CHAPTER FOUR

A STORY ABOUT NARRATIVE RESEARCH:
METHODOLOGY AND METHOD.

4.1   Introduction - storied lives

Narrative research represents a break with the positivistic mould of modernist research in its naturalistic, ethnographic, phenomenological and subjective approach. (Polkinghorne, 1988). Relativism, rather than absolute truths, is at the core of this qualitative method. Furthermore, this method recognizes the existence of more than one reality, and /or truth, in line with social constructionist thinking.

Qualitative research methods do not presume to supersede the findings of quantitative research but can be seen as a complementary approach in the pursuit of a holistic view. This is an important point as the literature review in this study is largely based on findings from quantitative research. What remains unclear at this point is the way to integrate the findings from two different paradigms.

Not following a recipe-like approach, as narrative research does, has the advantage of not setting out "to prove" prior hypotheses as in traditional research and implies being more open to what this narrative conveyed. The disadvantage is that of having a mass of information that is often difficult to organise in the absence of set questions or hypotheses. Josselson (1993) acknowledges the considerable "breadth" of material that is generated in narrative research and notes that a narrative researcher has to struggle with the question of "how much one needs to know about someone else to feel one can understand something about them" (p xi). A further question concerns finding a way for a theoretical frame that manages to compact the

data whilst honouring complexity.

An additional complication concerns the choice of focus on form versus content. Lieblich (1998) believes that a dichotomous distinction is not really feasible. A content analysis cannot reach a meaningful conclusion if it disregards the form of the narrative or does not seek an understanding of the person's story as a whole.

In spite of these difficulties, Lieblich and Josselson, (1994) describe listening to the life stories of people as a new and powerful way to study people and to do psychological research. It is a way that is especially sensitive to the unique characteristics of human existence (Polkinghorne, 1988). But narrative is "subtle, complex and difficult to interpret" (Riessman, 1993). The multifaceted, evasive nature of truth contributes to the problem of interpretation. To further complicate interpretation, is the notion that reality and identity are constructions that take place on several levels, within a certain context and in a certain language.

Lieblich and Josselson (1994) are guided by the idea that there is always a core of consensus in terms of the number of facts, traits and processes about which different subjective accounts agree. This is an indication that the world is not entirely chaotic and means that we can, in fact, make some sense of it.

The common goal of social research is to create "novel observational experience from which new views about the social world can emerge" (Polkinghorne, 1988). The aim of narrative research is to come as close as possible to the meaning of subjective experience or as Riessman (1993) puts it: "what life means at the moment of telling" (p.52). This is in line with the aim of this thesis which seeks to explore the meaning given to the adjustment experience in a developing world context. Using narrative, we as social scientists, return to "studying people rather than variables" (Josselson, 1993). Insight follows on informal, exploratory, qualitative research (Polkinghorne,

1988).

In the final analysis, people live out the events and affairs of their lives in a storied way. We make sense of experience by casting it in narrative (Bruner, 1990). We create plots from fragments of disordered experience and give reality a unity. We do this by moving away from nature and into the "intensely human realm of value" (Riessman, 1993).

It is not possible to separate living a life from telling or performing a story (Ochberg, 1994). In social science, this idea of life as storied in terms of the forces that shape human behaviour, is the core idea in the evolving field of narrative study. There are many approaches to the work of making sense of narrative material (Josselson, 1993) and few methodological resources available for narrative work within the social science research tradition.

Storytelling becomes the focus of research and the story itself is the object of investigation. The story metaphor implies that we "create order and construct texts in particular contexts" (Riessman, 1993).

To this end, a discursive framework of analysis has been proposed. Discourse includes conversation, meanings, narratives, accounts and anecdotes (Sampson, 1993). In practice, therapists work with narrative knowledge. Our concern is with the stories people tell and we use everyday stories to explain our own and others' actions (Polkinghorne, 1988).

4.2   Narrative - a research model

Taking the above into account, the question can be raised how narrative can be implemented as a scientific research model. From the previous section it can be seen that scientific narrative research has a "new" meaning, that is:

1)   aims to study people by listening;

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2)   the act of listening implies sensitivity to the unique characteristics of human existence;

3)   is guided by a core of consensus regarding facts, traits, and processes about which different subjective accounts agree;

4)   aims towards novel observational experience, and

5)   creates new views about man's social world.

How will the researcher now go about research?

Riessman (1993) proposes the following procedure, which forms part of a complex process, to act as a guide for the narrative researcher. She prescribes these steps to allow for the creation of order and for the construction of texts in particular contexts. The reason is, I believe, to prevent narrative research becoming vague and chaotic in its description and interpretation which can easily be the case.

Riessman (1993) argues that since we do not have direct access to the experience of another, representation remains ambiguous at best. Furthermore neutrality and objectivity cannot be expected when representing another to the world.

Even the current feminist attempt to give voice to the marginalised, is theoretically not possible. At best we can hear voices that we record and interpret (Riessman,1993). It is therefore not possible to avoid representation of others' experience. In the process decisions are made and approximate representations occur at various points of the research process.

Riessman (1993) describes five levels of representation in narrative research. These levels are not absolute but have porous boundaries:

•   Attending to experience

•   Telling about experience

- Transcribing experience
- Analyzing experience
- Reading experience

In the following section these research procedures are defined and explained.

4.3. Riessman's research procedures

4.3.1 Attending to experience

Attending to experience presupposes an awareness of phenomena. At the thinking stage certain phenomena are made meaningful by being selected for consideration (Riessman, 1993). Reality is actively constructed to oneself by thinking.

This implies that the first step proper in a research process is connected to an awareness, on behalf of the researcher, that precedes thinking about phenomena. A certain preoccupation with observations is implied. These thoughts are translated into ideas and questions about the phenomena or situation. In turn these ideas shape the research question. Thus the researcher shapes and constructs the research according to her perception of reality.

This means that the researcher needs to be sensitive in her observations and interactions in order to consider meaningful phenomena for the construction of novel ideas and in the creation of new views.

4.3.2 Telling about the experience

Once an awareness of a constructed reality has taken shape, a next stage is entered in which this awareness is translated into words and put forward as a story. The researcher formulates her awareness and sets the scene for others to formulate their own stories around the identified field of study.

The telling about an experience, becomes the performance of a personal narrative.

> " Events are re-presented, already ordered in a sense, to these listeners in a conversation, with all the opportunities and constraints the form of discourse entails" (Riessman, p.9, 1993).

A telling has certain characteristics:

- The description of an experience creates setting, characters, an unfolding plot, and an attempt at coherence.

- The reaction of the listener contributes to the creation of a joint narrative. In this way research becomes a reciprocal interactive process between person and reality, so each may serve as both subject and object.

- Time is collapsed as memory takes over to relate an experience as if one is reliving it for the other in the telling.

- In the telling, there is an inevitable gap between the experience as it was lived and any communication about it. This is because words cannot be the same as the ideas of the first level of representation. But without words, the experience would not exist. Finding meaning in experience and then expressing this meaning in words, enables the community to think about experience instead of merely living it. (Merleau-Ponty, in Polkinghorne, 1988). However, there is no authority invested with the meaning of life nor is there a meaning to life awaiting discovery. We ourselves create the meaning to our lives (Polkinghorne, 1988).

- Meaning shifts as a function of the process of interaction in significant ways. For instance, the teller's narrative is a self-representation in which she seeks to persuade herself and others

that she is a good person. A person's perception of the audience will influence the telling. Thus the telling might have been presented differently to a different audience.

4.3.3 Transcribing experience

This is the stage in the research process when a way needs to be found to record a conversation.

A taped recording provides almost complete recall of conversation as it includes pauses, inflections, emphases, unfinished sentences, fluency, tone of voice, wit and so forth. Even so, these aspects are hard, if not impossible, to capture in the written word. Thus transcribing narrative, like narrative itself, is also incomplete, partial and selective (Riessman, 1993).

Transforming spoken language into a written text, is taken seriously as we no longer assume the transparency of language (Riessman, 1993). Each inclusion as well as exclusion; even the arrangement and display of the text, have implications for how the reader will understand the narrative. Omissions provide the reader with an opportunity to supply his own interpretations.

The investigator needs to decide how much detail to put into the text. Here I found that I was guided by my sense of inclusiveness and holism, a need to include as much as possible to provide a full spectrum of experience. I transcribed each interview fully and included seemingly irrelevant bits such as digressions and even the parts that were "off the record".

The form of the transcript reflects the recorder's views and values. Thus the act of transcription is an interpretive practice and the decisions that are involved are theory based. The way in which a text is presented, provides a basis for arguments. Furthermore, different transcription conventions result in different interpretations and ideological possibilities. This implies that meaning can be

constituted in different ways with the possibility of alternative transcriptions of the same stretch of talk (Riessman, 1993; Lieblich, Tuval & Zilber., 1998).

4.3.4 Analyzing experience

At the fourth level an investigator analyses the transcripted text or typically a number of texts. This started with an immersion in the texts which were read and reread. In truth, analysis started with listening and continued through the transcription process and was guided by each decision about inclusions versus exclusions.

"The challenge is to identify similarities across the moments into an aggregate, a summation. An investigator sits with pages of tape recorded stories, snips away at the flow of talk to make it fit between the covers of a book, and tries to create sense and dramatic tension. There are decisions about form, ordering, style of representation, and how the fragments of lives that have been given in interviews will be housed. The anticipated response to the work inevitably shapes what gets included and excluded" (Riesmann, 1993, p.2).

The narrative analyst seeks to understand how interviewees "impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives" (Riessman, 1993, p.2).

"This is accomplished by gathering examples of expressions of individuals and groups through self-reflection, interviews, and collections of artifacts; and by drawing conclusions from these data by using systematic principles of linguistic analysis and hermeneutic techniques" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p 10).

In the end, the analyst creates a metastory about what happened by telling what the interview narratives signify; editing and reshaping what was told; and turning

it into a hybrid story, a 'false document'" (Riessman, 1993, p.13).

Language is the vehicle of analysis. Through language plots are uncovered and meanings understood. A plot is an expression of meaning. Narrative explains by clarifying the significance of events that have happened on the basis of the outcome that ensued (Polkinghorne, 1988). This turns the researcher into a kind of detective who is interested in unravelling the meaning of events to a person through the plots described and the language that is used. Narrative analysis is the configuring of past events into meaningful themes (Polkinghorne, 1988).

4.3.5 Reading experience

Finally a reader is presented with a new written account and brings his own meaning to bear. Bruner (1986) speaks of collaboration that takes place between reader and text as the reader brings a new dimension to the work:

- A text has many voices, as it is open to many readings and many constructions.
- Moreover for the same reader, the same work can provoke different readings in different historical or political contexts (Riessman, 1993).

Riessman concludes her analysis of interpretation by saying that there can be no master narrative as all texts stand on moving ground. All findings are "meaningful to a specific interpretive community in limiting historical communities" (Clifford, 1988 cited in Riessman 1993). Findings are thus always relative and do not assume to represent a final nor incontrovertible truth.

4.4   Validation of narrative.

Riessman discussed the issue of validation of findings under the headings of persuasiveness, coherence and pragmatic use. I will use the same headings to present both her ideas and those of other authors. Because of the difference

between modern and postmodern paradigms, it is not possible to apply traditional criteria such as validity, objectivity and reliability to narrative research. For example, different narrative researchers will arrive at different descriptions. This is not an illustration of low interrater validity but of the richness of the material and the belief that reality can be interpreted in a variety of ways (Lieblich et al., 1998).

As there is limited consensus at present about a specific set of criteria for validation, my choice of criteria is arbitrary.

4.4.1 Validation

According to Josselson (1993), a good deal of thought on the part of researchers, and lessons learnt from the traditional case studies of clinical psychology, have contributed to the consideration of good narrative.

An evaluation should aim to be comprehensible, correct and complete as well as credible to partisans on all sides (Cronbach, in Mischler, 1986). Validation is not the same as verification - which is an impossibility since the past is always a selective reconstruction - but refers to the value of a narrative. This is difficult to determine as realist notions are not relevant for narrative analysis and narrative as a literary craft cannot be enough in terms of social science (Riessman, 1993). Lieblich et al. (1998) describe narrative analysis as a skill that can be "academically learnt, refined and improved" (p.170).

Other writers such as Josselson (1993) and Lieblich et al (1998) insist on the criterion of <u>aesthetic appeal</u> of presentation and of its explication, for good narrative. This is where narrative leaves the scientific arena and enters the domain of art.

> "Good narrative analysis makes sense in intuitive, holistic ways. The knowing in such work includes but transcends the rational" (Josselson, pxii, 1993).

When the pieces fit together to take on an "aesthetic finality" and we decide that a certain experience has been portrayed to our satisfaction, we can speak of narrative truth (Mischler, 1986). A well constructed story has a kind of narrative truth that is real, immediate and believable (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Perhaps the reader should the guided by his or her own sense of whether a truth is being revealed or not.

However a work's validity is based on its trustworthiness rather than truth. Looking at the issue of validity in this way, moves the process into the social world and out of the realist world of assumed objective truth (Riessman, 1993; Lieblich et al., 1998).

But knowing must be linked to a theoretical context or previous knowledge as story cannot stand alone. Moving to a conceptual level requires "insight and parsimony" and a "different level of interpretation allowing us to see things or organize data or to organize from this story or other stories to other people or other aspects of experience. Concepts, usefully applied, would create a bridge to other life experiences" (Josselson, 1993, pxii,).

4.4.2   Persuasiveness

Work that is persuasive, contributes to its validity. This criterion refers to evaluation by a community of researchers (Lieblich et al., 1998).
Persuasiveness and plausibility go hand in hand. A persuasive argument is plausible even though one disagrees with the basic thesis. Persuasiveness is best when theoretical claims are supported with evidence from research data and when alternative interpretations are taken into account (Riessman, 1993).

Polkinghorne (1988) argues that there is a closer relationship between literary/ historical narrative analysis and psychological narrative analysis than between

traditional scientific research requirements and narrative analysis. The criterion for historical explanation is its acceptability of intelligibility rather than its predictability, as should be the case for psychological narrative.

The critical issue is the assessment of relative plausibility of an interpretation when compared with alternative and plausible interpretations (Mischler, 1986) The researcher's argument presents the reasoning by which the conclusions were arrived at and does not produce certainty, only likelihood (Polkinghorne, 1988).

4.4.3 Coherence

Coherence refers to the way in which the different parts of the story fit together to form a complete and meaningful picture (Josselson, 1993; Lieblich et al., 1998). Coherence can also be understood as talk about the same topic (Mischler, 1986). Riessman (1993) refers to coherence as taking place on three levels, namely global, local and themal.

- Global coherence refers to the overall goals a speaker is trying to accomplish by speaking.
- Themal coherence involves content and will reflect a few common themes within an interview that may be returned to again and again.
- Local coherence refers to the methods a speaker uses to make his points.

A good interpretation will include all three levels of coherence.

4.4.4 Pragmatic use

This criterion of relevance refers to the usefulness of a study and the extent in which it could become the basis for the work of other researchers. Riessman (1993) advises that the following steps are taken to achieve maximum validation:

1) Describe how interpretations were produced;

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2)   make the process visible;

3)   and make primary data available.

4.4.5   Conclusion

Riessman concludes her discussion on validity as follows:

> "There is no canonical approach in interpretative work, no recipes and formulas, and different validation procedures may be better suited to some research problems than others" (1993, p. 69).

Thus validation in interpretive work is a difficult and ongoing issue in narrative science. The criteria for evaluation are qualitative in nature and cannot be expressed in scales or numbers (Lieblich et al., 1998).

4.5   Riessman's procedures applied to the research : method.

4.5.1   Attending to experience

In order to apply an "attending to the experience", as defined in the previous section, the method which I followed was to come to terms with my own adjustment in FA missions over many years. The following is a brief overview of the process which led to the shaping of my mind to attend to experience "which presupposes an awareness of phenomena" (Riessman, 1993).

4.5.1.1   Attending to the experience of adjustment

My own awareness of adjustment abroad as an experience that is out of the ordinary, has grown with each international move and became particularly evident during our last move to the South African embassy in the third world.

I decided to undertake this research as I already had an awareness of the kind of story that would emerge if I were to listen to diplomats living in difficult

contexts. I was also very aware of the difficulties experienced by fellow South Africans at our last mission.

So it came about that I decided to collect the stories of diplomatic families to understand how they cope with this experience and what kind of meaning they create to a life of discontinuity. I was aware of a life lived on the surface. Having acquaintances and representing one's country, seemed to foster inauthentic relationships. Do others have a problem with this kind of life?

I asked interviewees to tell of their experience of adjustment to life in a hardship country and left the content of the text to the discretion of the individual. As I see it, this did not include the personal experience of the most major adjustment required of everyone in the history of our country.

4.5.1.2   Attending to the experience of adjusting within an organization

Apart from the individual stories, the organizational story intrudes one's life in a very real sense at a mission abroad. A state department has a specific mission and vision that is translated and interpreted by employees and as such have an effect on their dependents. Moreover each mission, so it seemed to me, has a particular culture that is shaped by the people who start it, who run it and who interpret the rules and regulations emanating from Head Office in Pretoria. This mission culture is mediated by the host culture in terms of what is possible and what is not.

There seems to be more direct control over decisions affecting one's personal life at a mission than at Head Office where no-one is told where to live, how much is to be paid in rental, how big a house one can live in, which telephone calls are paid for and which not, how often one is allowed to travel "home", how many cars can be owned, what constitutes a medical emergency requiring evacuation, and so forth. Mission spouses are expected to entertain guests, cater for functions and should be able to prepare special South African dishes.

This aspect of bureaucratic control over major areas of life constitutes an adjustment but is also an aspect of a specific organizational story. This is how I have perceived it over many years.

An organizational story also gives a certain unity to events in the organization. If there is more than one organizational story, the group will be without direction and the organization will operate in a conflicting way, making use of various stories drawn from the common stock of organizational stories (Polkinghorne, 1988).

The organizational story as a shaping influence in the mission culture has been a strong part of my awareness and I certainly had one ear open listening for the way in which it revealed itself.

4.5.2   Telling about adjustment

For an interview to be successful, Riessman(1993) speaks of creating a facilitating context for a person in which to talk about important moments in his life. I believe part of such a context is created before the interview starts when requests are made for participants in the study. I wrote to the head of each mission in advance stating the purpose of my study and requested permission to interview members of staff. My request was accepted positively and in most embassies I was pressed to interview EVERY staff member and their families. I decided to do as many interviews as I could for the sake of completeness.

I felt that my position as a diplomat's spouse living in a hardship mission at the time, contributed to a sense of common experience and implicit understanding. I was aware of a sense of hope among interviewees that the telling of a story may bring about a change to difficult circumstances or at least to certain policies. I was allowed to undertake my study but it was not done at the request of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Hence I could give no-one a guarantee that my findings would be attended to.

On arrival at each mission I would brief the head of mission more fully about my research and request permission to address the staff members so that they could be informed about my study. I asked everyone to discuss the possibility of granting me an interview together with their spouses and adolescent children. I did not want to interview younger children as family is still a bigger influence in their lives than social context, unlike adolescents who typically use their social context as a frame of reference. As family remains a constant influence, I do not expect younger children to have particularly strong experiences of being exposed to a foreign context. I expect that adolescents will be more susceptible to the influences of their international school setting and wanted to know more about this process.

I soon discovered that I could not insist on a homogenous format due to conflicting schedules and personal agendas. Most interviewees had spent a considerable amount of time in the mission, excepting those persons who had been transferred between missions.

Some interviews took place inside the mission, some at homes. One interview was conducted over a meal and a glass of wine, overlooking the Mediterranean sea. That was what the interviewee wanted. Sometimes a spouse would come into the office for a joint interview and often children had schedules that were too difficult for a family interview given my own time constraints as well.

In some instances I interviewed the husband at the office and his wife at their home. At some interviews the entire family was present. Sometimes a baby's or even a toddler's needs foiled a few attempts and we'd need to reschedule.

In one instance one partner was on holiday outside the country. I discarded that interview as it seemed one-sided. In all the other interviews, except one, I had spoken to both partners, either together or separately.
The one I am referring to is an interview with only one partner of a couple which I retained because of their commuter status, a particular point of interest in the

study as it is such a new, yet increasingly common, phenomenon.

4.5.2.1   Telling about experience

The basic source of information about narratives is the interview.
The question: "What was this experience of moving abroad like for you?" provides an opportunity for a narrative to be told.

The research question is framed to open up a topical discussion so that teller and interviewer can co-evolve an understanding in a way that casts light on the topic under investigation.

I provided an opportunity for each respondent to speak from his own view point and to say as much or as little as he wished. This is in accordance with Mischler's (1986) finding that we are more likely to find stories in studies using unstructured interviews where respondents are "invited to speak in their own voices" and are also allowed to control the flow of conversation. This approach represents a movement in the direction of lessening the asymmetry of power in interview research.

4.5.2.2   "Telling" the research question

After the initial briefing in which I informed interviewees about the aims of my study, followed by a request for an interview with the family, I would typically return the following day and approach each employee individually for feedback. If they were agreeable, we would then schedule a meeting and I would be informed of who would attend the interview.

Here is a sample introduction to an interview:

" As I said yesterday. I really want to know your story, your experience of adjustment in the Foreign Service. How it came about that you took this

job. You know, start way back there........and tell me what it was like to leave the country......what it was like to get here.........talk about the adjustment experience. What you have had to adjust to. I am interested in how the family is affected by moving around. It is your story. Please tell it as you see it".

The introduction combined with this loose format was sufficient for almost everyone. Only one person requested to have questions put to him, which he was happy to answer.

I had a few questions that I kept back till the end of the interview in case pertinent issues had been left unaddressed. I did not need these often. One specific question which I did use for everyone required the interviewee to give his opinion on what he would tell someone who was preparing to go to a hardship posting. The answers to this question were very insightful as they indicated firstly the worst aspect of the person's own adjustment and secondly it gave me an indication of his own learning and kind of adjustment he has made. The other question concerned the characteristics of the posting that made it a hardship for the interviewee and/or his family.

4.5.3   Transcribing experience

The process of reading and rereading and thinking and talking helped me to formulate the critical moments which helped to shape the bigger story.

Initially I tried several foci for analysis, starting by analysing each individual narrative. I analysed several narratives in a variety of ways but could not think of a way in which to link a variety of experiences and unique individual stories into an analysed whole. I became aware that every way of looking tended to produce similar results on the same material.

In the meantime I was producing more and more pages of analyses. I was torn

between wanting to preserve each individual's story and providing an aggregate or a summation. Eventually I had to face the realisation that the individual stories veered away from the central issue of adjustment due to the wealth of secondary information that they contain. This had the effect of sidetracking me into trying to present the texts as a series of stories, each with its own theme. However my work would have lacked coherence and cohesion, important criteria for judging the value of narrative research.

This process-oriented approach to narrative analysis corresponds with Lieblich et al.'s (1998) focus on independent perspectives informing the development of own tools for reading and analysis.

After time I gave up wanting to present each person fully and when I focused on the critical moments, the entire story seemed to appear as if by itself. Perhaps what I experienced as struggling to find a way to present the text is part of a process of "analytic induction" as Riessman (1993) calls it. She describes it as the process whereby the focus of analysis emerges from the text, almost like features of the narrative that jump out at you. Arranging and rearranging the interview text is a process of testing, clarifying and deepening our understanding of what is happening in the narrative (Mischler, 1986).

The investigator seeks to define critical moments in narratives that become the framework for the new narrative and determines what data is excluded. This new narrative is clearly quite different from the original oral accounts of experience. The features jumping out for me were the critical moments in relocation that provided a framework for my narrative in the form of shared punctuations in the story of each relocating family.

Each story had a before, an arrival, a hotel stay, a home to be found and a new lifestyle and culture to come to terms with. A few stories had repeated experience of this process and included a return to South Africa as well as the motivation for leaving. For some families this relocation would be a once in a

lifetime "chance" that influenced their experience of it.

After transcribing twenty eight interviews I had almost two thousand pages of transcripts. I had to face the question of how to approach "long stretches of talk" as Riessman (1993) puts it. The initial decisions taken in constructing the metastory are presented in chapter five. This section deals with the analytical process.

> "There is a cumulative suppression of stories through the several stages of a typical study: interviewers cut off accounts that might develop into stories, they do not record them when they appear, and analysts either discard them as too difficult to interpret or select pieces that will fit their coding system" (Mischler, p.235, 1986).

But the process of listening and transcribing also brought the realization, that some of the interviewees' experiences do not fit with the aim of the research. The following criteria for inclusion versus exclusion of interviews were developed during the experience of transcription.

When listening to all the recorded interviews, only interviews which complied with the following criteria were included:

- The interviewees had to follow and express their ideas and views regarding adjustment in the Foreign Service.
- Although the aims and boundaries for story telling were open, their consensus of ideas had to keep within the realm of adjustment and could include references to possible comparisons to a time before and their present situation as well as ideas and feelings about adjustment.
- The story, regardless of possible adjustment problems, had to convince the researcher of the interviewee's intention of identifying with the South African Foreign Service and acceptance of her duty as an officer of FA.

A few stories were omitted which did not comply with the above criteria. These were omitted because:

1) The interviewee concentrated on personal matters, e.g. a forthcoming marriage.

2) Leaned strongly towards discussing other political themes, e.g. feminism, and authority issues.

3) The interview developed into a form of therapeutic intervention, pushing the researcher into the role of therapist.

With these, I allowed myself to be guided by my wish to provide a sample of the experience of diplomatic life abroad that would be representative of many stories rather than few. To this end, I also organized a selection of excerpts in terms of the various critical moments that are presented when a family has to uproot itself to relocate and settle in another country. The reaction to the news of a impending transfer or a family's arrival in a foreign county are examples of critical moments. This framework produces a categorical analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998).

Once the family had settled into their home in the foreign country, a new narrative emerged in which home leave becomes a critical moment. However this new narrative is frequently centred around an attitude of how to survive the remainder of the term of duty. This basic theme runs like a thread through the narratives and is highlighted by the reaction to home leave. I became aware of it in the ways I was told how people had adjusted to what they did not have. It sounded like a regressive narrative to my ears even for those who embraced the experience fully.

This method produced a temporal ordering of events and experiences as well as a typical chronological continuity that is experienced by a person/family who is transferred to work abroad. This ordering allowed for a variety of narratives to be linked to the identified stages of the transfer experiences - the careful reader should be able to also follow each participant's particular "story" sequentially by

reading only that person's specific excerpts presented under each heading.

I have separated the stories of those families and persons on first postings from those who were on a subsequent posting. I wanted to see what difference that would make to the experience. The new narrative begins with the pre-transfer stage and ends with some projections on how the reentry may be experienced on the part of the new transferees as well as motivation for further postings abroad, if the issue arose spontaneously.

The discussions following each stage are based not only on the reported responses in the thesis, but on all the interview transcriptions.

This method allows the researcher to attend to a person's experience in terms of how it relates to the stories of others (Polkinghorne, 1988).

4.5.4   Analysis of experience.

Lieblich et al.,(1998) describe four modes of analysis, namely holistic, categorical, content and form. The authors stress that the distinctions are not absolute and an analysis may contain aspects of all four foci.

- A content reading presents the work from the standpoint of the teller and describes what happened, who participated and why. The implicit content is analysed in terms of symbolic images, traits and motives and the meaning of the story.
- A reading guided by form focuses on the structure of the plot, sequence of events, the style of the narrative, complexity and coherence and feelings evoked. The aim being to manifest deeper layers of identity.
- A holistic way of reading focuses on a life story as a whole and may interpret particular sections in the context of other parts of the narrative.
- In a categorical interpretation the prime interest is a phenomenon

shared by a group of people.

Looking at the process I followed I realise that a switch took place from a holistic to a categorical description (Lieblich et al., 1998) . But the distinction is not clear cut as the initial holistic intent is preserved by the way the material is integrated as opposed to discarded to arrive at the categories of the metanarrative.

The new narrative is presented in chapter five. A framework of critical moments, punctuated as distinctive categories emerging from the experience of adjustment, is used. The narrative could also have been organized in different ways allowing different conclusions to be drawn. In choosing excerpts the main areas of interest of the study were kept in mind throughout. The criterion for inclusion of a passage relates to the relevance of the passage to a stage of the transfer.

I discern the following cycle of stages or critical moments during a life in transit and I have linked each stage to the physical location of the family.

There is a pre-transfer stage when the family is still at Head Office in Pretoria. For some people this stage might begin when they leave a home town somewhere in South Africa to join the department of Foreign Affairs. This first stage refers to the period directly before a transfer takes place and has relevance since several interviewees referred to incidents and conclusions that had a bearing on their ultimate adjustment. Interviewees anchored their stories in this pre-departure stage, reflecting on those events that were linked to current experiences. In this section the boundary between the pre-transfer and arrival stage is blurred by this retrospectiveness.

What transpires during this period can determine the motivation of the official and family during their posting. A lack of information and too little time to prepare properly can impact negatively on the initial adjustment period. Mistakes are made in such hasty relocations. Sometimes these are costly mistakes.

The next stage starts with an arrival in a new country and a hotel stay. This is a temporary stage which lasts on average five to six months.

The substantive stage is linked to a move into a home. This stage marks the beginning of the sojourn in the sense that the family can start reestablishing a normal routine.

The departure and reentry stage occur when the family returns to Pretoria for a home posting. After a few years the cycle starts again. This is the procedure for Foreign Affairs families. Representatives from other government departments are generally transferred once only.

4.5.4.1   Selection for inclusion

During the process of analysing the experiences recorded in 28 interviews, the transcribed experiences, after the selection process (as stated in 4.3.6.3) was conducted, a number of interviews had to be selected for inclusion in the thesis. It became clear that not all of these transcripts could be used. The criteria that were followed for inclusion were the following:

1)   Experiences of interviewees which reflected similarities were weighed against one another. The ones that were most representative of the general experiences of adjustment, were included. At the end twenty five interviews were used for analysis.

2)   In contrast to 1), the final selections of interviews that were included in the thesis, had to reflect a variety of experiences and reflect the make-up of the department of FA. Thus:

- Black, coloured, Indian and white officials were selected.
- Married couples without children.
- Married couples with children.
- Single officials.

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- Couples in commuter relationships

The reason for this is that research based on a narrative approach tries to create a plot from fragments of all these, often disordered, experiences in order to lend a sense of reality to the varied experiences (Riessman, 1993).

The following section represents the names and missions (pseudonyms used in both) of all the transcribed experiences used in the analysis and selected according to the above.

4.5.4.2   Interview information

Mission ABAB

Place: Interviews took place at hardship mission ABAB
Interviews: Three interviews were conducted with
- Eddy, a career diplomat, and
- Sharon, his wife.
- Elizabeth, a career diplomat and single woman.

Mission BOBO

Place: Two interviews, individually conducted, took place in Pretoria as
                 the couple was on home leave.
Interviews:
- Stephen, a career diplomat, and
- Jenny, his wife.

Mission DADA

Place: The following interviews took place at hardship mission DADA
Interviews: 4 individual interviews were conducted with 2 married couples.
- Barney K, a career diplomat, and
- Vesna K, his wife.
     The K toddlers were not interviewed.

- Susan M, a career diplomat, and
- Johan M, a businessman.

Mission ZOZO

Place:　　　Interviews were conducted at hardship mission ZOZO

Interviews:　Three interviews were conducted with two married couples. Individual interviews were conducted with couple Z.

- Guy Z, a career diplomat and Head of Mission, and
- Angelique Z, his wife.

  The Z children were not interviewed.

- Songo X, a career diplomat, and
- Nongile X, his wife.

  The X children were absent during the interview.

Mission FIFI

Place:　　　Hardship mission FIFI

Interviews:　One family interview and two interviews with married couples were conducted. The latter were conducted together too.

- Fred B, a career diplomat, and
- Jo B, his wife (a nurse), together with
- Don B and Anne B, their adolescent children.
- John W, a technical expert, and
- Amanda W, his wife, who is similarly qualified.

  The W toddler was not interviewed.

- Bennie K, a career diplomat and Head of Mission
- and Stella K, his wife, a teacher.

Mission GOGO

Place:　　　Hardship mission Gogo

Interview:　One family interview was conducted, with the Schoombee family.

- Deon S, a career diplomat, and
- Sanette S, his wife, and

- their 3 adolescent children Jack, Elwin and Suzy.

Mission ZAZA

Place: Hardship mission ZAZA

Interviews: Four interviews were conducted: one with a married couple together, two with a married couple separately and lastly with a single person.

- Chris W, a diplomat on a once only posting
- and Lettie W, his wife.
- The W children were not interviewed.
- Oliver B, a career diplomat, and
- Joan B, his wife, a teacher.
- The B children were not interviewed.
- Henry J, a young adult living with his diplomat parents

Mission DIDI

Place: Hardship mission in DIDI

Interviews: Three interviews were conducted. One with a family, one with couple and one with an official whose wife and children live in South Africa.

- Jan B, a diplomat on a once only posting,
- and his wife, Magda, B, together with their adolescent children
- Anna, Boet and Ben.
- Louise F, a career diplomat
- and Bernhard F, her husband, a professional person.
- Mandla M, a career diplomat.

4.5.5 Reading experience

After listening to my own reading of the interviewees' experiences, coming into contact with the interviewees' experiences, a meaning started to evolve, the

creation of a story or stories. A collaboration, as Bruner (1986) puts it, takes place between reader and text. The text allows voices to speak and to be heard. The readers of this research will become part of the meta-story.

4.6 Methods

In order to cope with the complexity and difficulties with narrative research (Riessman, 1993), the following methods were chosen, based on the essential ingredients for conducting narrative research and on Riessman's procedures.

4.6.1 Interviewing

It is clear from Riessman's procedures that the interview as method allows for a context where, in an open-ended way, the interviewee's world can be lived and experienced. As Olivier et al. put it:

> "Researchers should not be guided by preconceived scientific ideas since these can lead only to a superficial knowledge about people, which does not offer a real understanding of human behaviour. Such an understanding can only be obtained by experiencing things as specific actors experience them, and by judging the problems which such people experience in their daily lives. First-hand detailed information has to be obtained about people's social reality. This reality has to be reconstructed by means of interpretive, unstructured or qualitative means " (1991, p 47).

4.6.2 The interviewer

In research of this kind, the interviewer is no longer seen as an "objective observer", but as an active participant in the research relationship (Keeney & Ross, 1992) . Keeney and Ross (1992) speak of a perspective moving from ".....emphasizing *observed* systems, to emphasizing *observing* systems...."
The presence and personality of the researcher are acknowledged as variables

in the research process (Skinner & Allen, 1991). In participant observation, the interviewer becomes the research " tool".

The interviewer's role is to keep the conversation going; to remember which issues have been covered; and to probe deeper or more precisely where necessary (Skinner & Allen, 1991). Moreover, the interviewer has to know which questions to ask and how to ask them (Olivier et al, 1991).

4.6.3 Sample selection

The number of interviews required in a study is determined by the degree in which the research question is answered satisfactorily (Potter & Wetherell,1987). Olivier et al. (1991) showed in their interview-based research that themes start repeating themselves by the twelfth interview. With regard to this narrative research, it means that the interviewee tells his story until the story has a moment where it becomes repetitive and/or where the interviewee terminates and concludes his story. The selection procedures for inclusion in the thesis were also explained in 4.5.4.1 and 4.5.4.2

4.6.4 Delimiting the interview unit

Flexibility is required in the composition of the interview unit for practical, theoretical and psychological reasons. Flexibility during an interview allows for choice of content and degree of emotional involvement, and how, and where, the interview would be conducted. In other words, the interviewee could discuss with a spouse whether they were prepared to grant an interview and whether they would speak separately or together.

Parents may decide whether their children would be included in an interview. This provides interviewees with feelings of freedom and a degree of control over the interview situation. In this way the process was in keeping with the fuller and more flexible involvement of those from whom data would be collected, as is

required in qualitative research (Allen & Skinner, 1991).

A flexible approach was necessary in order to accommodate the various domestic, school, work and travel obligations of respondents. This meant that it was not practically possible to decide in advance on the participating members of interviews. For instance, it was not possible to know in advance whether a couple would prefer to be interviewed separately or together.

To prevent interviews from being too general in nature and not covering important or obvious issues, the researcher prepared a short introduction that was presented to officials in each mission visited and served two purposes:

(a) to describe the motivation for the study and the aims of the research.

(b) to allow for an independent decision as to whether to participate in the study or not.

The researcher conducted twenty-eight interviews in seven hardship missions in five countries over a period of ten months. These countries are listed in Addendum B. The eight mission was not visited personally but an interview was conducted with one couple on home leave in Pretoria.

The respondents were all attached to South African missions and were mainly from the Department of Foreign Affairs.

4.6.5 Magnetic tape recording and transcribing

Magnetic tape recordings were used to capture interviewees' stories. All the taped interviews are transcribed. A good transcript is necessary for an analysis that requires several repeated readings of the data. Potter and Wetherell (1987) refer to the act of transcription as a conventional but constructive activity. The researcher is confronted with minute decisions all along the way. How many times should one listen to an indistinct phrase before giving up? How does one

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indicate the length of a pause? Many thoughts about the interviewing process and content occur spontaneously during this laborious process.

The conventional aspect refers to an acceptable end-product.

4.7   Confidentiality and ethics

All participants were ensured about anonymity and if unsure about their participation in the research, were allowed to withdraw. The interviewees were assured about the anonymity of their names, their FA placement and the cities and countries where they were stationed. For this reason, hardship missions in the text do not identify one specific country or city of a FA mission.

Although I had permission for the research to be undertaken in missions abroad, no formal information was provided by FA, unless specified, and all references to FA, its functioning, rules, regulations and interpretations are based on the perceptions of the researcher. Any views expressed are not in any way a reflection of the views of FA or any governmental official in whatever capacity.

4.8   Limitations of representation.

The very nature of representation have certain inherent qualities that limit its usefulness in a significant way.

- As we have no direct access to the experience of others, all forms of representation are "limited portraits" (Riessman, 1993).
- The narrative I construct of others is my worldly creation.
- Each interpreter allows different voices in the chorus to dominate in the final performance (Riessman, 1993).
- The study of meaning requires the use of linguistic data which lose informational content when dissected from context (Polkinghorne, 1988).
- Most importantly, meaning is fluid and contextual and not fixed or universal.

In the light of the foregoing, there is a new understanding of representation as being partial, selective and imperfect. An awareness of the limits of representation makes us more reflective in the claims we make (Riessman, 1993). But we still believe it is the best method for exploring meaning.