaining their CA (or equivalent designation). Once again, this finding points to the role ambivalence plays surrounding a misalignment between what is desirable versus what is feasible: while many participants may have wanted to leave the accounting profession, they did not choose this option as a viable exiting strategy given the feasibility of such an option.

6.4. SUMMARY

As Inkson et al. (2012) have argued, individuals' responses about career boundaries are worthy of study. As discussed in Chapter 4, the career boundaries participants perceived and experienced are not static or applicable to everyone, but they are dependent on the experiences of any given individual and the context(s) within which he/she exists. In this chapter, I highlighted the notion that career boundaries are not only connected, but are fluid, so the way participants negotiated these boundaries (via different strategies) is also not a permanent solution nor is it their only solution; rather is it temporary and connected with other strategies. This chapter builds on the ideas in Chapters 4 and 5 and examines the ways in which participants ambivalently manage, negotiate, and take advantage of their perceived constraining and enabling boundaries. Participants appeared to engage in various strategies to negotiate their perceived career boundaries. This chapter offers an alternative look at Duberley et al.'s (2006) modes of engagement by illustrating the role of ambivalence in influencing and shaping the type of strategy an individual may take. Unlike the descriptions of the free and unrestricted SIE found in the boundaryless careers literature, this chapter demonstrates that participants experience

ambivalence when using various strategies to manage and/or capitalize on the career boundaries they identify. In light of this discussion, this chapter infuses ambivalence as a theoretical framework with understanding how SIE's negotiate their perceived career boundaries. Chapter 7 extends this dialogue further and offers a theoretical explanation behind the various types of ambivalence and its influence on an individual's choice of strategy to negotiate his/her identified career boundaries.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This final chapter reflects on the entire research project. In it, I revisit the overall objectives of this study and I identify this study's specific contributions to our understanding of SIEs' experiences of career boundaries. Given the paucity of research focused on examining career boundaries, this study offers key contributions to career literature: it challenges contemporary notions of boundarylessness, highlights the versatility and richness of boundaries, identifies the ambivalence inherent within understanding boundaries, and develops an understanding of how SIEs negotiate with a range of multiple and co-existing boundaries as they structure their careers. Based on the findings reported in earlier chapters, I developed a conceptual model (Figure 2) to explain the different ways participants may experience ambivalence and the ways in which this ambivalence influences their strategies for boundary negotiation. I also discuss how the findings of this study may contribute to related scholarship. I end this chapter by discussing limitations of the study and areas for further research.

7.1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study set out to provide a comprehensive understanding of how SIE professional accountants from the Asian subcontinent perceive and experience career boundaries in the UAE. The three research objectives designed to gain this understanding were:

1. To explore how SIE accountants from the Asian subcontinent perceive and experience boundaries in the context of their career;
2. To identify how these boundaries may be a constraining and/or enabling forces on their career experiences;

3. To understand how SIE accountants from the Asian subcontinent manage and/or capitalize on their identified career boundaries while working in the UAE.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a lively debate within the careers literature surrounding the boundaryless career. Several scholars have asserted, there is little empirical evidence regarding the boundaries that do exist and the contexts in which they exist (e.g., Gunz et al., 2000; Inkson et al., 2012; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). However, other scholarship suggests the idea of boundaryless careers is overly simplified and thus not an accurate reflection of career experiences. By examining how individuals perceive, experience and negotiate career boundaries through the lens of ambivalence this study provides an alternative look into the way in which individuals struggle with and try to make sense of these boundaries. This study therefore builds on previous work on how the ways individuals may negotiate their perceived career boundaries (e.g. Duberely et al, 2006; Fernando & Cohen, 2011; Richardson, 2009) by considering the ambivalent experiences within this process.

7.2. KEY THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study offers four main theoretical contributions. Firstly, this study challenges existing notions of ‘boundarylessness’ contributing to a deeper understanding of extant boundaries in career experiences. Furthermore, it provides an understanding of how SIEs perceive and experience a range of multiple and co-existing boundaries as they enact and structure their careers. Secondly, this study signals the salience of comparisons between different points in time, spaces, people, and places in the way in which SIEs perceive and negotiate career boundaries. Thirdly, this study provides a closer look into specific career boundaries experienced by SIEs in a particular part of the world. Finally, the findings from this study draw upon the

concept of ambivalence to offer an understanding of how SIEs understand career boundaries and why SIEs may or may not adopt certain strategies in dealing with perceived boundaries. Each of these contributions will be discussed in the next sub-sections.

7.2.1. Building on the careers literature: challenging notions of ‘boundarylessness’

This study aimed to engage in the debate on the boundaryless career by demonstrating that career boundaries are “not dissolving” (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010, p. 1170); rather, they are salient in shaping individuals’ career experiences. By highlighting the anxiety related to losing one’s job in the UAE and feelings of career instability, the findings of this study provide insight into the nature of boundaries that are experienced by SIEs operating in a risky expatriate environment, and therefore challenges contemporary notions of boundarylessness. In doing so this study broadens our understanding of career boundaries by examining individuals who may simultaneously be ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ (Currie et al., 2006) in the enactment of their career and demonstrates why a more nuanced understanding of career boundaries is essential to career theory.

Further, the findings highlighted the significance of understanding SIEs’ experience in terms of contexts and multifaceted boundaries in understanding SIE career experiences, particularly in the context of the UAE. A common thread throughout this discussion has been the idea that career boundaries may be both objective and subjective and therefore may impact individuals in different ways, particularly when examined in different contexts. Despite being able to move across geographical boundaries, SIEs may experience other forms of boundaries inherent in the professional, organizational, and national contexts in which they are embedded. The findings also point to the interconnectedness of contexts in which an individual can experience a career (e.g., Duberley et al., 2006). For instance, when examined on the level of the

national context of the UAE, participants' designation was seen as a valuable source of career capital; however, when examined within an organizational context, this sense of worth was dependant on the organization and the designation of the partners in the firm. In light of these findings, this study opened up the space to examine the range of career boundaries in the context of the UAE.

7.2.2. The salience of comparisons and the role of possible selves

The salience of a comparative other (i.e., time, place, person, context) is an important concept in this study because the findings of this study suggests that meanings SIEs assign to their career experiences are shaped through comparisons. For example, in Chapter 4, I demonstrate that the way in which participants made sense of their perceived career boundaries as enablers and/or constraints appears to be affected by comparisons made with something else—either another context or another point in time. In particular, the importance of time progression points to how the influence of a boundary can become more or less salient depending on the lens (that is, “now” orientation versus a “future” orientation) through which boundaries are examined. Hind's (2005) four-roomed apartment metaphor, which focuses on how individuals adopt different frames of mind is useful in understanding how participants may evaluate their career experiences. This model draws on existential ideas to understand four frames of mind to understand how people experience and embrace change, and how they may influence their own and others thought processes associated with this change (Hind, 2005); likewise, the participants in this study demonstrated a range of emotions, such as contentment, denial, confusion, and renewal, as they evaluated their career experiences and career boundaries. There are signs in the data that participants moved through these different emotional ‘rooms’ as they made comparisons of their past, present, and future career experiences. While some

participants may have been content in the “sun lounge” room (Hind, 2005, p. 271), they did reveal a sense of doubt and confusion when they thought about the future, sometimes even moving to the “pit of paralysis” (Hind, 2005, p. 271). The findings contribute to our understanding of how individuals perceive career boundaries as it suggests that the ‘room’ participants may presently be in (i.e. their current frame of reference) may shape their perceptions of the boundary they are experiencing now or even in the future.

In addition, in Chapter 6, I suggest that making comparisons between their present situation and either a previous situation or an envisioned future possibility appears to be a strategy that participants adopted to manage perceived career boundaries. By demonstrating that career boundaries can be shaped not only through comparisons made with other points in time, but also other contexts, and other people, this study contributes to extant careers literature: The use of comparisons therefore may be useful in providing an explanation behind King et al.’s (2005) assertions surrounding *how* the influence of a boundary can become weaker or stronger because it suggests that depending on the lens through in which SIEs evaluate their careers (i.e., a “now” orientation versus a “future” orientation), participants may evaluate the same boundary differently.

The findings surrounding how participants express an envisioned possibility connect with Costas and Grey’s (2014) notion of “nostalgia,” which they defined as “a long[ed] for, and a promise of, something better,” the tendency to take on a future-orientation while overlooking one’s present situation (p. 917). Costas and Grey (2014) drew on the earlier works of Thornborrow and Brown (2009) and suggested that future subjects are in a “continuous process of ‘becoming’” (p. 371). While I only focused on hard forms of exiting in Chapter 6 (i.e., leaving their current situation or the UAE), Costas and Grey’s (2014) study points to the idea that

participants may also exit their identified reality by imagining a future self: “a future imagined not in terms prescribed by disciplinary power but breaking radically with those terms, typically in the form of dreams of escape from the corporate world in favour of a freer and more creative existence” (p. 911). Ibarra’s (1999) notion of possible selves³⁹ offers a useful explanation in this respect because it considers how career transitions, “provide opportunities for renegotiating both private and public views of the self” (p. 766). In the same way that Ibarra (1999) considers how possible selves are negotiated, retained or rejected in the context of career change⁴⁰, the findings of this study point to the salience of “future possibilities” (Ibarra, 2005, p. 9) when considering their strategy in negotiating their perceived career boundary. The findings point to the way in which exiting is a way in which some participants manage their perceived constraining boundaries surrounding the UAE’s labour laws. Drawing on Ibarra’s (1999, 2005) concept of possible selves, imagining a future possibility may therefore serve as the motivator or incentive behind this choice of strategy. This study theoretically contributes to our understanding of how SIEs may negotiate their career boundaries beyond actions, and instead, by playing with imaginary future selves to help them escape the constraining boundaries they identified and acknowledged they could do nothing about.

Further, Ibarra (2005) has suggested that, “these images of desired and feared future selves as perceptual screens, shaping one’s interpretations of, and responses to, unfolding opportunities or constraints” (p. 9). The findings of this study point to SIEs’ ideas of what they hope to become and fears surrounding this future becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). A desired or feared future self may therefore impact the way in which they think about their career options

³⁹ Ibarra’s (2005) work focuses on identity, defined as “the various meanings attached to oneself by self and others” (p. 7). However, it is important to note, in this study, I discuss how some of this work can still be applicable in offering a theoretical explanation behind some of the study’s findings surrounding participants’ adoption of a future possible self.

⁴⁰ Ibarra (2005) defines career change as “any major change in work role requirements or context” (p. 3)

and may thus alter the way in which he/she perceives and experiences a career boundary. Finding a way to cope with identified career boundaries can therefore be considered a means of preparing for future career planning in terms of an ongoing negotiation with an individual's narrative of the self.

7.2.3. Theoretical contributions to the SIE literature

As Cappellen and Janssens (2010) affirmed, “careers need to be situated in the contexts within which they develop” (p. 689). By focusing on the career experiences of a particular group (i.e., professional SIEs from the Asian subcontinent) within the UAE, this study contextualizes an understanding of SIEs’ careers and their perceived career boundaries and responds to calls to “engage more actively in exploring the characteristics of SIEs and how they navigate specific contextual constraints” (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014, p. 206). Compared with organization expatriates, the literature describes SIEs as individuals with a high amount of agency who often taking full “advantage of the employment opportunities available in the global economy with a shortage of skilled workers” (Tharenou 2008, p. 183). As a result, SIEs are often described individuals who are able to transcend geographical boundaries with ease. Scholarship suggests SIEs not only transcend geographical boundaries, but career boundaries as well (e.g. Doherty, Dickmann, & Mills, 2011; Inkson et al., 1997; Shaffer et al., 2012; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). However, the findings of this study demonstrate boundaries, geographic and career, are not so easily overcome. The institutional and structural factors in the UAE created constant boundaries for study participants, thus the findings of this study problematize depictions of SIEs as free agents who enact boundaryless careers (e.g., Doherty, Dickmann, & Mills, 2011; Inkson et al., 1997; Shaffer et al., 2012; Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

In addition, data on how SIEs in this study perceived boundaries is an important contribution to scholarship. Findings from this study consider the contextual underpinnings of career boundaries. Drawing on Barley's (1989) and Kaulisch and Enders' (2005) frameworks to understand how SIEs perceive and experience career boundaries, this study considers how boundaries, which are embedded in national, organizational, and professional contexts, can enable and constrain SIEs' career experiences and, in turn, how factors in these contexts influence SIEs' strategies for negotiating these career boundaries. This consideration of the specific career boundaries SIEs experienced in the UAE context provides an in-depth understanding of how SIEs' perceived boundaries may shape their career experiences in this particular part of the world.

7.2.4. The role of ambivalence in negotiating career boundaries

The findings from this study have illuminated the importance of bringing the dynamics associated with ambivalent career experiences to the careers literature generally and career boundaries of SIEs specifically. For example, when discussing their career experiences in the UAE participants appear to be faced not only with doubt and uncertainty at every juncture in their career (psychological ambivalence), but also challenged with a set of contradictory demands and expectations through their interactions with others (sociological ambivalence). Previous research (e.g., Duberley et al. 2006, Fernando & Cohen, 2011; Richardson, 2009) made use of the Barley (1989) model, which focused on the recursive process of the interplay between agency and structure to understand how individuals managed perceived career boundaries. The findings of this study build on this previous research by offering an explanation behind SIEs agency and their choice of strategy to cope with their perceived boundaries. Moreover, the findings indicate that this choice of strategy is an ambivalent one. In particular, the findings in

Chapter 6 suggest that participants' discussions of strategies for dealing with their identified and experienced career boundaries lacked clarity and were often vague, indistinct, and sometimes contradictory. This study adds another layer to our understanding of how individuals deal with their perceived career boundaries through the lens of ambivalence.

As discussed in Chapter 2, ambivalence is not just a reaction to individual issues, but is a response to contradictions in the social context. As such, ambivalence points to the “contradiction and paradox of social experience” (Connidis & McMullin, 2002, p. 558). By examining how individuals perceive and experience career boundaries through the lens of ambivalence this study offers a deeper look into the way in which individuals may struggle with and sometimes make sense of the tension between what is feasible versus what is desirable (Campbell & van Wanrooy, 2013) when enacting their career. Ambivalence therefore offers an additional perspective to career theory as it “bridges social structure and individual lives by emphasizing the tensions between them” (Connidis & McMullin, 2002, p. 565). Not only does this approach complement the work of Barley (1986), but also studying these tensions or in between spaces of contradiction and doubt within careers research provides the opportunity to explore the challenges individuals face as they enact their careers. The findings highlight the ambivalent experiences associated with both identifying and coping with perceived career boundaries. As a result, this study builds on earlier work surrounding the various strategies individuals may take in dealing with perceived career boundaries (e.g. Duberley et al, 2006; Fernando & Cohen, 2011; Richardson, 2009) and offers an alternative understanding of *why* SIEs may or may not adopt these strategies.

Ambivalence may also serve to offer a counter perspective to the rational choices made by individuals when enacting their career and thus allows for an examination of the messiness,

uncertainty, and contradictions inherent in career decisions and career experiences. In addition, an examination of ambivalence provides an alternative contribution to the global careers literature which often depicts the notions of people moving seamlessly and with ease (i.e., Dickmann & Baruch, 2011). As discussed earlier, there seems to be a discourse of free-will and fluidity that is embedded within our current understandings of the SIE. While some of the global career literature proclaims SIEs “can decide for themselves where to apply and which job offer in which country to accept in order to promote their careers” (Biemann & Andresen, 2010, p. 434), viewing this through the lens of ambivalence suggests this perspective ignores the importance of structural factors in shaping careers. The literature on ambivalence examines the in-between spaces whereby individuals may be fraught with uncertainty and ambivalence in deciding on their next career move. The development of ambivalence as a conceptual tool may contribute to career studies by suggesting that perhaps a global career is, by definition, replete with ambiguity, uncertainty, precariousness, and discontinuity, regardless of where an individual goes to work. Examining the experiences of ambivalence at the individual level broadens our understanding of the global career, particularly with respect to the ‘de-glamorization’ of a global career.

Consequently, this study not only offers a unique theoretical contribution to the SIE literature by connecting SIEs’ careers to experiences of ambivalence, but also allows for a re-framing of uncertainties and/or contradictions inherent in career decisions and career experiences. Figure 2 presents these findings. This conceptual model demonstrates how SIEs may experience ambivalence and explains how participants negotiated their perceived constraining and/or enabling career boundaries embedded in their contexts. Figure 2 shows a heuristic in understanding how individuals ambivalently cope with their perceived career

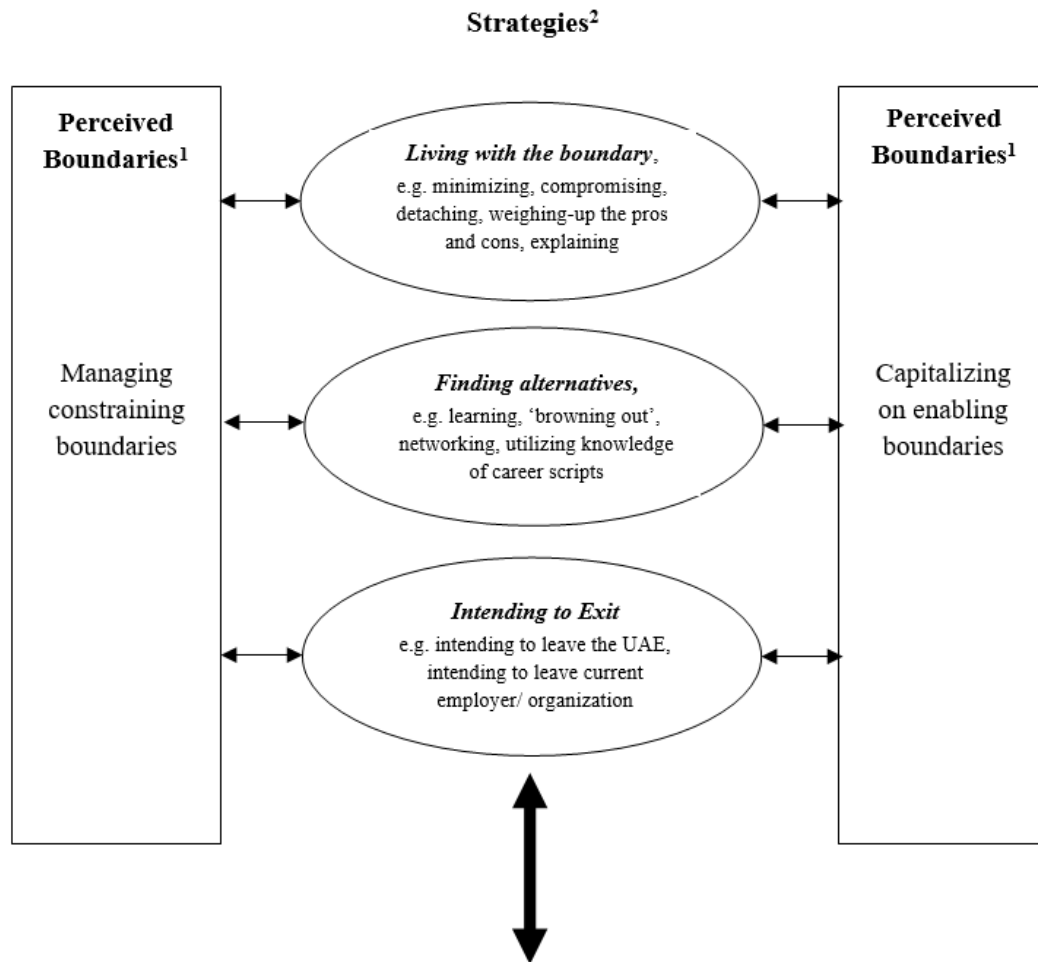
boundaries, it is not intended to be treated as a model which predicts the relationship between a set of variables.

7.3.TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW INDIVIDUALS NEGOTIATE PERCEIVED CAREER BOUNDARIES

Chapter 4 demonstrated that participants felt their careers can be both constrained and enabled by factors within their national, organizational, and professional contexts, while Chapter 5 suggested, participants were often ambivalent about their career experiences. Chapter 6 extended this discussion by suggesting that the role ambivalence plays in shaping SIEs' decisions about negotiating career boundaries is a salient one. The conceptual model is intended to explain how participants may experience ambivalence and its influence on their 'choice' strategy to negotiate their identified career boundaries. Before I explain the model in detail I will first identify the key components of the model and will then discuss the specifics of how they are connected and the theoretical implications of these findings to the careers and SIE literature.

FIGURE 2

Experiencing Ambivalence when Negotiating Career Boundaries



- Alignment/Misalignment between what is desirable vs. what is feasible
- Assessment of risk vs. reward
- Perception of free vs. constrained choice
- Perception of what is avoidable vs. unavoidable

¹ “Perceived boundaries”: corresponds with findings in Chapter 4

² “Strategies”: corresponds with findings in Chapter 6

³ “Types of ambivalence”: corresponds with findings in Chapter 5

Perceived boundaries

As shown in Figure 2, *perceived boundaries* include constraining and enabling dimensions. As the findings in Chapter 4 demonstrate, participants perceive boundaries as constraining if they block or limit career opportunities and/or mobility and they perceive boundaries as enabling when they provide some form of structure and/or direction to their career experiences. The findings also demonstrate that boundaries are unique to an individual's specific context, thus the influence of a boundary can change over time. Additionally, while one individual may feel that a boundary has a constraining effect on their career experiences, another individual may feel this same boundary enables their career.

Types of ambivalence

The findings in Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrated that the ambivalence is significant, particularly with respect to how it may influence a SIE's choice of strategy in negotiating their perceived career boundaries. The types of ambivalence are: perceptions of misalignment between what is desirable versus what is feasible; perceptions of risk versus reward assessments; perceptions of free versus constrained choices; and perceptions of what is avoidable versus unavoidable. Each of these types of ambivalence will be briefly described. First, ambivalence stemming from a *misalignment between what is desirable versus what is feasible* refers to the doubt or uncertainty individuals may experience when they are faced with a set of constraining boundaries that may limit their career goals (psychological ambivalence), and/or when individuals are faced with incompatible normative expectations about how they, "should act" versus how they may want to act (sociological ambivalence). For example, as the findings demonstrate, while many participants had a desire to leave the accounting profession, this option was not feasible to them given the length of time it took to become a professional accountant.

Another example of this type of ambivalence is demonstrated when participants discuss their concerns surrounding their transience in the UAE: the desire for something more permanent, yet knowing this permanence was not feasible.

Second, *assessment of risk versus reward* is based on the findings which showed that participants appear to be very cognizant of the ‘price to pay’ of being a SIE – on one hand reaping the benefits, yet experiencing psychological ambivalence when they have to weigh this against the associated risks. As the findings demonstrated, there were several instances whereby participants were aware of the risks associated with living in the UAE, yet their accounts pointed being pulled in opposite directions as they considered these risks in light of the benefits. Third, ambivalence stemming from the *perception of free versus constrained choice* surrounds the idea that while participants feel that in some instances they do have choices in deciding on how to negotiate their identified career boundary, this choice is ‘constrained’ by circumstances in their professional, organizational and national contexts. For example, when discussing their experience of working in a professional services firm versus industry some participants were very vocal about the restrictive nature of working in industry. Despite these criticisms, they demonstrate ambivalence associated with free versus constrained choices because even though some participants may prefer to work in a professional services firm, the norms of promotion which typically involve an ‘up and out’ career structure does not guarantee career longevity. Finally, perceptions of what is *avoidable versus unavoidable* refers to the idea that individuals may experience ambivalence upon a realization that the ‘rules of the game’ (i.e. career scripts) cannot be avoided and therefore must comply. For example, the findings point to the way in which participants did not feel they could avoid perceptions of organizational unfairness even when they realised this unfairness should not be taking place.

Strategies

In this study, *strategies* refer to the ways in which participants negotiated their perceived career boundaries and find ways to live with or work around them. It is important to note that in contrast to earlier studies (e.g., Duberley et al., 2006; Fernando & Cohen, 2011; Richardson, 2009), there was no evidence in this study to suggest that participants changed, and/or eradicated any of their perceived boundaries. Instead, all participants' accounts demonstrated that they maintained both the perceived constraining and perceived enabling boundaries; that is, participants allowed their perceived boundaries to take on a "routine orientation" and accept the social structures in place (Duberley et al., 2006, p. 1141). In their accounts, participants explained how they sought to live with their perceived career boundaries, sometimes by trying to minimize or detach themselves from their effects, trying to adapt their lives to the environment by finding alternatives, or trying to find ways to exit the UAE altogether. Based on this study's findings, it appears individuals engage in three key types of strategies to either manage or capitalize on their perceived constraining or enabling boundaries: living with boundaries; finding alternatives to boundaries; or exiting boundaries. As shown in Figure 2, participants' choice of strategy appears to be influenced not only by participants' perceptions of their career boundaries (i.e., constraining and/or enabling), but also by the different circumstances that gave rise to the ambivalence they were experiencing.

7.3.1. The connection between Perceived Boundaries and Strategies

As the findings in Chapter 6 suggest, participants appeared to be very aware of their own agency (or lack thereof) when attempting to manoeuvre their perceived boundaries. Prior research has suggested that individuals' perceived career agency is dependent on and enacted

within factors in their various contexts (e.g., Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; Dany et al. 2011; Tams & Arthur, 2010; Zikic et al., 2010). For example, Dany et al.'s (2011) study demonstrated that individual agency is “oriented and restrained by individual perception of environmental constraints [. . .] and opportunities” (p. 990). Further, as discussed in Chapter 2, an individual’s decision to confront a boundary may be linked with structures within the field, such as “rules of the game” (Iellatchitch et al. 2003, p. 728). In this manner, individuals envision what is attainable or not based on the structures within which they live; in other words, there are “rules” attached to dealing with certain career boundaries and individuals must learn these normative expectations and behaviours in order to work within them. The study’s findings suggest the way in which participants ambivalently manoeuvre around their landscape and adopt various strategies results from a negotiation between their perceived agency in relation to their perceived career boundaries and contexts⁴¹.

It is important to note there appears to be a recursive element to this relationship (depicted via the double-headed arrows in Figure 2); in other words, while the strategy an individual chooses to adopt may be based on his/her evaluation of whether he/she has enough agency to address a perceived boundary, this choice of strategy can have an influence on his/her perceptions of these boundaries itself. For example, as discussed in Chapter 4, the findings suggest that sometimes participants may be complicit in their own boundary creation and may choose to remain voluntarily bounded (e.g., Pang, 2001). As demonstrated in Chapter 6, participants appeared to be aware of a boundary of certain promotion scripts within their

⁴¹ As the findings of Chapter 4 demonstrated, career boundaries are fluid and dynamic and are specific to the individual experiencing them. Therefore, the link between perceived boundaries and strategies is not intended to be interpreted as a universal framework; instead it is based on their own individual perceptions of their career boundaries.

industry, but voluntarily remained in their current positions without opportunity for promotion by choosing not to engage in certain activities required for promotion. This finding builds on Pang's (2001) study which argued that sometimes individuals choose to remain voluntarily bounded. This notion of voluntary boundedness is important for this study since this concept suggests individuals may be just as responsible for their own career constraints and/or enablers as the forces within the contexts in which they are embedded. While participants may choose not to engage in informal promotion-related activities due to personal reasons, they do not try to get a promotion in another way, thus they are still complying with the career scripts that determine what is needed to succeed in their professional context. The idea of choice, then, is a constrained one, stemming from perceptions of how powerful the career scripts are. By doing nothing, participants reify the scripts. As New (1994) has argued, "the agents who are variously positioned in these systems draw on these rules and resources in order to act and in so acting, reproduce them" (p. 194). By accepting the social structures in place (Duberley et al., 2006), conforming to the subsequent boundary, being behaviourally submissive to it, individuals exhibit maintenance-like strategies, which, in turn, continue to maintain the perception of the boundary.

The idea that boundaries are social creations echoes Pringle and Mallon (2003) who have suggested that it is important to consider the "enduring 'reality' of constraints [or enablers]⁴² in people's lives while simultaneously recognizing that individuals interact with and, to some extent, enact their own social circumstances" (p. 849). Drawing on Barley's (1989) model, the findings of this study suggest SIEs perceive career boundaries as being constraining and enabling on their career experiences. Furthermore, this study also finds career boundaries are also created, reified, and sustained by SIEs themselves. This finding is significant in career research since it

⁴² While Pringle and Mallon (2003) focus on constraints, I added the word enablers to reflect the specific objectives of this study.

points to the role individuals play in both creating and re-creating the career boundaries, which they then perceive and act towards as being constraining and/or enabling.

7.3.2. The connection between Types of Ambivalence and Strategies

While the literature on modes of engagement (e.g., Duberley et al., 2006) offers a useful starting point for understanding career boundaries, it does not fully capture the uncertainty, doubt, and contradiction which seems to permeate participants' accounts of their careers. This study suggests ambivalence is evident in participants' career experiences and plays a significant role in influencing participants' boundary negotiation strategies (as discussed in Chapter 6 and depicted in Figure 2). The types of ambivalence are significant, particularly with respect to how they may confine a participant's choice of strategy in negotiating perceived career boundaries⁴³. For example, when discussing their experiences of a perceived racial hierarchy in the UAE, many participants engaged in a *minimizing* strategy. However, some participants also stated that they did not feel this boundary should be mentioned, thus perhaps actually signally the importance of it. This finding is consistent with Scurry et al.'s (2013) study on SIEs working in Qatar; Scurry et al. (2013) found that their participants did not seem to "problematize" the barriers they were faced with and oftentimes "seemed relatively unconcerned," perhaps because they "did not seem to consciously establish a link between restrictions that apply to their career as part of the wider structural and institutional system" (p. 23). This study's finding is important because it not only suggests that the UAE system and participants' perceptions of restrictions

⁴³ As the findings in Chapter 6 demonstrate, while participants may take on the same strategy, the type of ambivalence may be different. In other words, each type of ambivalence does not correspond neatly to a specific strategy; strategies are specific to the individual experiencing the ambivalence.

may actually be distinct, but also highlights whether or not participants have an awareness of their ambivalence (Campbell & van Wanrooy, 2013).

Another important finding surrounds the idea that while participants may have taken on the same strategy for a perceived enabling boundary as they would have for a perceived constraining career boundary, their experienced ambivalence may be based on and/or manifested quite differently. Connidis and McMullin (2002) have argued individuals “regularly attempt to reconcile ambivalence or risk living in a constant state of inaction. This is consistent with the view that all actors exercise agency in an attempt to exert control over their lives, even when constrained to varying degrees by social structure” (p. 563). This idea of attempting to reconcile ambivalence is reflected in the study’s findings (Chapter 6). However, it is important to note that the type of ambivalence (Figure 2) influenced the strategy participants would adopt in negotiating their perceived career boundaries. For instance, many participants appeared to be ambivalent about the risk (versus rewards) involved in tackling a certain perceived career boundary; as a result of their ambivalence, these participants chose to live with the boundary, conforming to it. Similarly, when discussing their desire to leave their organizations, many participants appeared to be ambivalent about what was desirable versus what was feasible. The ambivalence associated with this misalignment between what was desirable (i.e., working elsewhere) versus what was feasible (i.e., the presence of No Objection Certificates and the Kafala system) was alleviated when participants engaged in a *weighing up* strategy and carefully thought about the feasibility of withdrawing from one organizational context to join another.

Further, in the case of perceived constraining boundaries, participants’ acceptance of boundaries does not always occur voluntarily, but may occur as a result of their constrained choices. The choice between free and constrained options (Campbell & van Wanrooy, 2013; Sen,

1999) can cause conflict and ambivalence because while participants feel that in some instances they do have choices in deciding on how to negotiate their identified career boundary, this choice is ‘constrained’ by circumstances in their professional, organizational and national contexts. To this end, participants may not *intend* on maintaining their perceived constraining boundaries, but may maintain them through their actions, such as minimizing the boundaries, detaching themselves from them, or compromising with them. For instance, while the boundaryless career framework is rooted in the notion that mobility is a choice, in this study, participants’ intentions to exit (Chapter 6) may not necessarily be out of choice, but borne out of necessity (Loacker & Sliwa, 2015). As the findings suggest, simply wanting to exit one context or one point in time does not mean the individual has escaped all forms of career boundaries; rather he/she must consider the potential of being faced with a whole new set of boundaries in their new context(s). This is an important contribution as it highlights that career boundaries are not only connected, but are fluid, so the way participants negotiated these boundaries (via different strategies) is also not a permanent solution nor is it their only solution; rather is it temporary and connected with other strategies.

As Cohen et al. (2004) have put forward, exiting is oftentimes described as a means of “regaining a sense of oneself and creating a situation in which [a person] could operate with integrity” (p. 420). This idea is important for the model presented in this study because it demonstrates that capitalizing on an identified enabling boundary may be a way in which participants try to deal with their ambivalence in order to regain a sense of self. However, as Chapter 6 demonstrates, participants appeared to be ambivalent surrounding the risk versus reward of actually leaving their organization or the UAE. When faced with a set of constrained choices, this strategy of intending to exit may be a result of not being able to deal with current

perceived boundaries anymore. Further, it is important to highlight in contrast with prior studies (e.g., Duberley et al., 2006; Fernando & Cohen, 2011; Richardson, 2009), this study finds no evidence to suggest that participants expressed an intention to exit the national context. The way in which they managed their boundaries appears to have been done by thinking about the possibility of exiting as opposed to actually exiting⁴⁴.

It is also important to highlight the recursive nature of these types of ambivalence and strategies. As depicted via the bold double-headed arrow in Figure 2, while the different types of ambivalence may impact participants' decisions on the types of strategies they adopt, the experience of ambivalence is also being continually re-interpreted and re-shaped by participants when enacting their given strategies. While this study did not adopt a longitudinal research design, it is important to note that in some accounts participants did express how their strategies helped alleviate their ambivalence. For example, due to perceptions of injustice at the organizational level (e.g., not feeling appreciated) and national level (e.g., fear of being sent back home), some participants engaged in a *browning out* strategy (Lanier, 1979; Richardson, 2001). This strategy appears to be a way of exerting *some* form of agency and control given the unassailable nature of the UAE's labour laws (Richardson, 2009). Participants adopted a browning out strategy to live with their perceived boundaries, which helped participants alleviate some of the ambivalence they were experiencing. These types of ambivalence then, have the potential to shape, and are simultaneously shaped by, the strategies that participants adopt when negotiating their career boundaries.

⁴⁴ This idea of focusing on the future and considering possibilities was discussed in section 7.2.2.

7.4. CONNECTING THE EXPERIENCE OF SIE CAREERS TO OTHER FIELDS OF STUDY: AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

I take the perspective that data cannot always be “squeezed dry of all analytical insights” (Oliver, 2012, p. 413). Consequently, I believe that there is always the possibility to analyze existing data through other paradigmatic lenses. Further, this study responds to the calls to “rejuvenate” career research (Dany, 2014, p. 719) to take a more interdisciplinary approach to studying careers (e.g., Khapova & Arthur, 2011). The intention of this section is to propose areas of future research and open up new possibilities within the literature beyond the specific objectives of this study. In order to do so, I draw on other paradigms and streams of literature to demonstrate how this study’s findings can broaden our understanding of how SIEs experience and deal with career boundaries.

7.4.1. Examining career boundaries through a critical lens

The way in which boundaries have the power to create and maintain social inequalities and hierarchies was an important finding for this study, as was demonstrated in participants’ accounts surrounding perceptions of discrimination based on nationality and gender. Informed by boundary research (e.g., Lamont & Molnar, 2002), Heite (2013), in her study of “the boundary” and professionalization as boundary-work, argued that “boundaries have a great impact on the processes involved in constructing reality, on definitions and classifications, on social in(equality), the invention of hierarchies, subjectivation, the range of human action and movement” (p.2). Drawing on the work of Foucault (1995), Heite (2013) contends:

the boundary is one aspect of regimes of power: it prescribes social relations, it marks concepts of social order and dualisms of the normal and deviant, the accepted and the

unacceptable, the own and the other, the belonging and the not-belonging. These boundaries are objects of a panoptic surveillance that identifies everyone who does not meet the norm and who consequently has to be normalized. (p. 2)

Boundaries are then conceived as “expressions of power relations” (Heite, 2013, p. 2). When examined in this manner, boundaries, like Grey’s (1994) critical perspective on career scripts become a tool of self-discipline, a “project” to manage; in this way, negotiating career boundaries becomes a vehicle for the self to “become”. Just like how Grey (1994) argued that “discursive and non-discursive practices of ‘career’ should be treated as a contemporary project of self-management,” negotiating career boundaries can also be conceived as a process of self-management (p. 481). While Chapter 5 demonstrates that some participants capitalized on boundaries they perceived as enabling, it can also be argued that adhering to career scripts when developing one’s career is actually a form of “regulated freedom” (Mueller et al, 2011, p. 558). While examining boundaries explicitly as a process of power relations goes beyond the scope of this study, the findings from this research act as a platform for future research to explore how individuals navigate perceived boundaries through a critical lens, thus contributing to the current dialogue and integrating new ideas to career studies.

7.4.2. Broadening our understanding of SIEs via the ‘sociology of the stranger’ (Levine, 1977)

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there is still a range of “conceptual, theoretical and empirical challenges in the study of SIEs” (Doherty et al., 2013, p. 97). Further, several studies have demonstrated complexity and multidimensionality associated with SIEs and have suggested the literature needs a more encompassing label (e.g., Doherty, 2013; Doherty et al., 2013; Rodriguez

& Scurry, 2014; Scurry et al., 2013). As discussed in Chapter 1, the participants in this study occupied an in-between space of being migrant and SIE as many are “perpetual visitors” in the UAE (Nagy, 2006, p. 122). Since foreign workers live and work in the UAE for an extended period of time, “the ‘temporariness’ of [SIEs’] labor immigration into the UAE (and the GCC) can be questioned” (Edwards, 2011, p. 32). The findings of this study suggest SIEs cannot be fully understood as they are portrayed in the careers literature.

Levine’s (1977) paradigm for the ‘sociology of the stranger’ is as an excellent framework within which to locate and bring a new dimension to work on SIEs’ mobility, movement, and migration. This framework offers a typology of ‘stranger’ relationships which include the stranger’s response to his/her host community (i.e. are they visiting, residing or seeking permanent membership?), as well as the host’s response to the stranger. The host’s response to the stranger can be characterized as friendly or antagonistic and is likely to change, as is the stranger’s interest in the host community, in a fluid and dynamic way depending on the changing nature of the relationship between the host and the stranger, or between the host and a collectivity of types of stranger (e.g. expatriates, refugees). A host that is friendly towards strangers has a relationship with visitors (guests), residents (sojourners) and members (newcomers) that is likely to be positive. If the host’s response is antagonistic, visitors are viewed as intruders, residents as an inner enemy and, newcomers as marginal men/women (Levine, 1977). It is likely, however, that a host community will be friendly towards some strangers but antagonistic to others depending on the types of stranger and their reasons for being and continuing to be in a host environment. Levine (1977) suggests that from this typology an analytical framework can be developed with respect to three essential questions: 1) what are the characteristic properties of each of these types of stranger relationships? 2) what factors are

associated with the process by which persons enter into one or another of these types of relations? 3) what factors can affect the shift in stranger status? (see Appendix G for a detailed breakdown of each question).

This paradigm offers a framework that is general enough to enable an appreciation of the stranger(s)/host relationship in its many forms, but flexible enough to allow for the specificity of any particular form of stranger/host relationship to be understood and interpreted. Due to a perceived lack of belongingness towards the UAE (due to institutional restrictions highlighted in Chapter 4), participants may simply not be willing to ‘connect’ with other people in a place in which they feel that they do not belong. As stated by Wang and Kanungo (2004), “human beings have a fundamental need to belong, which motivates the establishment of significant interpersonal relationships and frequent contacts with other people” (p. 775). However, given institutional restrictions associated with not having citizenship (e.g., the right to vote), participants felt it was difficult for them to be a part of society in the UAE and, in other words, to fully belong. This assertion is reinforced by McKenna and deGama (2011) who use Levine’s (1977) sociological framework of the ‘stranger’ to examine the experiences of SIEs. They argue that depending on the perceived relationship with the host country, SIEs (i.e. ‘strangers’) may feel detachment, precariousness or belonging. While a discussion of Levine’s (1977) framework goes beyond the scope of this study, it is important to consider how participants’ willingness to interact with UAE citizens or other expatriates may be due, in part, to their feelings of belongingness towards the UAE. Their perceptions of constraining career boundaries may therefore stem from their lack of willingness to integrate themselves into the UAE culture, thus being complicit in the boundary they have identified. Levine’s (1977) framework provides an opportunity to open up a multi-paradigmatic space to examine not only the SIE, but also career

boundaries perceived by individuals within a specific context. Future research may consider using Levine (1977) as a framework to further our understanding of SIEs' career experiences by considering individual agency and contexts as relational and "mutually enacted through collaborative processes" (Tams & Arthur, 2010, p. 638).

7.5. PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The findings of this study offer some significant practical implications not only for international human resources, but also for individuals who plan on or are currently engaging in international work. Firstly, the findings point to an awareness of SIEs' perceived constraining career boundaries. This finding shows it is important for organizations to be aware of and try to alleviate and/or address the perceptions of boundaries by providing specific organizational support. For example, SIEs who identified language-barriers as being one career constraint could partake in Arabic language classes offered or subsidized by their organizations. Similarly, for SIEs who identified the lack of knowing whom as a barrier to their career development, organizations could offer networking opportunities to SIEs who are new to the organization and country as a way of helping them understand the local customs and to meet colleagues and friends (Collings et al., 2011).

Secondly, the various strategies adopted by participants should encourage organizations to consider how they may want to support SIEs in negotiating their perceived career boundaries. For example, when considering the participants in this study who considered detaching themselves and/or exiting as a way of negotiating the ambivalence associated with the UAE's labour laws, organizations could create programs to encourage SIEs to stay in a given host country. While organizations do not have control over the labour laws, they can help SIEs pursue

their individual career goals by matching SIEs with local mentors (informal or formal) to help them discuss their career issues and career options. Doing so may not only provide some connection with the host country, but may encourage SIEs to stay in their current organizations (Carraher et al., 2008). For those who still have a strong desire to leave, organizations may consider the wider use of secondment programs, which will satisfy an SIE's desire to leave without losing the SIE as an employee. Similarly, organizations could find ways to address SIEs who use the strategy of 'browning out' (Lanier, 1979; Richardson, 2001) to navigate perceived career boundaries. Participants who adopted this strategy started to under-perform and put in less effort due to perceptions of organizational and national injustice. Browning out, like leaving an international assignment prematurely early, is very costly to organizations. To prevent such costly losses, organizations could implement formal support systems to manage the psychological contract between the organization and the SIE. SIEs may avoid browning out by having clear and honest conversations about what is expected of them and how the organization may be able to support them in meeting these expectations, as well as conversations about what the SIE is expecting from the organization from a personal and professional perspective. This conversation also could be supplemented with a statement clearly articulating both parties' expectations (Collings et al., 2011).

As this study focused on the context(s) in which SIEs are situated, it is important to note that initiatives should be unique to each organization. It is important for organizations to remember that the best approach is not "one-size-fits-all," but rather is "one-size-fits-one." Instead of exporting initiatives from other organizations, each organization needs to consider and develop programs specific to their organizational needs and the individuals in their organization.

7.6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Like Kanuha (2000), I was “drawn to study ‘my own kind’” (p. 441). My own experience growing up in the Middle East as an expatriate from a non-Western country, coupled with my research interest in SIE literature, led me to believe that professional expatriates from non-Western countries are a rich topic for sustained research study. I structured this study based on my experience with and interest in this topic. As a result, my closeness to the study’s participants may be considered a limitation to this study as I may have exhibited bias towards certain accounts. As discussed in Chapter 3, it was important for me to maintain “empathic neutrality” (Patton, 2002, p. 49) and be reflexive during the research process. Doing so added to the richness of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

It is important to note that this study does not compare SIEs with locals and as such it is difficult to ascertain if ambivalence is experienced only when enacting an international career or careers in general. This gap in my study is an important area for future research given the lack of work currently done on ambivalence and careers in general. In addition, even though I considered the importance of time in shaping participants’ perceptions of their boundaries and explaining how they coped with or capitalized on these boundaries, I did not interview participants at different points in time. Instead, my analysis of the role of time is based on participants’ own accounts whereby they compared different time-points. This approach is similar to that of other researchers (e.g., Costas & Grey, 2014; Loacker & Sliwa, 2015) who also did not study individuals’ experiences at different points in time and it provides insight on the influence of temporality based on the way in which individuals constructed their career stories.

Future researchers may wish to conduct longitudinal studies to examine how SIEs perceptions of career boundaries and the ways of dealing with them change and evolve not only over time but also across different contexts.

Further, as mentioned in Chapter 3, I believe in the need to be sincere throughout the research process (e.g., Tracy, 2010). While I discussed my shortcomings related to the methods in Chapter 3, it is important to highlight here a limitation that arose during the write-up of the study. As discussed, I used Kaulisch and Enders (2005) as a framework to understand how participants perceived boundaries in their national, organizational, and professional contexts. When presenting the findings, I initially organized my data based on these three broad categories. However, as Wegar (1992) asked, was I really “gaining clarity or imposing order?” (p. 91). Presenting the findings initially in this manner in an attempt to gain some sense of order resulted in a dilution of the complexity in the data. I soon realised that rather than trying to fit my findings neatly into a box, I had to engage in “box-breaking research” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2014, p. 967) and “bring chaos back in” (Wegar, 1992, p. 91) to the presentation of findings. Like the research process, writing-up qualitative research is also an iterative process which often requires moving back-and-forth between writing, analysis, and feedback. Limitations notwithstanding, the main value of this study is that in addition to the empirical and theoretical contributions already discussed, the findings offer the potential to contribute in many different ways to the extant literature on careers generally and global careers specifically beyond the data presented here.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

| PARTICIPANTS (N=30) | | | | | |
|---|----|---------------------------------------|----|-------------------------|----|
| | n | | n | | n |
| <u>Gender</u> | | <u>Accounting Designation</u> | | <u>Current location</u> | |
| Female | 8 | CA | 14 | Dubai | 23 |
| Male | 22 | CPA | 1 | Sharjah | 4 |
| | | ACCA | 15 | Abu Dhabi | 3 |
| <u>Nationality</u> | | <u>Experience in the field</u> | | <u>Partner</u> | |
| Indian | 17 | 0-5 years | 8 | Yes | 22 |
| Pakistani | 12 | 6-10 years | 10 | No | 8 |
| Sri Lankan | 1 | 11-15 years | 2 | | |
| Dual nationality ⁴⁵ | 3 | 16-20 years | 2 | <u>Children</u> | |
| | | 21-25 years | 0 | Yes | 17 |
| <u>Type of Organization</u> | | 25+ years | 4 | No | 13 |
| Public Accounting | 17 | Unspecified | 4 | | |
| Industry | 13 | <u>Current Job Title⁴⁷</u> | | <u>Age</u> | |
| | | <i>Public Accounting</i> | | 20-25 | 5 |
| <u>Length of time in the UAE</u> | | Partner | 1 | 26-30 | 10 |
| 0-5 years | 13 | Manager | 5 | 31-35 | 8 |
| 6-10 years | 10 | Assistant Manager | 2 | 36-40 | 1 |
| 11-15 years | 2 | Audit Supervisor | 1 | 41-45 | 0 |
| 16-20 years | 2 | Senior Associate/Auditor | 7 | 46-50 | 2 |
| 20+ years | 3 | <i>Industry</i> | | 51-55 | 3 |
| | | CFO | 1 | 55+ | 1 |
| <u>Worked in other countries⁴⁶</u> | | Country Head Rep | 1 | | |
| Yes | 7 | Director of Finance | 1 | | |
| No | 23 | Finance Manager | 2 | | |
| | | Financial Analyst | 1 | | |
| | | Head of Financial Reporting | 1 | | |
| | | Internal Audit Manager | 2 | | |
| | | Assistant Relations | 1 | | |
| | | Relationship Manager | 1 | | |
| | | Reporting & Consolidation Analyst | 1 | | |
| | | Unspecified | 2 | | |

⁴⁵ Participants with dual nationality include those who are American/Pakistani, British/Indian, and Canadian/Pakistani.

⁴⁶ Countries include Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, India, Egypt, Venezuela, Jamaica, Bahrain.

⁴⁷ Job titles among public accounting firms tend to be standardized. However, in industry firms, these titles vary depending on the organization.

APPENDIX B:

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Invitation to Take Part in a Study of Non-Western Accounting Professionals in the UAE

I am a PhD student carrying out a study on non-Western expatriate accounting professionals in the United Arab Emirates. The aim of the study is to examine their experiences of expatriation, focusing specifically on why they decided to expatriate and the implications of their doing so for their careers, and professional development. In other words, what is it like to be a non-Western expatriate accounting professional in the UAE?

Participation in this study involves being interviewed about your experiences of expatriation. I am especially interested in finding out why you decided to move to the UAE, your experience of expatriation more generally and how you evaluate that experience. So, for example, you may wish to think about the impact coming to the UAE has had on your professional development, standard of living and relationships with other people in your life such as family and friends etc. In addition to these themes, if you have other ideas you would like to raise I would welcome any suggestions about what other issues are important to expatriate accounting professionals in the UAE.

Regarding the information collected in the study, all information given will be kept strictly confidential. No interviewees will be identifiable and all names and places will be changed.

If you are a non-Western accounting professional, and hold a professional designation in the field of accounting (e.g. CA, CMA, CPA, ACCA) and are currently living in the UAE, I would very much like to speak with you. Alternatively, if you would like further information about the research, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Many thanks

APPENDIX C:

INFORMATION SHEET

A STUDY OF THE CAREERS OF NON-WESTERN PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

I would like to invite you to participate in this study of non-Western expatriate accounting professionals living in the UAE. The study is being carried out as part of the requirements for completion of my degree Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Human Resource Management at York University, Canada. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you do decide to participate I thank you for your interest and co-operation. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and I thank you for considering the request.

Since the development of its oil sector as its primary source of income, the Gulf Cooperation Council⁴⁸ (GCC) has experienced an influx of foreign workers to facilitate economic development. Nearly 85% of the UAE's population is made up of foreign workers, with the majority of these individuals having moved from Arab and Asian countries. Although Western expatriates have received a great deal of attention, there is very little research on professional expatriates from non-Western expatriates. By focusing on expatriate accountants from non-Western countries, this study seeks to enrich our understanding of the international career of such professionals, specifically in UAE.

I would like to interview non-Western professional accountants in the United Arab Emirates. I am especially interested to find out about their professional experiences. In particular, I would like to find out why someone chooses to move to the UAE and their experience of making such a move – particularly with respect to career development and how they feel about living in the UAE more generally. Although I will make reference to certain themes during the interview, I welcome suggestions for other themes. The interview will be an informal and informative conversation during which I would like interviewees to feel comfortable and relaxed.

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will typically last about forty-five minutes (but could be longer or shorter at your discretion). The interview will be tape-recorded, with your permission. If you prefer not to be recorded however, I can easily take notes. It will take place in a location of your choosing at a time convenient to yourself. The interview will take the form of an open-ended discussion about your experiences of expatriation with a particular focus on issues that have been especially important to you. You are assured that you need only give information that you feel comfortable with and which you feel is relevant to the aims of the research, as you perceive them.

⁴⁸ GCC countries include: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman.

The interview will involve an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s). In addition, you may withdraw from the interview at any stage without disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

Results from this study will be used to expand our understanding of expatriate professional accountants. The data may be published but any personal data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant. Only I will know the personal data you disclose. Your confidentiality is assured.

Once the study is complete, you are most welcome to request a copy of the results should you wish. You are also free to request a copy of the transcript of the interview and to correct any personal information in it.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only I and my PhD committee will have access to it. At the end of the study any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the host university's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

If you have any questions about the research, either now or in the future, please contact myself.

Many Thanks

APPENDIX D:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A STUDY OF THE CAREERS OF NON-WESTERN PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. The data audiotapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.
4. This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops.
5. Career, national and cultural issues are some of the issues which I will be encouraged to discuss during the interview. In particular I will be asked to think about the extent to which they have affected my experience of expatriation and vice versa.
6. In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I am fully aware of my right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that I may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to myself of any kind. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data will destroyed, immediately, circumstances permitting, or as soon as possible thereafter.
7. The results of the project may be published but my anonymity will be preserved.
8. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. Should you have any questions about your rights or the ethics review process, please contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor of the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone: 416-736-5914, Email: ore@yorku.ca.

I _____, consent to participate in this study conducted by Nadia deGama. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

.....
(Signature of Participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Signature of Researcher)

.....
(Date)

APPENDIX E:
INTERVIEW AGENDA

Research questions:

1. How do SIE accountants from the Asian subcontinent perceive and experience boundaries in the context of their career?
2. How do they identify these boundaries as being constraining and/or enabling forces on their career experiences?
3. How do they cope with their identified career boundaries while working in the UAE?

| INTERVIEW QUESTIONS |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you move to the UAE? • How come you decided to work as an accountant in the UAE? • Have you worked as an accountant in other countries? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's it like being an expat accountant in the UAE? <p><i>Probing questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are positive/negative features of this experience? • What have you particularly enjoyed/disliked? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's it like working in the UAE? <p><i>Probing questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any frustrations or difficulties working here? • What about any positive aspects of working in the UAE? • Has working in the UAE impacted your career in any way? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe the culture in the UAE? <p><i>Probing questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the things you mentioned influence your career in any way? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's it like working in your current organization? <p><i>Probing questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there anything you particularly like about working there? • Have you had any promotions or raises? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's it like working with other expatriates in your company? • Do you work with any locals? • What are those interactions like? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's it like working in the professional accounting field? <p><i>Probing questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me a little about your role. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking back, do you think moving to the UAE has been a good thing? Why/why not? • (If why not): Do you feel anything got in the way? (Explain why) <p><i>Probing questions:</i></p> |

| |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think moving to the UAE has benefited you? • How do you think it has impacted you? • What are the positive and negative aspects of working in the UAE as an accountant? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel there has been anyone who has influenced your career or work when in the UAE? <p><i>Probing questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are they? (Another expat? Local?) • Why do you feel they have influenced you? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beyond certain people, do you think there has been anything else that may have influenced your career in the UAE? <p><i>Probing questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What about any government regulations? • What about any employment laws or practices? • What about the national culture? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any plans for the future? (Explain what they are; explain why) • Do you plan on staying in the UAE? • Do you have any desire to leave? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has there been anything you've learned while working in the UAE? <p><i>Probing questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there any "take-away" from this experience? • Is there anything you would change during your time in the UAE? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you recommend working in the UAE to anyone else? <p><i>Probing questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you feel this way? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you consider yourself a foreigner in the UAE? Why do you feel this way? • Has anyone or anything influenced the way you feel? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you ever feel lonely in the UAE? • Do you feel you belong in this country? • If you had to tell someone a story of your career so far in the UAE, what would you say? • If there was any metaphor you could use to describe your working experience so far in the UAE, what would it be? |

APPENDIX F

STRATEGIES IN NEGOTIATING PERCEIVED CAREER BOUNDARIES

| | Strategies | Exemplar quote |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Living with the boundary | a) Minimizing | <i>So it's not been a mega issue in terms of living in this place and you're not a citizen. It's just that we live life (Philip).</i> |
| | b) Compromising | <i>There are so many compromises you have to make as a lady... So I've just- I've just given up- I've just given up...But I'm happy....you just have to say, okay fine - if I get a job which is- doesn't require much more time and it doesn't require that much intense...updates and developments that you need to do with your career (Natalia).</i> |
| | c) Detaching | <i>I just go with an expat. I consider myself an expat and nothing else as I don't know where I belong (Rashmi).</i> |
| | d) Weighing up the pros and cons | <i>In India...it's a struggle there in terms of water electricity and travelling... whereas here you normally take it for granted...so you got to choose between living in free India, or living in a bounded place like Dubai (Vikesh).</i> |
| | e) Explaining | <i>Very broadly an Indian or a Pakistani was generally a labourer. A Filipino was either generally a maid or a shop assistant, a white person was usually the manager and an Emirati was usually the owner. And the Arab national was the Emirati's right hand guy, or the white guy's translator to help him get through the day. That's broadly what this society has experienced, and it's kind of stereotypical but that's what it has evolved from (Aman).</i> |
| Finding alternatives ⁴⁹ | a) Learning | <i>I feel it is really up to me on how I would like it to impact my career, so on a daily basis I am trying to learn from things, and I am upgrading my skills, and that is the only impact it can have – regardless of where I am working (Saamia)</i> |
| | b) Browning out | <i>...but since we know that we'll always, always... and even after living here for 35 years of whatever, we will be sent back, then why bother (Fahad)</i> |
| | c) Networking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To raise pecking order | <i>... it's very simple - we have to do something out of the office to raise your pecking order.... I think a lot of people make that effort here because they know that's the way you need to move and you need to get your work done otherwise you can be left behind (Vikesh).</i> |
| | ○ To further one's career | <i>So if I had to move back, Firm D would also always take me – because I had developed that kind of reputation with my seniors and with people in the organization (Haaris).</i> |

⁴⁹ As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, the only strategy which participants seemed to adopt when managing their perceived enabling boundaries was Finding Alternatives. The remainder of the strategies were focused on how they managed their perceived constraining boundaries, perhaps signaling the salience of boundaries being a constraint versus an enabler for them in the UAE context.

| | | |
|---------|---|--|
| | d) Utilizing knowledge of career scripts | <i>I work with (Company B) – one of the Big 4 international auditing firms. Company B's Professional Development Programme (PDP) is designed to help fresh graduates mould into young business professionals. The programme teaches individuals the basics of auditing and helps them grow in the field year on year. This program has really helped me progress in my firm (Urmila).</i> |
| Exiting | a) Intending to leave the UAE b) Intending to leave current employer/ organization | <i>We have seen that Dubai is not that stable – you have a job and you aren't guaranteed to stay for 10 years – you must always think of alternatives (Ifraz). And then because I had no help from my in-laws I had to again leave that job for 1 year because I—nobody could take care of my baby and I didn't want any caretaker to take care of her.... then I got into Bank A...And Bank A was very good (Natalia)</i> |

APPENDIX G

PARADIGM FOR THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE STRANGER

I. Characteristics of Each Type of Stranger

(Guest, Intruder, Sojourner, Inner Enemy, Newcomer, Marginal Man)

- A. Individual Strangers
 - 1. Personal characteristics (detachment, insecurity, etc.)
 - 2. Typical relations with host (used as confidants, king's men etc.)
- B. Stranger Collectivities
 - 1. Internal characteristics (high levels of participation in voluntary associations etc.)
 - 2. Typical relations with hosts (residentially segregated, used as scapegoats etc.)

II. Factors Affecting Assumption of Each Type of Stranger Status

- A. Factors affecting aspirations of stranger
 - 1. Reasons for leaving home (alienation, boredom, calling, disaster, economic hardship, political oppression, etc.)
 - 2. Conditions of entrance into host group (amount of prestige, moveable resources, special skills etc.)
- B. Factors affecting response of host
 - 1. Extent of stranger-host similarity (ethnicity, language, race, region, religion, value orientations etc.)
 - 2. Existence of special cultural categories and rituals for dealing with strangers
 - 3. Criteria for group of societal membership (classificatory kinship, religion, citizenship, professional certification etc.)
 - 4. Conditions of local community (age, size, homogeneity, degree of isolation etc.)

III. Factors Affecting Shifts in Stranger Status

- A. Factors affecting orientations of strangers
 - 1. Changing conditions at home
 - 2. Changes in stranger's control of resources in host community
- B. Factors affecting response of host
 - 1. Changes in criteria of group membership (from tribal affiliation to national citizenship)
 - 2. Changes in local community conditions (increasing unemployment, political unrest etc.)

Note. Adapted from "Simmel at a distance: On the history and systematics of the sociology of the stranger" by D. N. Levine, 1977, *Sociological Focus*, 10, 15-29.