

“The other beautiful thing is the colourful people you see in the streets, in different attires and speaking different languages. You taste different food in restaurants and everything is different. So there is something in the mists of this, which makes you say: thank God, I came here. So it's a hardship post, but where on earth will I get all this bonus”?

The ambassador in S----- appreciates the opportunity to be exposed to another culture and to have the possibility of observing events in South Africa from the outside. He describes a learning process that occurs in interaction with ambassadors from other countries.

It is perhaps noteworthy that none of the positive comments came from persons on a first posting, but from ambassadors and persons on subsequent postings. Typically ambassadors are invited to special ceremonies unlike the rest of the embassy staff. It also indicates that one can learn to appreciate life in a different culture with time, whereas the first posting can be simply overwhelming.

5.5.13 Relationship with host country

Some people go to trouble to find out how the other culture functions and as a result, their adjustment is easier.

You have to learn how the other person thinks if you want to cope in another culture, says **Stephen**.

“In some countries people do not say no. They say yes to please you”. So you need to pose your question in a way that

will give you the answer you need. An exhausting process”!

Both **Amanda and John** feel they have nothing in common with the local people and this incompatibility makes it difficult for them to relate to them. They do not necessarily dislike them, but simply find they have nothing to say to them. This lack of a relationship is seen as something that will neither enhance or impoverish their lives.

Sharon has decided to defy local tradition by sticking to her preferred wardrobe and simply ignoring the reactions. She has found that if she ignores whistles and such, the reactions generally dry up. As she says:

“When I go out, if I want to wear a pair of shorts, I’ll wear it”.

Personal relationships with the host culture tend to remain superficial, though there is much individual variation.

Fred:

Yes, it’s hard to really become friendly because they’ve got the culture with them and unfortunately I’m at the point now where I don’t want to offend them by telling them what I really think”.

Johan:

“I have formed a real friendship with an elderly J... gentleman. I can tell him how I experience life here and he laughs with me about my frustrations. It kind of takes the edge off it for me. He understands. Sometimes you feel that



you are the only one who is bugged by these things and who notices them. But then he'll say that is how it isand he'll laugh".

On the whole Johan seems to dislike the rest of the community. This old gentleman serves to affirm Johan as he seems to agree with Johan's interpretation of the idiosyncracies of his fellow countrymen.

Barney:

"I have made a few friends, but we are on a different wavelength. I just don't speak the same language and not just in the language sense".

The language barrier and different customs remain a barrier for Barney.

Nongile does not feel welcome in the host country:

"It's not a friendly place... Go to their schools or colleges, you feel so *left out*. They don't *welcome* you".

"I'd say you don't get about in the foreign community. You must know that if she says hi to you, she....she wants to benefit from you. Something huge. You cannot just be a friend".

"Here you live in pretense. You feel it after.....say you go on holiday and then you come back. You even hear the children say.....*what*. But then, life has to go on. Next day there is nothing in the fridge, you have to go to the market where you

are pushed and shoved”.

Nongile feels that friendship based on equality cannot exist in J---- as she always feels that she is seen as a have and is surrounded by ‘have nots’ who want something from her. In this section she gives the impression that she would prefer to be able to shield herself against the outside community. However necessity forces her to expose herself to something inherently unpleasant time after time.

Her words: “you live in pretense” denote a certain quality of inauthenticity to her life, shared by her children. I wonder if she does not mean too that her life is incomplete as she cannot expect to relate to those around her as she is wont to. Her adjustment then is seen as a situation in which there is a loss of certain aspects to her life that are irreplaceable the foreign community.

5.5.13.1 Discrimination

Eddy and his family were disappointed at a less than warm reception at the airport, on arrival, where the family was mistaken for local nationals at first in spite of documentation to the contrary. Not only did they experience what it is like to be a foreigner in a different country, but they also had to deal with mistrustful officials who insisted on speaking the local language to them.

After a lifetime of painful discrimination based on skin colour, this was certainly the last thing this family expected to have to cope with.

Sharon:

“At first I was harassed for being.....my colour. They just take me for a native of this country, in fact, my whole family. They wouldn't speak English to us for about six months. They thought we were pretending not to understand and were starting to be nasty. We kept on saying we were from South Africa. The little one started getting aggressive and before she says anything, she'd say: 'And I am not local'”.

In spite of this keenly felt experience of discrimination - which seemed only to have occurred during the first six months - Eddy tells me that a lifetime of suffering in South Africa has made them more resilient and adaptable.

“What we experienced here was different, but the bottom line was still a form of suffering”.

After six months the family learnt to cope with this perceived discrimination that had its origins in their own history and behaved in a way that elicited a different reaction. They had to change as their environment stayed the same.

Barney, even though of similar descent, found he had nothing in common with the people of J-----.

“I'm J-----too but they are *totally* different. It doesn't work for me. You are obviously an in between in the sense that you feel a little bit for them. The fact that they have to live in these conditions. Some of them, especially the rich people, don't want to associate with you. Some people do and some

people don't. They like to be in the diplomatic circle. It's a social crowd. And they like to unfortunately **associate** with the white people who are here. Because it's the social thing to do".

Vesna agrees with her husband:

"You know we were discriminated against in our country, but not as bad as here. Why should we still be discriminated against? It doesn't matter what you are here, as long as you are white".

She relates an incident where her husband wanted to take their daughter to the swimming pool but they were not allowed in as the pool was only for foreigners. The pool attendant refused to step outside to see his diplomatic car number plates and **Barney** had to drive all the way home to get his passport as proof that he is a foreigner.

"Small things like that but each time it grows onto you and then at times you wonder: Is it worth going to this party, especially if you know there will be lots of local people. It is discrimination in a different way. Because you are the same as them, they don't want to recognize you".

Barney and **Vesna** experienced ongoing and painful discrimination within the diplomatic circles where they move and on the street where they continuously have to prove that they are foreigners. I heard a similar story from another South African J----- family living in the same country. It is possible that each individual had different

experiences of discrimination in the past, that would have a bearing on their reactions.

What is important is to be aware of this aspect of adjustment so that the Department of Foreign Affairs could warn people that discrimination may exist in most countries, regardless of colour.

Our particular circumstances in South Africa have not prepared people for discriminatory behaviour that can occur in countries abroad.

Elwin (15) in X----- where the family lives in one sector of society:

“They think there’s only B-----s and then there is Y-----s. They can see we are not B-----s so then they like give it to us. I mean, stones thrown at you and stuff like that. It’s pretty hard fitting in and being accepted.....it would be nicer if the people did not hate us”.

Local people too may reject outsiders and show it through their behaviour. Looking different makes one an easy prey for all sorts of political, religious and racial attitudes and sometimes discriminatory actions.

Suzy (12) adds:

“We are like the rich kids and we don’t talk to them. We are blond and we are foreigners and we are too good for them. That’s what they *think*”.

Suzy describes how painful it is to be branded by a stereotype that she feels is undeserved and that she feels powerless to change.



Elizabeth:

“In that first month I was just so rebellious and anti. You see opulence and self righteousness combined with a total disregard for others. The poor who don’t matter”.

“It’s how you behave and how you dress that classifies you immediately. You’ve got to look good. These local people all look down on each other and it got to me. There’s the upper class, then the small middle class which battles along and then a huge lower class. Coming from South Africa which is free and everyone was like keen to get on with it.....that’s how I felt here. There was concern for one’s fellow man. I know it sounds idealistic, but that’s what I like about going home.”

From the above sections, representing people from all ethnic groups in South Africa, it seems that discrimination is based on difference and can be explained in terms of the us-them dichotomy.

5.5.14 A hardship post

Kaplan (1983) could be speaking about a hardship post in his conceptualization of person environment incompatibility, as “an example of an environment that is illegible, confusing and tending to undermine almost any plan one had in mind” (p.316).

Hardship posts differ from one another and people differ in how they experience life in these countries. I found that people had difficulties in describing the actual hardship elements in their posting. The next section describes some of the physical aspects of the countries where diplomats have to get used to coping with

conditions that are worse than what they are accustomed to. These are the elements that contribute towards a limited and frustrated life style, as seen in the last paragraph of this section.

Note that not every criterion applies to all hardship posts. For instance D----- in Africa may have infra structural problems but it does not have the pollution levels, population pressure or traffic congestions of x-----. The absence of these problems contributes to a freer lifestyle.

Susan's description comes close to Kaplan's definition as stated above. She says a hardship post is one where you do not have what you are used to and when you try to engage in the kind of activity that you are used to, the results are traumatic instead of pleasurable. She cites the pleasurable example of walking on the tree lined streets of Pretoria compared to the highly unpleasant experience of walking on the streets of M-----.

Barney found the work environment in his second hardship posting far better than the first one, but the living conditions were much worse. In their first posting his wife had the freedom of driving around. In M----- one needs a driver which is an added expense.

“Here she has the flat life basically. She stays in the flat and she takes care of the child”.

Let me add that this flat where the family lives is almost on the top floor of a high rise building, surrounded by other high rise buildings, with a high level of noise pollution from constant traffic and nowhere to go.



Sharon:

“I would say a hardship post is a place where you basically cannot get everything, where you have to have everything shipped in”.

Sometimes certain products would be available but not continually.

“So you buy it when you see it”.

The characteristics of a hardship post result in specific and ongoing frustrations.

“We always have conflict situations. I think it is because people are having such a hard time living in the country, that people are finding it difficult.

Sanette and Deon and their family had a drop in their living standards from their home in Pretoria to the one in A---- which had no garage, garden nor enough space for the family's needs. But the hardship for them was in living “on the wrong side of the track” in a city that was politically divided. An added aspect was that Head Office did not seem to be concerned with the living conditions on the ground and there seems to be no mechanism whereby they could enlighten Head Office of their difficulties.

Elwin, Deon's son of fifteen:

“We go to school in the West and there's no problems. There are shopping malls where we go, and all that. But there is a huge change between East and West. You come home to the East and you walk down the street and you have to walk

through trash. You get thrown rocks at by the kids who live here. And you know, you're blond, so. It's true".

"Here there is nothing. There's not even shops on this side. Even if there were, I wouldn't go, because it would be terrible. No movies, nothing. Seriously nothing. So we have to go to the West side".

"I come here to sleep. When I come here I stay inside the house".

Deon's daughter, **Suzy** (12) has this to say of her life:

"I have some friends who live in Z----- and you always have to cross checkpoints and go through all that stuff. It's really a hassle, if you just want to be normal and go and hang out. It's a lot different from any other country".

For **Deon** and his family the hardship is constituted in living in two irreconciled worlds.

Eddy describes part of the adjustment to life in a hardship post as:

"A process of coming to terms with all these oddities and differences to what you are accustomed to back in South Africa . What you do, is you compromise. You find that you look for a 'close to' to what you have in South Africa. It won't be exactly, but it will be close to. Then the item becomes acceptable and the sooner you get into that sort of a pattern, the sooner you settle in....."

The hardship element in B-----:

"It's the culture, but it doesn't come straightaway. It's

hidden”.

Bennie describes A----- as having features of both the first and the third world. He repeats the idea of a culture that continuously exposes its layers of difference to foreigners the longer they stay.

From the foregoing contributions it seems that one of the most difficult aspects of the adjustment process for newcomers is the shock of getting less and living with less than they were used to in South Africa. Bigger allowances do not seem to compensate for deprivations as money cannot buy what is needed in a hardship post.

Elizabeth says the hardship is not of a material nature.

“It is more the things that South Africans take for granted: like being able to play sport, to walk out. Here it costs a fortune. It can upset what you regard as your normal lifestyle”.

Oliver has lived in the first world as well as in a variety of hardship posts. When he compares posts, it becomes clear that certain first world posts have problems that are compensated for in third world posts and vice versa. Furthermore it seems that there are differences among hardship posts too. Each has its own problems and some are worse than others. He had been in an extremely difficult post and moved to a relatively easy one, which he appreciated unlike other South Africans, who went straight there. It may be important to keep in mind that one’s frame of reference

plays a role in someone's perception of hardship.

Susan maintains that we still have a choice about attitude towards hardship realities. We can choose whether to focus on the positive or the negative aspects. She accepts that some things are hard to ignore but one can try to ignore it. One must make peace with the things one cannot change. She is convinced that one can get used to anything.

It seems that some people have a harder time to cultivate a pragmatic and tolerant attitude than others.

5.5.14.1 Political instability

Even though **Deon's** family has friendships in the international community, strong political divisions between religious groups cannot but affect the family. Due to individual experiences and perceptions, the family has become split with father and one son supporting one side, while the younger son supports the other.

5.5.14.2 The ongoing frustrations of infra-structural problems.

Power fluctuations can damage sensitive equipment. Power and water cuts take place without warning in many parts of the developing world. In R----- **Deon** has not got enough electricity to use a kettle and on Fridays there is none at all.

Because this problem was unexpected, no departmental provision was made for generators.



Sanette:

“We have no garbage collection. Every time I walk down the street, I walk through garbage. You don’t get used to that. It’s always dirty. You cannot wear sandals outside. You get your feet dirty. It’s really in everything you do, you’re conscious of the fact that this is a strange place”.

The quality of local produce and clothing is seen as inferior in Z----

“Workmanship is bad. Everything breaks. Maintenance is very high”.

Medical services are generally much poorer than in South Africa and can contribute to a sense of anxiety should something go wrong with a family member. Several people mentioned examples of problems.

For instance, **Susan** had the added anxiety of being flown to South Africa for a medical procedure that could have been less traumatic if she did not have the added stress of time spent travelling and being without her husband at a time when one needs support.

But the initial anxiety about catching every passing germ soon subsides when you realize that no-one dies from the odd stomach infection, says **Susan**.

Susan implies that much anxiety is caused initially by the thought that there may be health problems that cannot be adequately addressed. Eventually the anxiety subsides when people see that they do recover from ailments that are due to poor hygiene.

5.5.14.3 Difference of population pressure:

Cities with a high population density, requires a different way of thinking to cope with a lack of privacy. Sometimes this lack of privacy can be due to a cultural practice of staring at strangers.

“And here we come from Pretoria with very few people, and there you arrive in J---- with 15 million people. So you lack privacy”.

After a few years in M-----, where the entire population of 15 million people are squeezed into apartments on a relatively small area, both **Johan and Susan** now seek to escape cities and people as much as they can!

But Johan says that no matter what you do, you cannot escape the reality of life in M-----. It is always hot; you are always surrounded by lots of people; travel is never a pleasure and you cannot avoid dealing with the local people. The only escape is one’s apartment as it is the only place where you can be by yourself.

Home becomes a sanctuary and protection against the outside environment. I was certainly struck by the high level of homeboundness South African diplomats experience in overcrowded countries. In general African countries allow for more freedom of movement.

5.5.14.4 Effect of overwhelming poverty



In most of the developing world, there is an enormous gap between rich and poor. There are furthermore very few rich people. A middle class as we know it hardly exists. One is continually confronted with the reality of this difference. Our diplomats mention a sense of being targeted due to being seen as haves. This is an impediment to natural or equal relationships with the host country nationals as motives are always suspect.

Susan speaks of the long time it takes to build up relationships built on trust and personal contact.

Nongile found it hard to cope with highly visible poverty and begging. This is obviously an aspect of the new environment that one has to find a way to cope with. It is not an easy process as the reaction is on an emotional level. No cognitive decision can be tough enough to withstand the emotional impact of the poor and suffering.

She says:

“I told myself I am not going to feel pity about them. When I learnt that the Embassy belongs to Charity Organizations, it was easier. I was told, of course, I should never ever give to beggars. But the minute you turn around and look to the other side, you just see another beggar. Sometimes, you even get to the robot, you wish the driver could just move on”.

Stephen says in a poor country like I---, foreigners are perceived as haves and considered as saviours who should be coerced into

helping the poverty stricken. Desperate measures can be employed to relieve poverty, such as throwing oneself in front of a car to get money as compensation for injuries suffered. Driving a car is therefor discouraged by the mission.

Fred describes a cultural difference that grates on him:

“If they discover that you are willing to give something small, in the mind the floodgates are now open and they ask for more and more and more until we get angry. But there is no concept of I’ve imposed on this person enough already. The more you impose on them, the more it gives you licence to continue”.

This may sound like a discriminatory statement, but for someone coming from a culture where the rules are different, it takes some time getting used to a new set of behaviours.

Barney :

“If a guy is born into riches, all he does is he gets up in the morning. That’s a hard enough effort for him.

There is no hope for the poor. At least we can see in South Africa a poor man can come out of poverty and do something with his life, and maybe get an opportunity. There is no opportunity here”.

On the caste system:

“If you were born in the streets, your grandchildren will live in the streets. If your father was a tailor, you’ll be a tailor. They don’t question it, they just accept it”.

5.5.14.5 Different climate

Arriving in a different climate can be a shocking experience if you are not expecting it:

“The greatest shock was when we arrived in M----- from South Africa. It was winter in South Africa, so you are so well dressed and suddenly you hit 41 degree C.”

“Beautiful houses, beautiful gardens, but you can very seldom sit in a garden like this, because it is too hot. It’s 35 degrees and the mosquitoes eat you up. So you live much more indoorsunfortunately”

Adjusting to a radically different climate takes a while. This aspect has its biggest impact at the beginning of a transfer. **Johan** says he did not anticipate the effect of the heat and humidity at all. Venturing outside an air-conditioned hotel room, required overcoming resistance to exposure to that heat.

Mandla:

“At least, we are coping now. Initially we couldn’t even cope with the heat. When you come out of the plane you feel very hot, as if you are going to die *right now*”.

A climate of extremes requires a physical adjustment and one that can lead to an indoor type of lifestyle, something South Africans are not used to.

5.5.14.6 Pollution levels

High pollution levels are linked to health hazards, causing anxiety both for individuals and parents of children.

“ J---- is so polluted, you don't have flowers growing” .

“D----- haswhat I would regard as subhygienic standards compared to South Africa. Even compared to X.. in South Africa where I grew up, my kids could play in the streets, barefoot. They could run outside”.

“We live on bottled water, from morning to evening, brushing your teeth, drinking tea, doing everything. You cannot use the water here. You get D----- belly, stomach problems. But the body is funny, it adjusts. We have made up our mind, we'll have to stay here for four years”.

In M-----:

“Everything is polluted: the beaches, the air, the water. I mean there is nothing that is really good in this country” .

Different water

In spite of reassurances by your landlord, the likelihood is great that the water is not drinkable. One entire family contracted amoebic dysentery in A----- and had to cancel a planned holiday. They switched to bottled water.

Eddy describes a long process of trial and error to find out which brand of bottled water suited his family's constitution.

Rubbish removal

This is definitely not as efficient as in the first world, if it exists at all.

Eddy:

“Back home you can complain if the municipality has not come to collect it. But here, the dirt in the street is just par for the course. They don't complain about it. They live in and amongst it. And you hope you don't get sick”.

5.5.14.7 Shopping realities:

“Shopping here is an occupation in itself. You spend long hours in markets, buying low quality produce and negotiating prices for everything”.

There are no supermarkets and you have to go from one place to the next to find what you need. The same was said of B-----.

Nongile in the markets of D-----:

“And you are not even sure if that is the right price, because he looks at you and he gives you any price. *It* is not written down anywhere. You must keep on at the bargaining part. That kills me. It's so much strain. Because you mustn't take his prices. The other day I was buying ice cream. I knew it was 60 rupees but he was writing 80. So when I said: Since when did it go up, he said, sorry madam, sorry, it was a mistake”.

In D-----:

“We were totally confused because we had never seen shops like these. We don't have them at home. Even in

rural areas, you know a shop you will see is a shop. It was a different case. First of all we had to bargain when you buy. Something we are not used to”.

In expensive A---- with its few shops, **Amanda** has to suppress her shopping urges, but then she indulges in “pent up sprees” whenever the opportunity arises. I heard a similar statement in M---- by **Barney and Vesna** who regard weekend shopping as recreational and found they could not do so.

“We South Africans, we enjoy shopping so much. It’s in our blood almost. For a weekend, we can shop the whole weekend and say we enjoyed the weekend. So these people don’t understand that”.

“It’s noisy, smoky, people are hooting and there is general chaos”.

“You can’t really buy meat here because it is really unhygienic. The stuff just lies on the floor - it’s unbelievable. Very dirty. We bring our meat from South Africa”.

Not being able to speak the language means Barney gets “robbed” when he attempts to do the shopping and that puts him off even more.

“I get nailed because I cannot speak the language”.

Different local conditions require a change in lifestyle, generally a more restricted one.

5.5.14.8 Difference in driving practices

I include this category as so many South African men had so much to say about the various driving practices.

Traffic congestion is very high in cities with high density populations.

In B----- there are no stop signs and this contributes to driving confusion. Everyone seems to go wherever he pleases. At the same time there is tolerance for each person's actions. Stephen appreciates this positive attitude and believes we can imitate it to our own benefit. In my experience each country has a workable system and the biggest problem arises when you reject their system and insist on thinking the system you are used to is the only correct one.

Fred would disagree with me.

He says:

“You expect the driving to be bad, but then after a while it gets to you. Because you live here. When you have the tourist mentality, you can accept that things are different. After you've lived here for a year or two, it's not a different place. It's home! And it's not acceptable that people at home behave like this. Of course, you forget that you are the foreigner”.

And before you get too irritated by the noise of many klaxons: Fred adds:

“Hooting is a big thing in the Middle East. But it is not in anger, it is more to say: I'm here.”

Eddy, another male commentator:

“The traffic was horrendous. It was horrendous. It took me close to two or three months to start driving in B---- itself. For the uninitiated it is very scary. They say they have a traffic order, but I am reluctant to believe that. How do you explain their haphazard driving?”

Eddy laughed when I asked him why he used the past tense when describing the traffic as horrendous and admitted that the traffic had not changed but that he had.

“I’ve compromised from my driving norm to a B---- driving norm”.

Eddy also provides a blueprint for driving in such traffic. He used taxi’s initially and observed the driving practices from the passenger’s seat as if in preparation for the day when he would drive his own car.

Driving in M----:

“If you want to take a drive, then someone will probably scratch your caror you can’t handle the traffic any more. Sometimes you drive along the road and you just stop in the middle of it and you say: just go past me please. They drive sideways and it is really disorganized”.

Driving in S----? That’s strictly for the brave, says **Songo** who employs a driver.

Due to a lack of facilities one's lifestyle needs to change radically in the third world. The obstacles are many, not least of which are financial. Where clubs exist, they are geared at the elite and priced accordingly. When you have to gird the loins and motivate yourself to brave the multitudes out there for the sake of an outing, it is often easier to stay home.

As **Barney** says:

“ We actually don't get out at all over weekends. We tried to. I told my wife recently, we can't do this any more, sitting in the house. We're getting depressed. It's becoming very difficult for us to handle the weekends. Just to get out a bit. What do you do? Besides eating out, that's it. We just watch TV all the time. The whole weekend. If you walk outside, all these people are looking at you. You feel so uncomfortable, they are always staring”.

Stephen:

“With the hectic lifestyle, work, traffic stress, social life afterwards, the entertaining.....one needs actually to get out of B---- more than we do”.

A hectic program and workload present a problem for a HOM who wants to keep his staff motivated, but cannot offer them the necessary facilities for relaxation. He believes that would be one way of keeping morale up.

The lack of entertainment facilities is mentioned by most people I interviewed. It costs a fortune to play golf in M----- and it is not pleasant to go to local cinemas, says **Johan**. There is no way to

escape from the city.

Eddy:

“Firstly as a South African, it’s common knowledge and it’s a fact that most South Africans are outdoor orientated and we all have pattern of life where we try to get away from the hustle and bustle of city life. It is not easy, not is it cheap to get out of B-----”.

B-----:

“We have nowhere to play. We have nothing. Recreation clubs are expensive, very expensive. I don’t have that kind of money. In South Africa we are used to recreation that is free and it keeps the mind and body healthy. The people are in the house the whole time. Children spend hours in front of TV sets as they cannot go anywhere”.

Costs are often an enormous impediment to recreation. Susan says your recuperation package determines which aspect of your recreation needs you can replace. This brings one to the important question of how much money is needed to compensate for hardships endured? When will one feel - on an emotional level - that you are being compensated for your hardships on a financial level? Is it possible to compensate for an emotional need in financial terms?

Boredom is a problem, says **John**, as your options are so limited.

Sharon regards herself as a very sporty person and finds C----- limited as far as opportunities are concerned. She has bought a

home gym that gives her some kind of satisfaction.

Eddy:

“Recreation is a big, big problem. For me it is a very big problem. Our whole family is ultra sporty, at professional level. I performed poorly after my first year here and did not know it was due to the physical adjustment to local conditions until I was told by a sports professional. I thought I had failed. I performed better the following year”.

“In M----, we are staying in a high class suburb. We just live inside and we are outdoor people. It’s a very new lifestyle, what with air conditioners and heaters.

B----- is a small landlocked country offering few places to visit. So there is little chance to escape a small society. Life is expensive in B----- - but otherwise there is little hardship other than the cultural difference. The availability of satellite television provides a means of recreation.

Oliver mentioned the fact that no alcohol is available in a fundamentalist religious country - not even for diplomats. This is a further hardship as one is deprived of an escape mechanism! In B-----, diplomats describe themselves as quite obsessed with getting hold of alcohol!

But one “advantage” of a hardship post is that there is often nothing to spend money on. However the more extreme posts offer a two monthly trip to a nearby resort for rest and recreation. But life there is so expensive that all those savings are then taken care of.

No-one seems to be able to envisage what it will be like in advance.

Mandla:

“We thought we would understand the lifestyle (in D----) because we were used to rural areas at homes where there are no facilities. Even then, it’s not like here. There you could drink rain water. Here no water is safe”.

5.5.14.9.1 Teenagers

Anne (18) who lives in Z-----, where there is no nightlife;

“What we do, we have lots of friends at church and we have youth group meetings and we get together. We have sleep overs and we go roller-skating together. I also play musical instruments.

But her mother, **Jo**, says:

“It is difficult for a teenaged girl. She is limited in where she can go in a strict religious society.”

“She can’t just go out on her own. She would certainly be sending a message that she is loose. It would give her an ugly name. She could go in a group, but only in certain parts of town. There are only men on the streets”.

Don (16)

“My recreation fun is through friends. I have lots of American friends from school and church. I get invited to the American

Embassy often where they have a big recreation centre. And...I can spend hours playing on the computer”.

Jo likes walking but dislikes the unasked attention out on a street.

“You feel very much noticed when you are out walking on your own.”

This is a reality in many strict religious countries where women generally stay indoors.

Deon’s teenaged children in B---- say that there are no sports facilities. Their lives are not particularly active:

“We either basically go to friends’ houses and hang out or we go to the movies. There’s not much else to do. The B----’s play basketball and the D---’s play basketball and softball. I wouldn’t feel comfortable going to either’s clubs. And I don’t play basketball either”.

Teenagers are also limited in what they can do by a lack of recreational facilities. They do not seem to mind too much. All their friends are in the same boat and so they manage to amuse themselves as best they can.

5.5.15 Marriage

Diplomatic marriages have always been described as ‘make or break’ relationships and a particularly high divorce rate testifies to this. Why does it happen?

The strain of the initial upheavals certainly impacts on a marriage:

Eddy:

“During that period, we had a lot of arguments, but not irretractable stuff. It was stuff we could sort out. Misunderstandings. Minor stuff”.

Lettie says the initial tension experienced when they first arrived created tension between husband and wife. This was an unexpected aspect for her.

Susan describes the adjustment stress as having a tremendous impact on her marriage. The partners tried to analyze each other and concluded that she was flexible enough to adjust whereas he was not. She decided that if their marriage could withstand this test of living in this difficult country, it would stand the test of time too. This attitude resulted in her seeing her marriage as if it were on trial

She experienced so much marital stress that she had to expand her coping mechanisms. Her solution for dealing with her stress caused the next problem as her husband disapproved of her doing yoga, as he considered yoga an eastern religion not compatible with Christian values.

For **Oliver**, the working partner, who remembers how his marriage nearly floundered after the first year in an extremely difficult hardship posting, the first year was a critical “make or break stage” in his marriage. This is the time when a spouse either decides “to hang around or she decides to hell with this and she buggers off home”.



Support is expected when unresolved work problems endure:

“You go home and talk to your wife. I have that habit of taking my problems home with me, because she provides that support. I came home every night and moaned and groaned.... andtelling nothing good. It was difficult for my wife and I couldn't take it any more”.

Barney was always irritated. But **Vesna** says she and Barney have a solid friendship and they have always provided support for each other. At the stage when he could not handle his situation any longer, Vesna's mother was visiting and he switched to talk to her. That was when Vesna realized that the situation had to change.

5.5.15.1 A stronger marriage - interdependence

John and Amanda, a couple who seemed to have received no support from anyone in the mission, had to become each other's sole support. Being pushed together has made their relationship stronger. The two took a conscious decision to be supportive and not to get angry at each other. Having a baby helped their relationship. Otherwise Amanda says she would have returned home or jumped out of the window.

One can see how this would lead to the kind of relationship that **Bonnie and Jaco** describe as taking place after ten years of marriage where they describe their nuclear family as a closed and interdependent system.

Fred describes his relationship with his wife as very supportive and that is what enables them to lead this kind of life.

“My hobby is my wife. On average we would probably have a conversation for about two hours a day”.

The family has tea together on a daily basis and uses the time to discuss everything that happens to them.

It seems to me that a posting could represent a radical change in the couple's roles and achieving a good working relationship can weather the potential storms. Conversely, if one partner does not succeed in finding an acceptable equilibrium, the marriage could be placed at risk simply because there is no where else for tension to be channeled to.

5.5.15.2 One spouse is fulfilled

One partner can be fulfilled whilst the other is not. In **Barney's** case he could not resolve his office problems and requested an intermission transfer. But his wife was very happy in their first posting and less so in the next, more restricting posting. She says that they will never know whether they did the right thing by leaving.

“I had a group of friends, we played bridge, you know, my daughter was at school and we had coffee mornings”.

Oliver says he loved the challenge of a hardship post in which he had to learn many things, but his wife was lonely and hated the experience.

Amanda got married, fell pregnant, gave up working and left South Africa to accompany her husband to A----- where there was literally nothing for her to do initially. She says she had to cope with so many things that were completely out of the ordinary for her in the space of eighteen months.

Office stress is taken home and a working husband does not want to hear about his wife's problems. **Stephen** believes one has to work even harder at a marriage in the third world than in the first world. He ascribes it to the fact that the spouse has a harder time simply getting around without a driver, not having colleagues to support her, having to deal with people who do not speak English, having to cope with different and difficult shopping practices. It is even harder when the husband *knows* she is battling and he cannot afford to buy her transport.

Jan appreciates his work fully. He wanted the challenge and has enjoyed the experience to the hilt. He was intensively busy, stimulated and involved in his work. He describes the satisfaction of feeling adequate to his task. His wife says she found plenty to do but little mental stimulation.

Angelique, a non-working spouse:

“When I leave J--- here, I don't know what I am going to call myself. At the end of the day, by the time I'm old, I've got no pension. He has got pension, he's working for his own work file. I'm supporting him.....this man is going up. I wish the Department of Foreign Affairs can employ and use spouses. Also promote *their* interests”.



And: "At the end of the day it is so fascinating to be on posting, but when you go back.....you are nowhere. That's what we discuss, the spouses, because you never know the future. I mean, you can be thrown away any time".

A precarious position for a woman. Angelique is raising an important issue here. The accompanying wife is completely dependent on a husband. If the marriage should fail, she has little to fall back on.

An interrupted career:

Sanette thought she would be able to work every time the family lived in South Africa. It did not work out that way for various reasons. It was to be eleven years before she could go back to work.

"And it was extremely difficult, not only for myself, but for the whole family. The children had grown up with me always being at home the whole day. There wasn't a time of being able to work at home for a bit or being able to work part-time. But this was my opportunity for going back to work. It's really been something that I've missed a lot all the time.....not being able to work. It took me about six months to find something. Still, I was actually lucky to find something. Doing odd jobs does not fill out your CV after four years I learnt a lot from my diplomatic experiences and you go back and people think you are on the same level as someone who had two or three years' experience of work".

The woman who fulfills a supportive role and tries to work when the family is in South Africa has the added problem of finding a job and of subjecting her children to a next adjustment.

5.5.15.3 A non-equal relationship

The inequality between spouses may exist before departure already. **Johan** realized in retrospect that his wife had a better idea of what to expect than he did. She underwent training that prepared her for her job. He lacked relevant and specific information about the parameters that exist for a non working spouse, which contributed to his difficult adjustment. He battled to accept that doors would not open for him; that results would not justify effort. All he knew was that he'd be living abroad for four years and he thought he could be the same entrepreneur that he had been in Pretoria. The inequality in the marriage relates to the fact that his wife could pursue a career whereas he was unprepared for the reality that he would not be able to do anything productive.

The second aspect of inequality for Johan refers to the difference in lifestyle between the two spouses. **Susan** would go to work on a daily basis where she'd be dealing with "competent" people in a stimulating office environment. She also had continued contact with South Africa. Johan would have nothing to do, in a hotel room and eventually in an apartment. He dealt with the larger, non-westernized sector of the population. As a male spouse he was not aware of other males in the international community who might have been in a similar position. Johan was resentful of the fact that Susan's work was so important in her life and hence he felt unimportant to her (Note the reversal of traditional complaints).



degree of connectedness with one's family of origin.

Eddy believes his childhood spent away from home prepared him for leaving home and living in different places.

“But **Sharon** comes from a very different environment. She comes from a very fine, close-knit family and they are getting along with each other and that. And she had to make the bigger sacrifice”.

It seems clear from the above that adjustment is different for each couple and unless the two can define a mutually supportive relationship, the marriage will be negatively affected.

5.5.15.4 A commuter relationship

Oliver does not think a spouse should accompany her husband to an extreme hardship post such as T----. Should they decide to take it and split up, he advises a maximum number of visits for the family, “even if it is out of one's own pocket”. For him, from a man's perspective, a commuter relationship is riskier early on in a marriage.

His wife, **Joan**, found that not having her husband with her, rendered her vulnerable to the attentions of another person. She became lonely and needed help in bringing up her sons.

“It was a dangerous split. Although one can phone each other just so often, you lose touch with that person. There

were times when I would say to my husband: I feel I don't know you any more. And he used to say the same".

Oliver would advise a newly married couple not to accept an extreme hardship posting such as T---- or K-----. Still, it is equally important to consider all circumstances before taking a decision.

Mandla admits that a commuter relationship could have its pitfalls:

"Well, it may be dangerous. It depends on that particular person. When you told yourself that this is what I want and nothing else, then you go that route".

His wife shuttles between Johannesburg and D----; now to be with her husband and then to be with their four children.

I asked Mandla what it was like for his wife to live in two places. She was away at the time of the interview.

"Ah well, she is the one *most* affected. Because she is doing nothing.... apart from social gatherings with other women. So when she's not doing that, there's nothing. There's that spare time when she starts thinking about the kids and all. So that's what makes us prefer that she goes to them quite often".

"It was quite a big problem. But all the same, we have adjusted to it. We told ourselves, well, it's like this, then let us just continue".

Mandla describes a woman who must be torn between her two roles