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# DISCONTINUOUS LIVES:

# LISTENING TO THE STORIES OF SOUTH AFRICAN DIPLOMATIC FAMILIES IN THE THIRD WORLD

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree PhD in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria,

PRETORIA

Promoter

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I also dedicate it to my children: Tonya, Richard, Neil and Lisa who grew up in a series of discontinuous contexts. They are four individualistic and well adjusted young adults today.

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# Summary

Diplomats spend four years at a time abroad in South Africa's foreign missions, and after a home posting to Pretoria, typically lasting two years, they leave again. Children attend international schools. Thus diplomatic families have to adjust to a lifestyle of change and discontinuity, foreign cultures and unknown environments. The extent of this adjustment seems underrated and misunderstood.

Since 1994 the number of missions abroad has doubled and most of the new missions are in the third world, hence the focus on hardship postings. In this narrative research, interviews were conducted with diplomatic families in several hardship posts. The aim was to gain a better understanding of the process of adjustment based on first hand information.

Adjustment is described as a complex unfolding narrative with regressive as well as progressive story lines. The first stage lasting up to six months is seen as regressive, since the person is further removed from his goal of adjustment than at arrival. The rest of the stay is largely progressive if adjustment is seen as "being settled in a familiar routine". Regressive elements refer to environmental restrictions.

Findings include a description of an ideal couple for the foreign service; a need for effective preparation for a posting is confirmed; a changed relationship between Head Office and an official when abroad; diffuse identity among adolescents who spend formative years abroad, resulting in poorly understood adjustment problems on reentry; importance of attending to the soft issues of relocation instead of focusing on financial compensation.

Key words: Foreign affairs; adjustment; hardship missions; international relocation; eclecticism; modernism; post-modernism; accompanying spouse;

Opsomming

Suid Afrikaanse diplomate bring vier jaar op 'n slag deur in buitelandse missies, gevolg deur 'n periode van sowat twee jaar op hoofkantoor voordat hul weer uitgeplaas word. Kinders woon internasionale skole by.
Diplomaat gesinne moet dus kan aanpas by 'n lewe van verandering en diskontinuiteit, vreemde kulture en onbekende omgewings. Die omvang van die aanpassings blyk onderskat te word.

Sedert 1994 het die aantal buitelandse missies haas verdubbel en meestal in die derde wêreld, vandaar die fokus op ontberingsmissies. In hierdie narratiewe navorsingsmodel, is onderhoude gevoer met gesinne in verskeie ontberingsmissies. Die doel was om 'n beter begrip te bereik van die proses van aanpassing gebaseer of persoonlike inligting.

Aanpassing word dan beskryf as 'n komplekse ontplooiende narratief met beide progressiewe sowel as regressiewe storielyne. Die eerste fase, wat tot ses maande kan duur, word gesien as regressief omdat die persoon verder van sy doelwit van aanpassing is gedurende die fase. Die narratief oor die res van die verblyf is meer progressief van aard as aanpassing gesien word as "gevestig met 'n roetine". Regressiewe storielyne verwys na die beperkende effek van die omgewing.

Bevindinge sluit 'n beskrywing in van die ideale egpaar vir die buitelandse diens; die behoefte aan effeltiewe voorbereiding word bevestig; diffuse identiteit word gesien by adolessente wat vormingsjare oorsee deurbring. Dit kan lei tot aanpassingsproblematiek by die terugkeer wat nie goed verstaan

word nie; 'n fokus op die psigologiese aspekte van aanpassing is nodig aangesien alleenlik finansiele kompensering nie wesentlike probleme aanspreek nie.

Sleutelterme: Buitelandse Sake; ontberingsmissies; aanpassing; oorsese verhuising; eklektisisme; narratiewe navorsing, modernisme; postmodernisme; accompanying spouse; stres.

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ADDENDA

Addendum A A letter from the department of Foreign Affairs in which permission is granted to visit missions abroad in order to undertake this study.
Addendum B List of countries visited.
Addendum C A copy of the consent form that was signed by each participant prior to an interview.

Transcribed material:

A bound copy consisting of five fully transcribed interviews is available from the Department of Psychology, University of Pretoria.