

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Wet on the Surface:

Rethinking the Concept of the Trailing Spouse

by

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ABSTRACT

The principal reason cited in the literature on overseas assignments for the failure of foreign postings is the inability of the employee's partner – the "trailing spouse" – to adapt to expatriate life, resulting in maladjustment, unhappiness, and an ignominious return home. Using ethnographic data gathered in Rabat, Morocco, this study attempts to assess the relative importance of a number of factors of adaptation cited in the expatriation literature.

It is concluded that the existing literature on overseas placements has become mired in a conceptual misunderstanding epitomised by the very opposition, "leading spouse" / "trailing spouse" and the passivity and lack of agency implied in the term "trailing spouse". If anything, in a typical expatriate household, the spouse of the employee is the more active partner in probing the environment and negotiating the family's relationship with the surrounding society and until this is recognised, our thinking about expatriation will be hampered.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with love and appreciation to my husband Ken Shupenia, who encouraged every phase of this research, from its nascence to final incarnation and every step in between. He merits much more approbation than I can express – most especially for his willingness to be my own “trailing spouse”.

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If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might better stay home. You are like a pebble thrown into water; you become wet on the surface, but are never part of the water. James Michener, Good Advice

1.0 Introduction

According to published figures between 16 and 40 percent of all expatriate assignments result in the return of the employee well before completion of the assignment (Black 1989, Tung 1981). These early returns are typically considered "failures" and are estimated to cost the companies involved between \$50,000 and \$5,000,000 U.S. each (Swaak 1997, Black and Gregersen 1991). This number does not include the indirect costs to Multinational Corporations (MNCs) of employees who do not return early, and yet who function at a low level of effectiveness because of problems relating to adjustment. "Brownouts", as these latter cases have been described, are estimated to be as high as 50 percent of all expatriate assignments in which the time requirement is successfully fulfilled (Black, 1990). As a result of "failed" assignments and "brownouts", MNCs can find themselves dealing with difficult to measure costs, for example, reputation loss of the MNC and damage to working relationships in the local area.

In addition to the MNCs "bottom line" perspective on the problem of business expatriates, there is the human side. The individual employee may also suffer loss of self-esteem and this may, in turn, undermine further career aspirations. Also, the marital stresses caused by expatriate assignments impose strains on marriages that could adversely affect job performance and eventually

lead to consequences ranging from substance abuse by either partner to marital breakdown. From this, it is clear that failed adjustments to a foreign posting constitute a very major expense to businesses, to say nothing of the human costs involved.

2.0 Expatriation Problem

2.1 Globalisation

Since the end of WWII more and more Canadian industries have moved from being exclusively involved in domestic operations to shifting their attention to the international arena. This trend has been accompanied and facilitated by corresponding economic, ideological, and cultural changes which are, for better or worse, summed up by the term 'globalisation'. A major aspect of globalisation, according to Gordon Laxer, includes "the internationalisation of production [which leads to] greatly increased mobility of capital and of transnational corporations" (1995:28). While globalisation has many far-reaching consequences, what is of primary concern to this proposal is the transfer of personnel, and by extension their families, that accompanies the mobility of these transnational corporations.

2.2 Financial and Emotional Impact

The emotional impact of international transfers on families and individual members of families can be overwhelming. Abandonment of day-to-day contact with established support systems becomes necessary and new ones need to be developed. In the interim, increased reliance upon family members to replace

this system can raise the stress levels of individuals who are themselves in need of increased support. As well, mundane logistical problems that accompany a move, such as the need to find a new residence, work out new financial arrangements, and the possibility of moving children from one school to another, increase the pressures on an already stressed and reduced emotional support system.

Families who undergo domestic relocations within their home country face similar problems. However, in international assignments, these difficulties can be compounded by a frustrating series of predicaments relating to cultural adjustment as well. Since expatriates are usually unaware of behaviours and attitudes of the new culture, they are oftentimes made to feel that their own norms and values are inadequate or boorish in the new context. These feelings can subsequently lead to confusion and helplessness that can, and often does, add to the already high stresses associated with the international relocation.

The financial aspects of an international transfer must also be considered. Some estimates suggest that "over 80 percent of all marriages in the United States will be dual-career partnerships by the end of 1995" (Harvey 1995). Although most transfers are financially advantageous to the "leading spouse" (a term I will use here to designate the spouse who receives the international placement), the "trailing spouse" (a term I will borrow from the literature to designate the partner of the leading spouse although I warn the reader in advance that my research calls into question the appropriateness of this term) is often faced with a choice of abandoning or putting on hold his or her own career.

Not only is the combined income of the family affected – often for the worse – but there is also a risk that this move will lead to the loss of a career or career momentum for the trailing spouse and with it a reduction in self confidence and autonomy.

3.0 Literature Survey

A review of the literature on international relocation reveals that, while this topic has increasingly become of interest to scholars, the main focus has been on the principal employee, rather than the trailing spouse. And this is in spite of the fact that it has been repeatedly reported that the number one reason for failure in expatriate assignments has been found to be the inability of the trailing spouse to adapt (Tung 1981, Harvey 1985, Black, 1991).

Most of the published research on the issue of expatriate adjustment falls into four main categories: (1) cross-cultural adjustment (Oberg 1960, Black and Mendenhall 1990), (2) individual differences in personality or behavioural characteristics (Sewell and Davidsen 1956, Hannigan 1990), (3) cross-cultural training (Tung 1982), and (4) literature that focus on socio-demographic characteristics of expatriates such as marital status, previous cross-cultural assignments, and social support network (Black 1990, Woytowich, 1992).

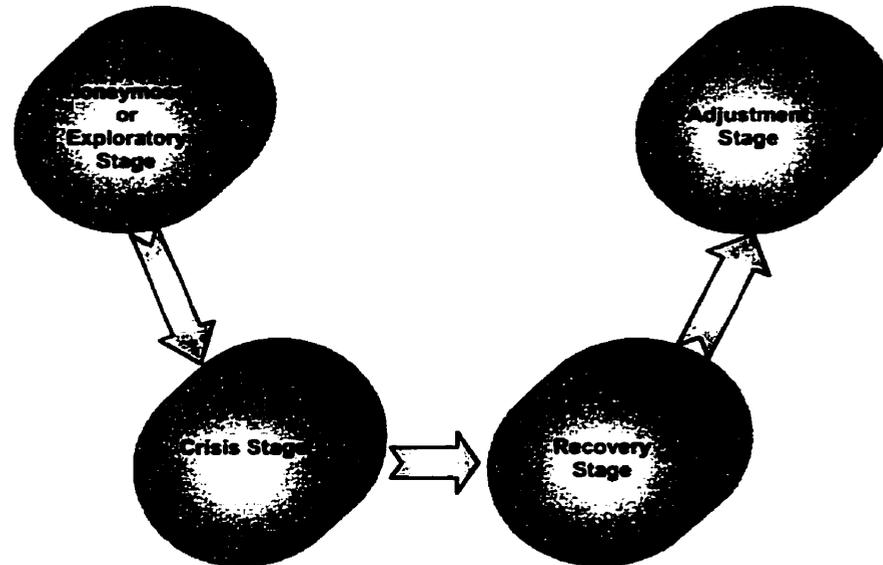
3.1 Cross-Cultural Adjustment

According to Black and Mendenhall (1990) the most understudied area in the cross-cultural relocation literature is in the domain of adjustment by the expatriate to the new cultural environment. The most likely reason for this lack of documentation is the inherent difficulty of defining the concept of adjustment and finding measures for it (Church 1982). Black and Mendenhall note that “[a]djusting to a new culture involves the gradual development of familiarity, comfort and proficiency regarding expected behaviour and the values and assumptions inherent in the new culture” (1990:118).

Early studies of cross-cultural adjustment perceived it as a unitary phenomenon and advanced the U-curve theory of adjustment (Lysgaard 1955, Oberg 1960, Grove and Torbiorn 1985). The U-curve theory traces the adaptation of expatriates through a four-stage process. The first stage is often identified as the “honeymoon stage” during which expatriates tend to experience feelings of euphoria. In this stage, everything in the new environment is exciting and intriguing. This honeymoon stage can last from a few days to several months, depending on individual circumstances, and the expatriate will tend to focus on cultural similarities between the home and host culture. This euphoric stage sooner or later gives way to the second stage of adjustment known as the “hostility or crisis stage”. This stage is generally triggered by problems encountered in the host culture that would not normally be encountered in the home setting. The focus of expatriates shifts from cultural similarities to cultural differences. Oberg describes this stage of adjustment as a crisis and suggests

that individuals who do not transcend the crisis “leave before [they] reach the stage of a nervous breakdown” (1960:178). Assuming that the expatriate does, eventually, learn to cope in the new environment, he or she will gradually enter the “recovery stage” with more or less awareness of the change depending on the individual. This stage is characterised by the individual becoming aware of “patterns of behaviour” that facilitate everyday activities which, in the previous stage, appeared to be overwhelming and unmanageable. The final stage in Oberg’s model is the “adjustment stage” when the expatriate, having coped with the crisis issues, becomes comfortable and functional within the new environment and even begins to appreciate the new “foods, drinks, habits and customs” (Oberg 1960:179) of the host nationals, (“the natives”).

Figure 1 – Stages of Culture Shock



Oberg, the great theoretician of “culture shock” described this phenomenon in pseudo-clinical terms, as a condition that progresses in a relatively predictable way, through a fixed sequence of stages, much like influenza. The implication is that, upon reaching the adjustment stage the ‘patient’ can be considered ‘cured’ and can expect to confidently function in the new environment with much the same self-assurance experienced in the home culture.

However, this one-dimensional approach to cross-cultural adjustment underestimates the variability of the phenomenon. Not only it is possible that many individuals revisit each of these stages during later stages of the cross-cultural experience, but it is debatable whether all or even most people adjust to

the host culture to the degree and in the sequence that this linear conception suggests.

More recent literature on the subject of cross-cultural adjustment has approached the issue as a multi-faceted one (Black and Stephens 1989, Black and Gregersen 1991). This literature suggests that expatriate adjustment to the new environment occurs across at least three distinct dimensions: “(1) adjustment to the new job, (2) adjustment to interacting with host nationals, and (3) adjustment to the general environment” (Black et al 1991:304). Since most trailing spouses do not work after accompanying their spouse on relocation to an international assignment (Stephens and Black 1988) they would probably not have to cope with the adjustment to a new job. This would, however, increase the pressure on the remaining two dimensions of their own adjustment. As well, according to a survey conducted by Black and Stephens “the spouse’s general adjustment is positively and significantly related to all facets of the expatriate’s adjustment” (1989:537). Black and Stephens phrasing of the situation suggests that the trailing spouse is essentially a passive participant in the cross-cultural experience, and unless the situation degenerates past the threshold of tolerance, will impassively occupy themselves at whatever activity is available to them. I would conclude from my, admittedly limited, field study that the adjustment (or lack thereof) of the trailing spouse could significantly affect the principal employee’s adjustment to their new job.

Another criticism of the multi-faceted approach lies in the application of the ‘U-curve’ theory of adjustment. The ‘U-curve’ theory postulates that adjustment

necessitates a dip in emotional and functional equilibrium and that people move through relatively predictable stages. Although later researchers have separated adjustment into various domains, they still apply the older one-dimensional and one directional hypothesis to the understanding of each domain.

3.2 Psychological and Behavioural Classification Studies

An examination of the literature on international adjustment reveals that relocating individuals do not all experience the same degree of difficulty in adjustment. This realisation led to psychological research in the 1950's that attempted to sort out specific "personality types" in terms of their ability to adapt into cross-cultural situations (Sewell and Davidsen 1956). According to Brein and David, who summarised this literature, this research revealed typologies that "appear to be as varied as the investigators themselves" (1971:222) and did not result in an identification of any single personality type that could easily manage adaptation into cross-cultural situations.

In the 1960's research shifted from identifying global personality types, to attempting to identify discrete "personality traits" that were most conducive to adjustment in cross-cultural situations. In a review of this literature undertaken by T.P. Hannigan, the traits that were most positively associated with successful cross-cultural adaptation were "patience, tolerance, courtesy, persistence with flexibility, energy, self-confidence, maturity and self esteem" (1990:107). Traits that were identified as counterproductive to cross-cultural interaction were "perfectionism, rigidity, dogmatism, ethnocentrism, dependent anxiety, task-

oriented behaviour, narrow-mindedness and self-centred role behaviors" (Hannigan 1990:107). Critics of this research pointed out that there was no reason to assume that all traits identified need to be embodied in an expatriate which would automatically lead to successful assignment completion (Abe and Wiseman 1983, Woytowich 1992). As well, such positive traits are usually considered necessary for successful interaction within the home culture and not simply for successful interaction in cross-cultural situations.

A third psychological approach to understanding the process of cross-cultural adjustment then emerged. This approach investigated the specific behaviours that were expected to promote successful cross-cultural interaction and concentrated mainly on interpersonal skills and social behaviours (Ruben and Kealey 1979). Behaviours identified as important in cross-cultural adaptation were:

empathy, respect, role behaviour flexibility, orientation to knowledge [awareness of differing world views], interaction posture [interpersonal skills that demonstrate cultural tolerance], interaction management [ability to sensitively, and accurately assess the needs and desires of another during communication] and tolerance for ambiguity (Ruben and Kealey 1979:15).

In her review of the literature Woytowich points out "there appears [sic] to be many inconclusive and contradictory results that surface when the behavioural approach is used" (1992:23).

More recently another psychological approach to the issue of cross-cultural adaptation has attempted to integrate both personality traits and behavioural characteristics of expatriates. This integration resulted in the

identification of three skills considered by Mitchell R. Hammer necessary for successful cross-cultural adaptation. These skills are: "(a) the ability to manage psychological stress; (b) the ability to effectively communicate; and (c) the ability to establish interpersonal relationships" (1987:65). Hammer concluded that these three skills are considered important to expatriates and points out that they are "consistently documented in research as important to sojourners' effective functioning in a foreign culture" (1987:84).

3.3 Cross-Cultural Training

Many authors in the literature of cross-cultural adjustment of the 1980's and 90's have suggested that effective training programs for expatriates could be developed to facilitate cross-cultural interactions (Tung 1982, Black and Mendenhall 1990, Black and Gregersen 1991). These training programs fall into six major types:

"environmental briefing (information about the geography, climate, housing, schools); cultural orientation (information about the cultural institutions, value systems of host country); culture assimilator (brief episodes describing intercultural encounters); language training; sensitivity training to develop attitudinal flexibility; and field experience, wherein trainees are actually sent to the country of assignment or a "micro-culture" nearby"(Tung 1982:65).

According to Tung, only 32 percent of U.S. MNC's offer any kind of pre-departure training for expatriates (1981) and this training often lasts less than four hours (Black and Gregersen 1991). Additionally, over 90 percent of all MNCs did not offer any cross-cultural or pre-departure training programs for either the trailing spouse or dependants (Black and Stephens 1989). This was in spite of the

knowledge that the number one reason for early return of an expatriate from an assignment was the failure of the trailing spouse to adapt (Tung 1981, Harvey 1985, Black 1991). In a 1997 survey of 650 managers and their trailing spouses, respondents identified training as the most inadequate area of services offered by MNCs (Harvey 1997).

3.4 A New Direction: Towards an Ethnography of Expatriation

Although the various psychological, behavioural and educational approaches discussed so far shed some light on the question of expatriate adjustment, they all miss one essential point. Expatriation is a social and cultural process and, of necessity, needs to be studied in situ, just as one would study family processes or small-group dynamics. Previous research has invariably used survey research to elicit data for analysis. To my knowledge, not a single ethnographic study exists in which a social scientist has studied people in real situations as they struggle and coped with the problems and adjustments. For better or worse, this thesis project jumps in to fill this breach.

One interesting example of how this lack of research has hindered our understanding centres on a factor that has been identified as "previous cross-cultural experience". Prior exposure to cross-cultural situations has been considered an important element in subsequent expatriate adaptations because individuals were expected to have formed "abstractions and generalizations based on past cross-cultural adjustments [and could then] extrapolate and apply these generalizations to the new adjustment situation" (Black and Stephens

1989:532). Interestingly however, survey results revealed that while previous international experience did appear to facilitate expatriate adjustment to the work environment (Black and Gregersen 1991), the adjustment of the trailing spouse was not affected by previous international experiences (Black and Stephens 1989). Moreover, these studies go on to suggest that whatever interaction patterns individuals had developed in previous cross-cultural environments were not of use outside the work environment, and adaptation for the trailing spouse cannot be expected to develop from “abstractions and generalizations” developed in a different environment.

As mentioned previously, the influence of the spouse has been considered recently as having the greatest impact on the adjustment of the expatriate to cross-cultural situations. To corroborate this position, a study of the selection and training procedures of MNCs in the US, Western Europe and Japan, managers representing 144 MNCs responded to a questionnaire that asked, among other things, for “the most important reasons for an expatriate’s failure to function effectively in a foreign environment” (Tung 1982:67). Both the U.S. and Western European MNCs identified the failure of the trailing spouse to adapt to the physical or cultural differences of the host country as the number one reason for the failure of an expatriate assignment. Among the Japanese respondents, the failure of the spouse to adapt was given as the fifth most important reason but, according to Tung, this ordering of importance is not unanticipated owing to “the role and status to which Japanese culture relegates the spouse”(1982:68).

It appears that the adjustment of the trailing spouse can be closely related to the mental attitude held towards the international relocation prior to departure (Black and Stephens 1989). A positive mental attitude toward the new international assignment held by the trailing spouse was found to be accompanied by self-initiated research in the culture of the proposed host country (Black and Gregersen 1991) and might also be accompanied by a determination, after arrival, to work hard at adjusting to the new culture (Black and Gregersen 1991).

Some research has suggested that, upon arrival in the host culture, trailing spouses tend to experience isolation which can lead to both domestic disharmony and an inability to adjust to the new environment (Harvey 1985, Black and Gregersen 1991). Social support networks provided by Host Nationals (HNs) or an experienced expatriate that might alleviate the isolation of the trailing spouse are often absent. This lack of social support can result in an early return to the home culture by both the trailing spouse and the expatriate employee (Black and Gregersen 1991).

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Research Site

Based on what I had discovered in the literature, I concluded that the single greatest contribution I, as an anthropologist, could make to the field was to conduct a broad-based ethnographic study, questioning as many trailing (and leading) spouses as I could study within a limited period of time. My concern

was not to prove or disprove a particular hypothesis, but rather to try to prioritise the gamut of factors which the literature suggests are in play in an expatriate situation.

Research for this thesis was conducted over a three month period, from mid-September to mid-December 1998. Rabat, the capital city of Morocco, was chosen as the research site for two reasons. A substantial number of expatriates live in the capital city as staff and family of various embassies, specifically (for an Anglophone researcher) the Canadian, British and American embassies. The availability of a reasonably large population of expatriate families available for study was, of course, the major consideration when determining the selection of this research site. The second reason for choosing Rabat as the research site was the level of perceived cultural difference between the home and host societies, a concept identified in adjustment literature as 'culture novelty'. If the country is insufficiently 'novel', the sorts of stresses observable might not be sufficiently in evidence. If a country is inordinately 'novel' (Nepal, for instance) it might be what is called a "hardship posting" with the result that the locally available expatriates may have been highly selected and experienced and, hence, unrepresentative of the general run of expatriates. For purposes of this study, the society to which the expatriates are assigned required that it exhibit a medium degree of exoticism.

4.2 Sample

Although access to the expatriate community proved somewhat difficult to establish, once the initial connection had been made I gained access to the wider community by using the snowball sampling technique. The snowball sampling technique requires that the researcher contact “key individuals and ask them to name others who would be likely candidates” for the research (Bernard 1995:97). Most of the participants in my study were British, although there were several Americans, one Spaniard and one Portuguese married to an Irish National. I have, of course, changed the names and in many cases the ethnicity of my informants in order to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality.

The focus of this research project was on trailing spouses, so ex hypothesi, single expatriates were outside the scope of this study. The units of study were families, at a minimum a couple, but in many cases a couple with children. The size of this intensive research sample was 10 families but over the course of this study I met and spoke to at least 100 other expatriates.

4.3 Procedures

4.3.1. Participant Observation

The most important part of this research project was the participant observation portion and informal interviews, or just ‘hanging out’ in the company of my research subjects that comprised the bulk of the initial data collection. Contact with trailing spouses resulted in shared informal activities such as luncheons, teas, dinners, restaurant dining, shopping, sightseeing, walking, the

weekly social clubs and a surprising number of volunteer activities. Questions that dealt with an individual's comfort level with host nationals, their ability to accomplish day to day activities, standard-of-living concerns, contentment (or lack thereof) with relocation, as well as concerns about re-entry to the home culture elicited information that led to the development of more specific questions. Initially I attempted to tape record my discussions, interview-style, but the recorder appeared to make informants nervous and the results could be more easily jotted down in my notebook, so I abandoned the recordings and relied upon my contextual observations which were recorded extensively in field journals.

4.3.2 Interviews

The second portion of this research project was developed following preliminary analysis of the qualitative data. Interview questions that were asked during these unstructured interviews elicited more contextual and extended perspectives on topics and issues, which I now recognised, were of central importance. Interviews were, whenever possible, conducted in locations selected by the trailing spouse, most often their home, but occasionally in a local café. Most of the interviews began with what Spradley calls "Grand Tour Interview questions" which elicited information on their history, and based on this data it was decided whether or not to include them in the intensive research sample.

4.3.3 Questionnaires

Once a relationship had been established, and agreement to participate in this research project was obtained, questionnaires were given to expatriates. The first questionnaire was a Community Integration Index (see Appendix A), which was designed by me in order to try to gauge the level of community integration felt by individuals (not families). This questionnaire has two parts, the first part dealing with pre-relocation integration asking that all questions be considered to refer to the six month period prior to relocation. The second part of the Community Integration Index deals with post-relocation integration. This questionnaire was intended to capture lifestyle changes, such as choice of entertainment subject matter and whether time spent on self-entertaining activities increases or decreases. Also this questionnaire seeks to yield a quantitative measure of the changes in participation in organised group activities, and whether time spent in family activities increases or decreases.

The second questionnaire was one developed by J. S. Black and G. Stephens in order to measure the adaptation of expatriates and also assess the influence of the trailing spouse on expatriate assignments (see Appendix B). This questionnaire addresses expatriate reaction to living conditions, entertainment opportunities, socialising with host nationals, and interacting with host nationals on a day to day basis. As well, participants are asked to rate how different the host culture was from the home culture. Since the Black and Stephens questionnaire had been used in other studies, I used it unaltered so that results would be commensurate with those already obtained and published,

despite certain reservations I came to feel about its coverage. I intend to go into more detail on these reservations in Sections 8.3 and 8.4.

There was a discrepancy in the return rate of the questionnaires between the leading and trailing spouse. Nine of the ten trailing spouses returned their Black and Stephens questionnaires, but two of the leading spouses did not. As well, the same nine trailing spouses returned their Community Integration Indexes but four of the leading spouses did not. As one informant and her husband did not fill out their questionnaires, I used the questionnaires from an additional couple who had not been able to participate in the in-depth interview portion of the research in order to make up the numbers in the quantitative portion of this thesis.

4.3.4 Letters and Notes

A research technique that was not anticipated but which became an important source of information was several informants' willingness to write down in letters or notes their thoughts and evaluations of the trailing spouse condition. As well, informants occasionally wanted to elaborate on topics that had been discussed during our informal interviews. These communications varied in detail and length from one or two lines scribbled in the margins of their questionnaires to correspondence as long as ten hand-written pages. Some letters were received before my research ended and I was able to follow up with face to face questions; others were mailed to me after I left Morocco. I continue to correspond with informants and have asked for clarification on a number of

points dealing with this research since my departure. Any material that appears in quotations and is not referenced are either quotes from my journal, quotes from interviews or direct quotes from letters and notes given to me by my informants.

5.0 An Alternative Perspective from Symbolic Anthropology

In contrast to the one-dimensional 'U-curve' model of culture shock theory, Mary Douglas' work in symbolic anthropology offers a perspective on the twin issues of cultural disorientation and adjustment that work well when transferred to a cross-cultural environment. Although her work was not part of the original thesis proposal, it is a perspective that I found to be repeatedly helpful in making sense of various case studies. Douglas' work on pollution and taboo proposes a method that deals with thinking or behaviour of individuals during the process of cultural disorientation, and by applying the principles of her Grid and Group theory to the problem of adjustment I think we acquire a window into the situation of the trailing spouse in adaptation.

One key tenet of the approach of most symbolic anthropologists is the idea that culture "does not exist apart from individuals but rather lies in their interpretations of events and the things around them" (McGee 1996:430). Consequently any analysis of cultural disorientation and adjustment needs to be considered from the micro-level perspective of the individual. Fortunately these theories lend themselves equally well to the global or macro-level analysis of culture.

5.1 Anomalies and Ambiguities

Cultural disorientation in particular can be investigated using Douglas' insights on pollution and taboo. Douglas believed that all individuals have a compulsion to create order out of chaos. This compulsion comes from the need to "impose system on an inherently untidy experience" (Douglas, 1966:4) and "[i]n a chaos of shifting impressions each of us constructs a stable world" (Douglas, 1966:37).

In order to construct this stable world people socially and collectively create categories of thought that they use as a framework, or schema, in order to interpret their surroundings. These frameworks are partially learnt in childhood through enculturation, and are also partially developed independently, which is the reason why enculturation is never complete from generation to generation. Everything from solid objects to social relations, metaphysical understandings to physical needs are included in this framework. Moreover, this classification process does not categorise phenomena in a dispassionate way; indeed, the process of categorisation frequently triggers moral connotations that guide the individual's response to phenomena, and things that end up on the boundaries or in the margins trigger powerful socially induced emotions in the individual.

No matter how elaborate and detailed the classification system, anomalies, "an element which does not fit a given set or series" (Douglas, 1966:38) and ambiguities, "a character of statements capable of two interpretations" (Douglas, 1966:38) keep cropping up. The reason for this is that

cultural categories are discontinuous and, in order to keep them separate and discrete in our minds, we must exaggerate their internal homogeneity and their external difference from one another. In other words, these classification systems greatly oversimplify nature that Mary Douglas considers to be continuous in most cases. In the case of a trailing spouse suddenly immersed in an entirely new culture, one that sports a whole new system of classifications, a method for dealing with anomalies and ambiguities must be found.

Douglas suggests there are five strategies that people use to come to terms with things or events that do not conform to preconceived categories or, in other words, five ways in which they “manage” anomalies and ambiguities.

- (1) The first strategy is to justify or “settle for one or another interpretation” (Douglas 1966:40) that is, mentally redefining the thing or event from one phenomenon into another, more acceptable thing. An example of this strategy would be the reaction of healthcare workers in the western world when confronted with the reality of babies who are born hermaphrodite. “Is it a boy or a girl?” is often the first question asked when a baby is born and consternation ensues when the answer is unclear. Hospital personnel are pressured to resolve this “anomaly” and assign the child either a male or female identity.
- (2) The second strategy, according to Douglas, is to physically remove or avoid the inconvenient phenomenon, thereby eliminating the difficulty of categorisation. Returning to the example of hermaphrodite babies,

hospitals routinely surgically reshape genitals in order to enforce the assigned sex, often before the infant is discharged.

- (3) A third stratagem is to react to such anomalous experiences by identifying them as dangerous and not to be trifled with. Indeed, many medical practitioners are reluctant to discuss hermaphrodites and the procedures that accompany the reinforcement of the assigned sex. In complex modern cultures these things are defined as being in the realm of specialised knowledge and therefore not available to the general public.
- (4) A fourth approach is to make the anomalies serve as moral boundaries that contrast and confirm the more acceptable version. Hermaphrodites, when they are acknowledged at all, are pitied and shunned, and are often considered “mutants” that highlight the “normal” male/female dichotomy in western society.
- (5) Fifth and finally, “ambiguous symbols can be used ... to enrich meaning or to call attention to other levels of existence” (Douglas, 1966:40). In some Native American societies hermaphrodites are considered to be complete human beings who contain the correct balance of both male and female characteristics that are required to make the perfect person and for that reason, in these societies hermaphrodites may fulfil the role of shaman or healer.

The trailing spouse in cross-cultural situations is often confronted with ambiguity and anomalies that threaten hard-won and defended systems of

classifications and in one extraordinary event an informant of mine encountered an anomaly that triggered all five of the previously identified responses.

This informant, Lauren, discovered under her back door mat a small bag full of some “black, sticky, noxious” substance that she could not identify. Lauren was concerned because she knew that it was not hers and when she asked her children they seemed quite puzzled by its presence. She did not make much of it at the time but she did ask her day-time *gardien*, (a host national who is a sort of combination gardener, security man and garage door attendant) if it belonged to him. Hussan not only denied ownership but seemed horrified at its presence, although he tried to disguise his reaction. She then asked her assistant Faouzia if she knew anything about the article. Faouzia also denied ownership, but she did reluctantly offer that it looked like a ‘black magic bag’; a *khensha dyāl sihr aswad*, however she had no idea how it could have surfaced under the mat, and explained to Lauren that only people who are a bit unstable “do black magic”.

Not surprisingly this explanation distressed Lauren – not just the idea that an unstable person might have hostile intentions toward her and her family, but also because it meant that someone had to have access to her home, which meant successfully by-passing the *gardien*’s security.

Lauren was sufficiently disturbed by this matter that she had the contents of the bag analysed by the embassy’s Drug Enforcement Division. When the results came back, they were negative for any toxic or illegal substances but this did not satisfy Lauren. However, something Faouzia had said seemed to jog loose an apparently unrelated memory in Lauren’s mind.

Faouzia had mentioned that black magic was often used to influence people and their behaviour. Their night-time *gardien* Abdul had recently asked for a pay increase and been denied. It was only a few days after this event that Lauren discovered the suspicious bag. After some intense speculation she concluded that it was probably Abdul who owned the black magic bag. The proximity of the *gardien's* apartment to the back door would have given him easy access to the scene, and this could also explain why Hussan, his co-worker, was so horrified by the sight of the bag. Hussan might have known how Abdul felt about the denial of his request for a pay increase and was disturbed at the evidence of the action that was taken.

At the time of this experience Lauren and her family had been living in Rabat for three years and coping with anomalies and ambiguities was a fact of life. Nevertheless the black magic bag provoked a reaction far out of proportion to its actual threat. It was not the existence of the article that so profoundly disturbed Lauren but where it was discovered; inside her home. Lauren had invested time and effort creating a space, a home, in which her classification system or schema was repeatedly reconfirmed and hence, strengthened. The surreptitious insertion of the black magic bag into her home invaded her space and challenged her schema and "that which is not with it, part of it and subject to its laws, is potentially against it" (Douglas, 1966:4)

This is what prompted the recourse to all five of Mary Douglas' strategies for dealing with ambiguity or anomalies, the threat to Lauren's schema. First, Lauren asked her children if they had put the bag under the backdoor mat in an

attempt to find an interpretation of this anomaly with which she could be comfortable. Second, Lauren physically removed the offending object and made sure it was assessed by a group of experts who could apply their specialised knowledge to discover if the item in some way threatened her family. Third, since she was unsure of the intent of the black magic bag and its mysterious appearance inside her house, as it had in effect breached her defences; she labelled it as dangerous, even though scientific and legal experts had pronounced it harmless. Fourth, because the black magic bag was identified as Moroccan, it reinforced her assessment that her own western culture was “safe” and by contrast, Moroccan culture was irrationally dangerous and one that threatened an orderly, coherent, logical western way of life. In this manner the black magic bag highlighted and confirmed her idea of a socially acceptable “normal” culture. Yet paradoxically, and fifth, in her recitation of the incident Lauren, whether she was conscious of this or not, was calling “attention to other levels of existence” (Douglas, 1966:40) in this case the spiritualism and magic inherent in the “alternate reality” of Morocco.

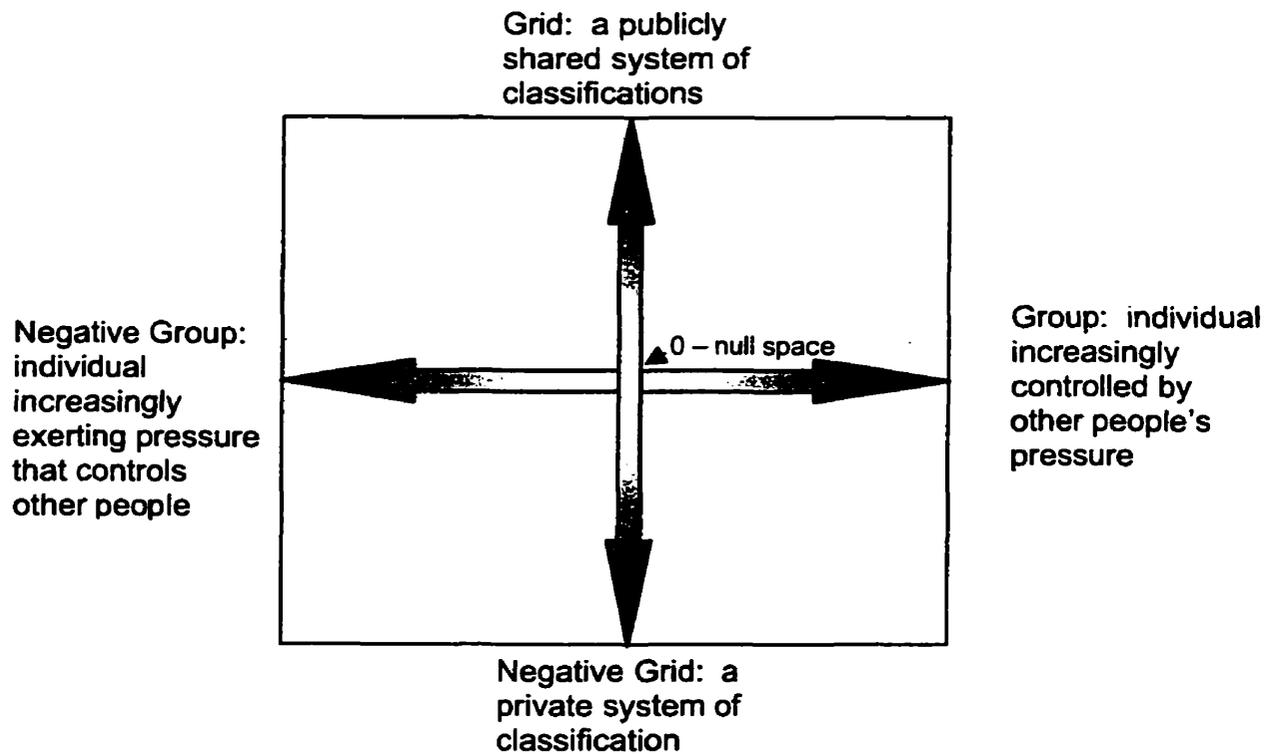
Ultimately Lauren settled on the first method of dealing with anomalies; by mentally redefining the phenomena from an unknown evil into Abdul’s attempt to attain a raise she was able to arrive at an interpretation with which she was comfortable. Although this interpretation resolved the incident for Lauren, it did not erase the influence of the application of the other four methods had on her understanding of Moroccan culture.

5.2 Grid and Group

Mary Douglas' analysis of how individuals cope with anomalies and ambiguities provides an insight into the management methods people use to cope with cultural disorientation. To model the process of cultural adjustment, on the other hand, requires a more comprehensive approach, and this is very largely provided by Douglas' theory of "Grid and Group". Douglas was able to craft a simple and elegant method to provide "a formula for classifying relations" (1970:viii) that was not affected by political, industrial or ecological variations.

Grid and Group is best explained by dividing a space into four equal quadrants. Where the quadrants converge is zero, a null space from which all other processes grow. The horizontal division separating the upper and lower region represents Group, which is "any structured group that is a group to the extent that its members know one another very well" (Douglas, 1973:77). The space to the left of zero designates the level of social control that an individual can exert over others, while space to the right of zero signifies the degree of social control to which individuals are subject – the further to the right, the more control.

Figure 2 – Grid and Group



Grid, the vertical division, can be defined as “the scope and coherent articulation of a system of classification” (Douglas, 1973:82). Rising from zero, grid catalogues an increasingly ordered or structured publicly accepted classification system. Order, here, refers to the existence of organised, abstract, high-order principles, to which all else in the corpus of belief can be subsumed. Monotheistic religions, in which a high god unites all belief, would be examples of “high” order, whereas syncretistic folk belief systems, in which everything in reality has its own spirit, but the spirits have no regular relationships among

themselves, would exemplify “low” order. Likewise, the further one moves below the horizontal centreline, the higher the level or order of classification, but here the classification is a “private” one – the belief system of an individual.

Thus, the area above the horizontal line is inevitably the “area of public classification.” (Douglas 1973:84). The upper right quadrant is the area reserved for “establishment” society, the ‘normal’ culture that the majority of people accept. The upper left quadrant contains the individuals who provide leadership to the society, those who impose moral or physical coercion on the masses occupying dominant society. However, since society is never completely in synchrony with itself, the individuals in this area may occupy this space only for a brief period; the TV minister on Sundays, the social critic in the newspaper, the radio personality who imposes his or her distinctive opinions on establishment society, all these individuals fleetingly affect normal culture but sink into the undifferentiated masses once they descend from their soap box; although sometimes their opinions are adopted by mainstream society.

Below the horizontal division, in the lower right quadrant is the realm of small counter-cultural groups within society, the area in which people create their own categories and rules, in effect their own self-contained world. This space is reserved for those groups who do not fit into normal, established society. Counter-culture groups such as the Branch Davidians, Heaven’s Gate and the Aryan Nations would occupy this area, groups whose beliefs vary so far from the norm that normal society shuns them and labels their beliefs as dangerous. This region also encompasses those isolated individuals who have no social power

and are not part of a group; the loners, the homeless and the mentally challenged. This is the zone for those who reflect anti-establishment society and who "march to a different drummer".

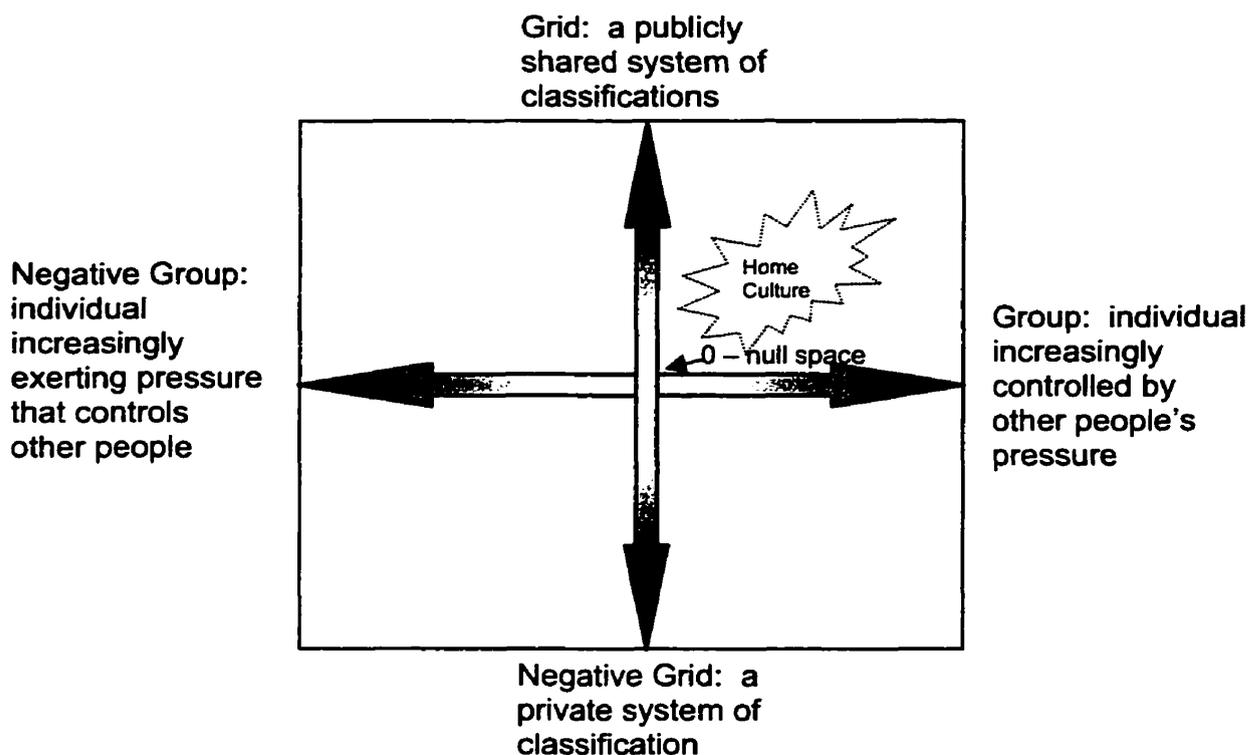
The lower left quadrant contains those people who lead the counter-cultures; David Koresh, the leader of the Branch Davidians would occupy this area. These leaders create schemas that are more or less ordered and which are so compelling they manage to convince others to subscribe their classification system. In view of the fact that they developed the schema, these leaders tend to become invested with ultimate moral authority over those who have enrolled in their system. Unlike the dominant society where descending from the soap box, or being defeated in an election curbs a leader's influence, these individuals sustain their authority over others persistently, only relinquishing their power when they, or their followers die, and in certain cases, it may be perpetuated in a cult.

An important aspect to this approach of understanding social processes is Douglas' contention that there is a correlation between levels of grid and levels of group. As shared classification systems become more defined and elaborate, group pressures increase in order to impose conformity on individual members. The reverse also holds true, should group pressures decrease shared classification systems will weaken.

In order to establish where the western trailing spouse fits in this graph of Grid and Group, it is necessary to gain a general understanding of the home culture. Western society can be conceived as a rather irregularly shaped bubble

located midway in the upper right quadrant. Here individuals are more or less constrained by their society; they occasionally exert social pressure on others, notwithstanding that, at another level personal liberty is prized, and – as members of society – they share a more or less well defined system of classifications.

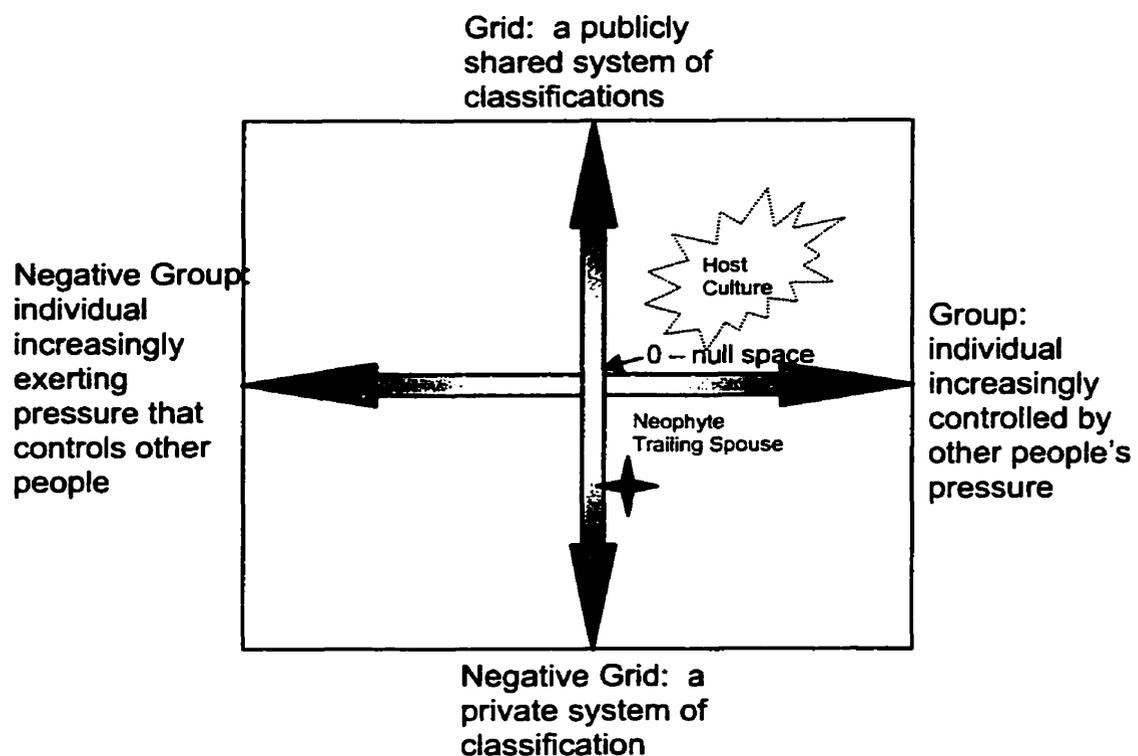
Figure 3 – Location of Home Culture



When a western trailing spouse moves to a new culture they shift from an environment in which they can expect to understand and share the public classification system, into one in which their mid-range complex categorisation system has suddenly become “private”. This results in an abrupt relocation of

the individual from a point somewhere above the horizontal line, to a location a comparable distance down the Grid line. Since presumably, few if any individuals in the host culture share their classification system; individuals (particularly in urban settings) can become isolated and find communication difficult.

Figure 4 – Location of Neophyte Trailing Spouse



At the same time the individuals position on the Group line shifts quite close to zero. In this "position near ... zero... the thinker does not see his fellow human beings as the principal determinants of social life" (Douglas, 1973:92). Anomie "the condition in which society provides individuals with little moral

guidance" (Macionis, 1994:664) prevails, and can lead to "total confusion with no meaning whatever, ... the suicides doubt ... or the mystic's moment of dissociation" (Douglas, 1973:83).

Adjustment is very challenging at this point since in order to participate in social life the individual must not only find a way to communicate and a group to communicate to, but also learn the new, public, classification system of the host culture. Since most trailing spouses can expect the traditional three to five year cross-cultural assignment (Newsbreak 2000), they will not expend the enormous amounts of energy required to adapt to the host culture so long as a reasonable alternative is available. They will tend to expand and modify to varying degrees their existing classification system, but will not go to the trouble of developing a parallel one. A parallel classification system would be developed only as a last resort.

5.3 The Expatriate Culture

So how does the individual adapt to living in a host culture? The simple answer is: they don't. Most trailing spouses find it imperative to make contact with other people from a western culture, other expatriates who, nominally at least, share the same system of classification. Together these expatriates build a *separate community*, a multi-cultural one, but one that shares a recognisable classification system and is not a part of the host culture.

The expatriate community in a city like Rabat is not a single homogeneous community made up of people from a multiplicity of countries. There is no place,

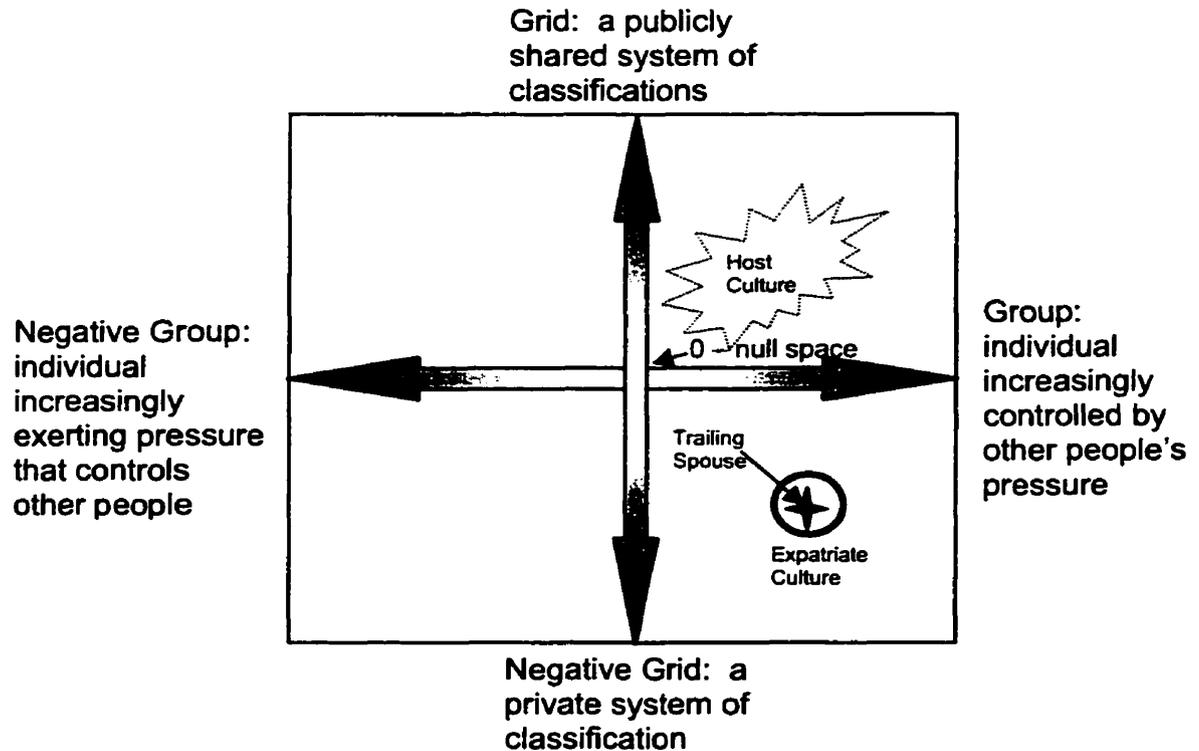
for example, where the entire expatriate community assembles as a body at a single time. Instead, there appear to be a number of different expatriate sub-communities co-existing and to some extent, overlapping within the surrounding Moroccan urban society, loosely linked by the fact of their otherness in the Moroccan context, and by the broadly similar activities (diplomacy, business) which brought them there. The boundaries between the various expatriate sub-communities give the impression that they are circumscribed by language, but language was by no means the only barrier that divided the expatriate communities, although it was the most obvious. There was a large U.S. population living in Rabat and although they shared the same language with English and some Canadian expatriates, there was a clear divide between the two groups reflecting the special political and economic role the USA has played in Morocco since the end of World War II (Zunes 1998).



Plate 1 – Tea with trailing spouses on a Friday afternoon

In general, the larger the national group, the more defined its boundaries and the more isolated it becomes from the host culture, with the predictable result that any adaptation that occurs will be to the expatriate community and not the host culture.

Figure 5 – Expatriate Culture, Host Culture and The Neophyte Trailing Spouse



The phenomenon of adaptation to the expatriate culture, as opposed to the host culture, helps to explain earlier research results that suggest previous cross-cultural experience is often not an accurate predictor of successful adaptation (Black and Stephens 1989) as previously mentioned in Section 3.4 of the literature survey. Individuals who adjust to the expatriate culture rather than the host culture will find adaptation difficult in situations where an expatriate culture does not exist or is hard to access.

There is another aspect to adaptation to the expatriate community that cannot be overlooked. Individuals in expatriate communities tend to be relatively

“nomadic” with a regular rhythm of departures of old members after a few years or so, and the arrival of new ones. There is a steady influx of neophyte trailing spouses; people who need help adjusting to their new environment. In Rabat a community group developed a handbook, The Great Rabat Cope Book (or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Rabat) an invaluable “compendium of customs, commercial transactions, shopping, eating, getting about and getting around and lots of other useful information squeezed into one tiny volume” (1:1995) (see Appendix D) in order to assist new trailing spouses become familiar with their new environment. However, useful as the handbook was, it worked best when it complemented the personal contact provided by role models or confidantes. As long as the expatriate community provided a role model or confidante for trailing spouses, the difficulties they faced in their adjustment process were reduced. As time passes, these trailing spouses become familiar with the new environment and are willing to offer help to even newer trailing spouses. By the very act of articulating their own understanding of their new classification system they enhance and expand it. Moving from the role of student into that of teacher, the trailing spouse finds meaning and hierarchical status that can facilitate the adjustment process by offering a new and gratifying role – as an “old hand” who can help out young and less experienced expatriates.

Mary Douglas’ famous graph forces us into another useful insight, which is obvious, but which tends to be obscured, particularly in the “culture shock” literature, namely that even though expatriates share a classification system they

are still divergent from the host environment. Since expatriates do not share the publicly-held system of classification and yet they are a group that exerts social control, both on each other, and on host nationals, the expatriate culture would be located in the lower right quadrant of the graph, the area designated as the location for counter-cultures. This is a somewhat disconcerting revelation given that the majority of expatriates would have been relatively high-functioning members of normative society in their home culture, the upper right quadrant of Mary Douglas' graph and such a shift calls for a radical re-evaluation of accepted reality.

5.3.1 Social Control

There is another difference the new expatriate culture has from the home culture: more than just the shift from a publicly to privately held system of classification, is the amount of deviation in appearance and behaviour that will be tolerated by the in-group. Instead of the irregularly shaped bubble of western society where tolerance for strange appearance and behaviour is moderately high, the expatriate counter-culture is now rather small, its boundaries more defined, and its classification system is more discrete. In other words, in order to be a bona fide member of the expatriate society, appearance and behaviour must conform closely to its evolved norm, a norm that individuals would not be expected to hew so closely to in the home society. Social control is stronger in the new expatriate culture than the home culture and the location of the expatriate

community on the Grid and Group graph moves down and to the right of the lower right quadrant.

Douglas argues that social control can be incited by challenges to four structures that could be seen to threaten the classification system of a community.

The first [threat] is danger pressing on external boundaries; the second, danger from transgressing the internal lines of the system; the third, danger in the margins of the lines. The fourth is danger from internal contradiction. (Douglas, 1966:124 emphasis mine)

Depending on the intensity of each of these stressors, they could trigger a commensurate response by the group to reinforce group solidarity, restore conformity, or maintain conventionality. Pressure on external boundaries is of course the classic condition which promotes cohesiveness within the group; transgressing internal lines can likewise produce social pressure to conform; danger in the margins of the lines can result in rejection of membership and danger from internal contradictions could also lead to expulsion from the group as inadvertently calling attention to these contradictions highlights inconsistencies in classifications systems which are held to be consistent. The common denominator in all these stressors is that they all lead to an increased awareness of the group tenets, with pressure on individuals to ritually reaffirm their membership, or, in some cases, the separation of certain members from the group. Following are some examples from my field notes.

5.3.1.1 External Boundaries

One example drawn from my field diaries of how perceived threats to external boundaries can encourage group cohesiveness within the expatriate community was the uneasy suspicion prevalent that everything that was said or done was being judged and weighed by some grim external authority. This concern was so prevalent that on one occasion my husband and I were actually warned not to patronise certain coffee shops, because “the tables were set too close together”. According to this informant “more Moroccans speak English than you would think and they would be happy to listen in on your conversation because they are very curious”. Since many interviews for this study were conducted in coffee shops, there was ample opportunity to assess the validity of this claim. It is unclear whether it was the warning against eavesdropping host nationals or the reality of their interest, but subsequent to this comment all host nationals suddenly appeared to be unduly interested in my activities. Thus the warning had its desired effect – the recognition of dissimilarity between the expatriate and the host national and the strengthening of external boundaries. A suspicion I had not formerly had on my own was implanted, and, from that point onward, my awareness of eavesdropping was heightened.

5.3.1.2 Transgressing Internal Lines

Max Gluckman has maintained that both gossip and scandal “maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups” (1963:308) or in Mary Douglas language, gossip functions to maintain the internal lines of a community. In

Rabat, gossip was undeniably the principal form of social control used to apply pressure on non-conforming expatriates who transgressed internal lines of appropriate behaviour. One expatriate was reputed to have abandoned a spouse in the home country and then to have blatantly developed a relationship with another expatriate. The actual facts of the situation were never established, but months after the two expatriates had 'normalised' their relationship by getting married the 'scandal' was still a topic of conversation.

While the two expatriates involved in this relationship never discussed their somewhat unconventional courtship, it is interesting that both of them were among those who cautioned me concerning the danger of "gossip" and how "gossip" was rampant within the community. They blamed various groups for generating this "gossip", ranging from locals who socialised with expatriates, to host national servants, to the "bored housewife" with nothing better to do, nevertheless both considered "gossip" to be pervasive and inevitably damaging.

5.3.1.3 Danger in the Margins

Gaining access to the Rabat expatriate community to conduct research proved a difficult and often exasperating process. Indeed, after almost four weeks of frustrating phone calls, false starts and fruitless meetings, changing the thesis topic was becoming an enticing option. Fortunately access was eventually granted, but subsequent analysis of the situation with the aid of the Mary Douglas model provides an insight into the social process that created this frustrating state of affairs.

The expatriate society in Rabat is a bounded community and entry into it requires crossing the external boundary; from starting out as an outsider, to becoming a member of the select company, one of the in-group. The more difficult the "initiation" into the in-group, the more its "grid" is insinuated into the consciousness of the aspiring member and the greater the hold of the "group" over the member. Individuals can languish in this threshold indefinitely until an accredited member sponsors them. There is energy in these margins, suspicion of the unknown, awareness of danger that permitting the crossing of the boundary could pose. Most people would hesitate to take the risk of introducing a potentially unstable element into such a bounded community and consequently without sponsorship access is problematical.

Luckily for the fate of my research, perseverance managed to overcome such vigilance, and it was possible to establish contact and develop relationships with people who were willing to share their trials and tribulations as well as their successes as trailing spouses in an Islamic country.

5.3.1.4 Internal Contradiction

An example of how internal contradictions in the shared classification system can affect the adaptation of the trailing spouse was an experience related to me by another of my informants, Nico. Nico, a Portuguese man married to an Irish woman, felt that he would have no problem adapting to the expatriate culture in Morocco. He had lived in England for some time prior to their transfer and he had had no trouble either finding work or interacting with local people.

Immediately after their move to Morocco, Nico attempted to find work in his area of expertise, which was film production. Unfortunately his weak French and the lack of demand for his specialised job skills meant that he did not find anything satisfactory.

Eventually he decided that since work was not available, he would spend his time more productively helping to advance his wife's career. He concluded that he could best accomplish this by fitting in with the British expatriate community in Rabat and consequently he joined the British Diplomatic Spouses Association (BDSA), even though the membership of this group was overwhelmingly female.

At that time, the BDSA was in the process of looking for a new committee head. This position did not appear to be very attractive, as no one had volunteered to fill the role. Nico investigated the job requirements and then decided to put his name forward. To his surprise his offer sparked off a strong resistance that was all the more startling because the resistance was furtive and the issues rejecting his appointment appeared to be nebulous. According to Nico, one woman disapproved so strongly of his offer to chair the BDSA that she organised the rest of the group to decline his placement. Nico did try to address the issues that were brought up as impediments to his appointment, but no one was willing to articulate them or speak to him about the situation.

Nico wondered whether it was his ethnicity or his sex that was at the core of the issues with the group, but regardless both he and his wife felt the effects of this rejection. Both of them were isolated from the British expatriate community

and the isolation was overt and disturbing. Nico was quite disturbed by the whole situation and went through a major period of self-doubt during which he examined his and his wife's behaviour to see what they had done to deserve such shunning. Nico felt so isolated that he withdrew from the BDSA and eventually the entire British expatriate community.

However, considering this incident in the light of Douglas' grid and group model, I would suggest it was nothing in particular that Nico did that prompted the isolation of himself and his wife, nor was it "racism" or "sexism" (dislike of Portuguese or males) per se. Rather, it is simply that Nico was an anomaly in that he was a trailing spouse, but he was not female. To compound the anomaly, he was married to an Irish woman but he himself was Portuguese. I suspect that he might have found acceptance as an ordinary member, but Nico then attempted to take on a central role in the community. This was what prompted the powerful and precipitate rejection of his membership, not so much what he did, but that his very existence contradicted the internal classification system of the group. Nico did not fit the norm of a trailing spouse and while he might be tolerated on the margins of the community, any attempt to take a leading role resulted in a backlash that he felt was as disturbing as it was surprising.

Mary Douglas' understanding of how individuals react to anomalies and ambiguities has provided insight into cultural disorientation's coping and controlling mechanisms. Cultural disorientation and adaptation is not a one-dimensional process as early researchers suggested, but a dynamic evolution in which individuals are actively involved in creating, interpreting and categorising

anomalous phenomena. Should this anomalous phenomenon challenge the individual too often or too fast, rejection of the culture – either host or expatriate culture – will occur and adaptation will fail. Conversely, the expatriate culture or host culture might well reject the individual if members feel that the individual does not conform to important preconceived categories, and again, adaptation will fail.

6.0 Symbolic Interactions at the Level of the Social Person

Up to this point, I have been examining the expatriate community from a macro-level or global perspective, in order to gain an understanding of the various social processes invoked during interaction. However, adaptation by a neophyte trailing spouse does not occur on the macro level, but on a micro level – the level of the individual.

Symbolic interaction, “the assumption that society is continuously recreated as human beings construct reality through interaction” (Macionis, 1994:669), is a particularly apt perspective for the micro-level approach. Trailing spouses who move to new environments find themselves having to recreate their history, their likes and dislikes, their skills and even their personalities within a new context. In this sense, they recreate their reality with each new person with whom they come into contact.

This process allows individuals the opportunity to redefine their identities and obligations, with the result that one of the most striking idiosyncrasies of expatriate living is the ability of individuals to modify their antecedents depending

upon the impression they wish to leave with their new companions. This behaviour is not unusual, or even disingenuous, as most individuals are wont to modify their behaviour in order to leave a good impression with their companions (Goffman 1959). However, since the trailing spouse is faced with the task of adapting to two separate cultural milieu, his or her opportunities and challenges are compounded exponentially.

6.1 Reinvention of "Self"

In the home environment, there are checks and balances in place to restrain a person from straying too far from their personal biography. These checks and balances are usually comprised of friends, extended family and even superficial acquaintances that inhabit the same social circle. Other people's expectations of a person, however, can be a 'Catch 22', as an individual's acknowledged history, good, bad or indifferent, can impose boundaries beyond which it can be difficult to reach.

In the expatriate community, and especially the host culture, the trailing spouse is unlikely to interact with people who are familiar with her or his past history. Nevertheless, individuals may wish to downplay or even erase part of their biography and since "[t]he tradition of moving as a social and psychological cure is a deep one in our culture." (Seidenberg, 1973:40) people often perceive a move to a foreign culture as an opportunity to make a fresh start, or reinvent themselves.

An example of this type of reinvention was Nancy M. who came to Rabat with the idea that she would pursue her career as a hair stylist. After making inquiries into the logistics of such a business, she decided that it was not feasible and at that point realised she needed to turn her considerable energies in a different direction. Nancy had never heard of the American Woman's Association (AWA) prior to her arrival in Rabat, but after learning of its existence she decided to join.

Initially Nancy only wanted to participate peripherally in the Association and after some investigation she joined the Community Development Committee (CDC) as it sounded the most rewarding. The CDC supported local charities and part of the committee's responsibility was to investigate them very thoroughly. These charities had to demonstrate that their contributions towards improving the community are genuine. However, Nancy discovered that peripheral participation was impossible, and after two months she was appointed the chairwoman of the Community Development Committee.

Nancy was quite deprecating of this accomplishment and attributed it to her skills in the English language. According to her, nearly all the members of the CDC are Moroccan and they are not sufficiently confident in their command of English to be willing to write reports, agendas and participate in board meetings; hence the appointment of an English woman to head the committee.

Nancy finds that being the head of the CDC is extremely gratifying, if time consuming and she is sure that she could "spend all day, every day working" for the charity. Moreover she never worries about whether she spending her time

doing worthwhile or important things, and said, “even though it is volunteer work, I think the experience will be of value for the rest of my life”.

Nancy found that the position as head of the CDC required someone who was multi-talented. Not only did the chairwoman of the committee have the final decision of where and how much money was to be allocated to various groups, but she also had to contend with the personal agendas of many of the Moroccans on the committee, especially when it came to allocating funds. Nancy not only learned how to negotiate various political landmines, but also how to tactfully resist internal manipulation so that it did not affect her decisions. This was particularly sensitive, since not all money-allocating decisions needed to be approved by the AWA board and she needed to be especially circumspect when situations arose that required her signature alone.

According to Nancy, she would never have considered running a committee prior to her relocation to Rabat, much less one that involved handling relatively large sums of money, or one that turned out to be such a politically sensitive post. However, having taken on the position she found that her expectations of herself had risen and she was now much more confident in her ability to run a complex and challenging division. She also found the position to be extremely satisfying and worthwhile. Here we are about as far from “culture shock” as it is possible to be. But the case of Nancy M. is instructive: expatriate relocation is sometimes the trigger for significant instances of personal growth and for nearly everyone, an occasion for some degree of reinvention of self.

6.2 Dramaturgical Analysis

Erving Goffman has written several books concerned with symbolic interaction. His interpretation of the approach proposed that individuals actively engaged in socially constructing their reality bear a striking resemblance to actors performing in a play. Goffman designated his approach dramaturgical analysis – “the investigation of social interaction in terms of theatrical performance” (Macionis, 1994:165). According to him, individuals are assigned roles to play according to the status that they occupy, and as long as individuals understand the nuances of their role, it provides them their script complete with dialogue and action. These roles also allow people to feel a sense of control of their environment and give them some predictability and structure.

6.3 Presentation of Self

Part of Goffman's analysis was concerned with the presentation of self, “the ways in which individuals in various settings, try to create specific impressions in the minds of others” (Macionis, 1994:165). Everything involved in creating an impression in another individual, “the audience”, is part of “the performance”; clothes that are worn are the costume, objects are props, and non-verbal behaviour and tone of voice are part of the presentation. These separate elements blend together to reinforce the image that the individual is trying to project. As long as both parties understand the nuances of their roles, interaction should run smoothly.

Unfortunately, trailing spouses in cross-cultural situations often have to contend alone with circumstances over which they have little or no control, in an environment that they do not adequately understand. This lack of understanding can lead to cultural miscues that result in traumatic and unhappy experiences.

A situation that Betty B. found herself experiencing early in her first move to Morocco effectively illustrates a cultural miscue of this kind. Betty needed groceries and as this was her first foray alone out into the cross-cultural environment of Morocco, she prepared herself with considerable forethought. She took into account everything she knew about Islamic and specifically Moroccan culture. Since she was aware that her long blond hair would attract attention, she carefully covered her head with a headscarf. She also attempted to blend in with local women by wearing a long coat that covered her almost to the ground. As additional props, although she probably would not describe them that way, she took her two children, ages six and four, by the hand and set off toward the market. Unhappily, during her walk she found she acquired a following of Moroccan men who took the opportunity to loudly practise their lewd and lascivious English.

Betty was quite embarrassed and distressed by this encounter, not only because of concern for her two young and confused children, but also because she did not understand what it was about her performance that prompted such a response. Not surprisingly, she classified this incident as an emotionally devastating one and it produced in her a reluctance to venture out of her home

without an escort. Since she knew few people in Morocco and her husband was occupied with his job, the end result was that she felt trapped and resentful.

Whatever Betty's miscue had been, she felt her performance fulfilled the requirements of her role, and the unanticipated response of the Moroccan men fundamentally disturbed her preconceived conception of "self". The sense that the image she was projecting was not the one she intended resulted in disorientation and anxiety. Mutually agreed upon "[s]ocially constructed reality ... functions like a dam holding back a sea of chaotic possibility" (Macionis, 1994:171) and Betty's encounter lead her to doubt all her previously understood versions of reality, almost as though the socially constructed dam had never existed.

6.4 Personal Identity Crisis – The Loss of "Grid"

Betty found her first experience in Morocco to be completely overwhelming and during this time she described herself as undergoing an enormous 'personal identity crisis'. Betty made a point of ensuring that I understood that most trailing spouses would encounter a "personal identity crisis" of some kind during their relocation.

Betty describes a "personal identity crisis" as one in which an individual has "zero self-confidence" and no idea of what they are capable. Their old knowledge, skills and social contacts are not important or relevant in the new life and whatever new skills, knowledge or social contacts have developed, they are

very tentative and are unwilling to rely upon them to any great degree.

Eventually self-esteem plummets and a full-blown crisis is in progress.

Betty's devastating experience on her first grocery shopping expedition contributed to her crisis, but a second aggravating factor was the isolation she felt as a result of her decision to home school her children. Betty's decision was the accumulation of a number of factors, but the most important was that she encountered some difficulty in registering her children in Moroccan French schools. Since Betty discovered there were no rules and regulations for home schooling in Morocco, she went ahead and ordered materials from an American organisation. However, delays at customs resulted in a wait of seven months before she could begin home schooling and this added to the stress and anxiety Betty experienced.

Once Betty began the home schooling, she found herself constantly revisiting her decision and was uncertain as to whether she was doing the right thing. As well, she was faced with all the usual problems of home schooling, such as discipline, deadlines and organisation.

One of the problems that presented itself as a result of this decision was the realisation that her children had limited contact with social peers. Consequently, ensuring that her children got a good basic education, guaranteeing they spent time with other children and making sure they were interacting with other adults and children in a positive way, became Betty's responsibility and as she described it, "everything came back" on her. Betty discovered that by western standards, Morocco has a dearth of activities for

children, for example, there were no community Brownies, Cub Scouts, swimming classes, etc., so after-school activities were non-existent and this contributed to her problems immensely.

Perhaps the most devastating impact of Betty's decision was the lack of supportive interactions with other parents of comparable school age children. The social and emotional support that Betty would have gained from such an interaction was not available to her and she felt "overwhelmed by the responsibility" and totally lost all self-confidence.

Looking back upon her own "personal identity crisis" Betty felt that "her expectations of herself were too high". Her husband "felt she was overreacting to the situation" and attempted to play down her anxiety, with the unintended result that she felt even more isolated. People, both local Moroccans and other expatriates, as well as her husband's company, thought that home schooling her children was "weird" and so any contact she had with the expatriate community and her husband's company tended to undermine her rather than support her.

6.5 Social Anchor: Reconfirmation of Classification System

One aspect to living overseas that impressed me most forcibly was the need many expatriates felt to maintain interaction with people who understood their verbal and non-verbal cues, or in other words, to maintain interaction with those of their own culture. The need to reaffirm the expatriate's conception of reality, as well as the individual's conception of identity, was expressed eloquently by Nico when describing his problems interacting with the British

expatriate community. His portrayal of cross-cultural interaction suggested that “meeting new people, and presenting the [appropriate] image ... can be very exhausting” which summarises the feelings of most expatriates quite adequately.

One informant told me that she thought most expatriates felt a need to isolate themselves from host nationals because expatriates need “to mingle safely ... not just financially but also psychologically”, as though different cultural interpretations threatened a person’s sanity. Such an experience could almost be described as an unexpected encounter with a funhouse mirror at a carnival; the image reflected is clearly identifiable but it is so distorted it keeps focussing attention on “the grid” rather than allowing the grid to slip easily into its usual position, as taken for granted background reality.

Many people react exactly this way during encounters with people who are not members of their home culture. When an expatriate’s carefully crafted presentation is no longer sending out the information that heretofore was clearly endorsed, and the reflection received back from “alter” is not the expected one, the reaction of the expatriate is to reject the mirror and deny the image.

A ‘social anchor’ would be someone who understands the social cues, both verbal and non-verbal, that the expatriate exhibits and reflects such cues back to the expatriate without distortion, thus anchoring the preconceived version of reality and identity. So long as interaction with people who challenge prior accepted versions of reality can be controlled, it is unnecessary and probably counterproductive to be completely sequestered from them, but it is important at least occasionally to feel self-assured when interacting with people.

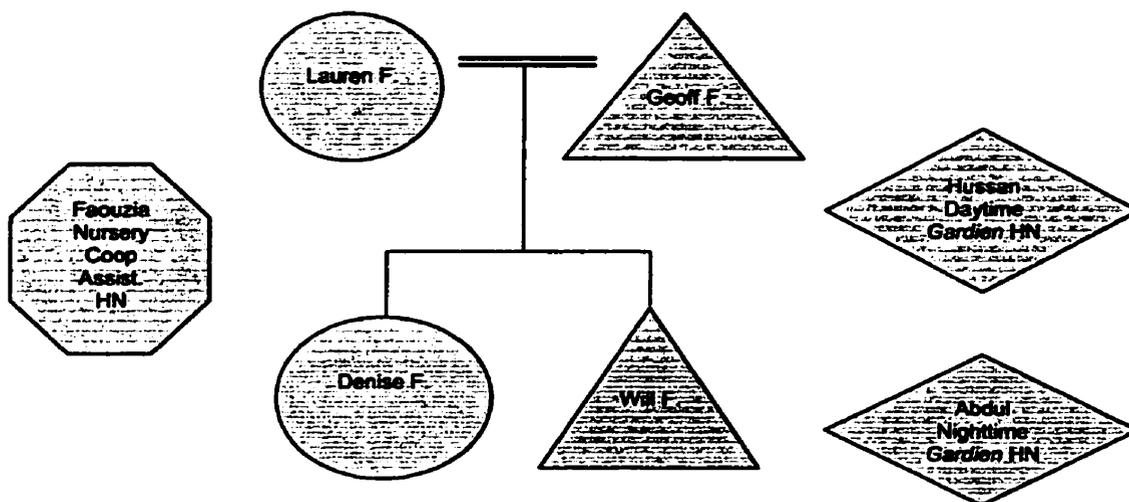
The internet provided a substitute 'social anchor' for many expatriates. One informant told me that her husband's internet communication with a friend in Paris provided him with much-needed social support. Another said that having access to ongoing internet conversations with family was a tremendous comfort. Internet discourse with a friend was also described as "my lifeline to common sense".

7.0 Dramatis Personae

In order to examine the lifestyle of trailing spouses in Rabat it was necessary to find people who filled the criteria and were willing to communicate their experiences to me. The criterion I considered most important was that the individual come from a westernised background and had relocated to Morocco in order to follow their spouse. I managed to find ten informants who fit this criterion who were willing to share their experiences with me. The informants were a mix of nationalities; six English, three American and one Portuguese and they were also of different sexes, as I was fortunate enough to recruit two men to participate in my study. Two of the women in this study had married Moroccan men and had spent several years living in Rabat. One of my informants had spent only nine months as a trailing spouse, but had in a very short time managed to incorporate herself quite thoroughly into the expatriate community. However, my prime informant was an English woman who was on her second cross-cultural assignment as a trailing spouse and was very well versed in the benefits and pitfalls of the expatriate lifestyle as it affects the trailing spouse.

7.1 Lauren F.

Diagram 1 – Fagan Circle



My prime informant was a woman in her mid to late thirties who was initially uncertain and somewhat confused about my intentions. So much so, that our initial contact was at what she described as a 'Moroccan Ladies Tea Party', since she felt that there would be more interest for me than her own life.

However, after a considerable amount of clarification on my part, and many questions about her life, she appeared to understand my interest, and later became an enthusiastic and active participant in my research. Rabat was her second cross-cultural assignment as a trailing spouse and as she had been living there for three and a half years she felt a level of comfort with the environment and the different expectations that a cross-cultural assignment required of her.

Lauren had a degree in education, secondary school, although she had not pursued a career in teaching. Her reasons for that were, upon graduation,

she found she had spent her entire life within the academic community and felt the need for a break. She had also observed changes in the personalities of people who went from student to teacher without some kind of interruption. According to her, they turned into “tin-pot gods, people who know everything even if they don’t”.

For these reasons, Lauren decided to postpone her teaching career and then, according to her, “life took over”. She met and married her husband while they were both working for the government and went with him to their first posting in Egypt. While in Egypt she had her first child, a girl, and instead of going back to England to give birth, she stayed in Egypt. She told me that the medical care was excellent, but the nursing care was appalling. She was unaware that she was supposed to provide her own nurse and as a result she spent the entire night after her daughter’s birth with an empty drip bag. Another thing she was unaware of, were the ramifications of an international birth on the citizenship of her daughter. While her daughter is British because both her parents are British, should her daughter have children of her own in an international situation her offspring would not automatically become British citizens, they would assume the citizenship of their father, or the country of birth.

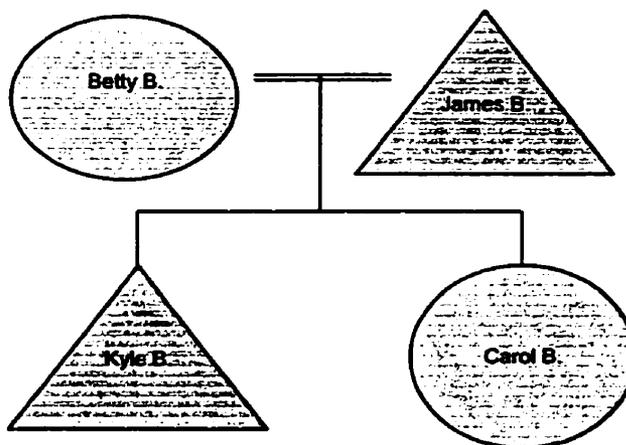
After their assignment to Egypt they spent a year in Britain where their son was born. Lauren’s evaluation of the Health Care system in Britain was very harsh. According to her, the botched care she received after the birth of her son resulted in some serious complications that culminated in another hospital stay and an operation. As the family had, in the meantime, relocated to Morocco,

Lauren decided to remain in the country for the surgery. Since, as she put it, “You get what you pay for”, she intended to purchase the best of care.

Lauren had enjoyed Morocco, although she expressed this with some reservations. She was a member of the American Women’s Association (AWA), and volunteered with the local AWA library at least once a week. She was also a member of British Diplomatic Spouses Association (BDSA). As well, she volunteered with the Brownie troop at the Rabat American School (RAS) and ran a Nursery Co-op for pre-schoolers who were planning to attend the American School in the future. She was thus very involved in the expatriate community and felt comfortable functioning in that cross-cultural environment.

7.2 Betty B.

Diagram 2 – Barker Family



Betty was a tall, blond American woman in her mid to late 30's. Our initial meeting took place at a sophisticated patisserie that was located in central Agdal

and very easy to find. Betty had lived in Morocco twice, the first time from January 1992 until 1995 and the second time from late 1996 until late 1998, the period covered by this study. She followed her husband, who was a travel consultant for Southern Europe and North Africa. Prior to their move, in 1991, the family relocated to Quebec in order to learn French and to take the opportunity to enrol their eldest child in first grade in a French speaking school.

In January 1992 when her son was six and her daughter was four they moved to Morocco. Her husband had made a scouting trip before the family had moved but unfortunately, he had been misinformed about the school system in Morocco. Betty discovered that moving to Quebec in order to get their son started in a French speaking school was an exercise in futility as, unfortunately, Canadian French schools were not recognised in Morocco. Eventually Betty decided to home school her children but this decision turned out to be inauspicious and resulted in a very stressful period in her life.

The living arrangements in Morocco also posed a challenge to her adaptive skills. Initially they stayed with a couple, both of whom were researchers in Salé, a sister-city to Rabat, on the north side of the Wadi Bu Regreg. They only shared living space for a short time as unfortunately the researchers soon returned to their home country. Since Betty and her family arrived in January they were exposed to cold and damp that they were not prepared for, and since all the houses have tiled and stone floors, it got very cold at night and in the mornings. Betty described how she got chilblains on her feet that were very painful and lasted for months.

As a result of her isolation and the fact that she was home-schooling her children, Betty found that the only way she met people was through the International Church of Rabat, which was an interdenominational church serving people of the Christian faith. Even that connection was only partially successful though, as the knowledge that she was home-schooling her children caused her to be seen as deviant within the expatriate community.

Looking back on her first experience in Rabat, Betty said that she often thought that she was “lost 99% of the time”. In 1995 Betty decided that she had had enough of the whole situation, she had come to the end of her tolerance and decided to return to the home country. She maintained that it was necessary to “force her husband home” in order for her to become emotionally stable again. Upon her return to the States she went back to university, joined a health club and gradually found herself regaining her sense of self-worth.

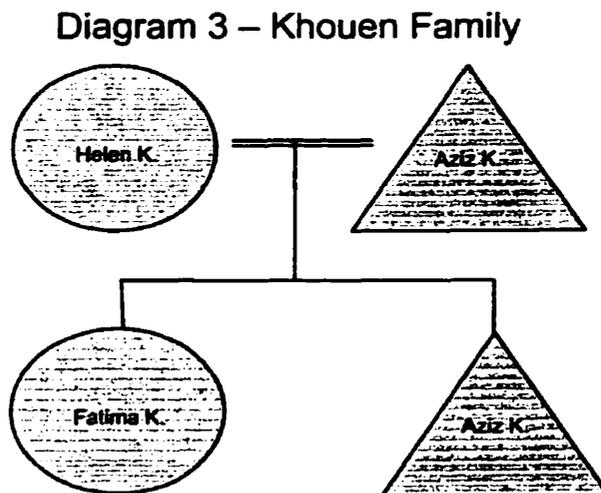
In 1996, eighteen months after their return to the United States, her husband’s company asked them if they would consider returning to Morocco. Betty would only agree if the company would pay the Rabat American School (RAS) fees, otherwise she utterly refused to even consider it.

Her second experience in Rabat was substantially better than her first, chiefly because her children were in RAS and the pressure of home schooling was off. Another thing that Betty noticed was a huge difference in how native Moroccans treated foreign women. This time she found she was not harassed whenever she went out, and her blond hair was not an immediate cause for unwelcome interest by Moroccan men. Betty considered this remarkable

difference to be a result of technological advances in communication, such as satellite dishes, but equally as likely it could have been because her own attitude was different.

Betty volunteered as a school board member and got involved in RAS after-school activities and immediately began to function well in the expatriate community. She re-established contact with some old acquaintances, both Moroccan and expatriate, and found it much easier to develop new ones. This was partially due to her renewed self-esteem, but also because she refused to allow herself to be isolated as she had been in her first experience. As well, she became very involved in the RAS Puppet Program and in fact, the students knew her as the "Puppet Lady", which was clearly important to her as it was her 'own identity'. Betty was also quite involved in the International Church and taught Sunday school. She was quite confident living in Morocco and was busy helping her husband with the accounting for his business, although she was quick to point out that she was not reimbursed for her time.

7.3 Helen K.



Helen K. was a tall, blond American woman in her mid 30's with a pleasant expression and high-spirited attitude. She met her husband, a Moroccan, while she was enrolled in university in France and he was getting his Ph.D. Her husband's family were Sufi mystics and she spoke about his background with some reverence. According to Helen, her husband's family was very devout and no member smoked or drank and each member was supportive of the others. In fact, for the first five and a half years after Helen and her husband were married, they lived with his parents and siblings. Helen found that living with a total of 17 people in one house and only one bathroom helped her learn how to get along with people. In a strict sense, Helen was probably not "an expatriate". Because of her marital situation she was in effect a Moroccan. However, for our purposes the important thing was that she was an active member of the expatriate community under study.

There were a lot of customs that Helen found she had to get used to once she moved to Morocco; most notably, the place of men and the place of women. She also found that she had to learn a different way of projecting herself when she went out. As Helen put it, she had to “learn how to walk”. According to Helen, there was a certain way to walk in order not to be harassed by Moroccan men. Absolutely do not establish eye contact with any male and walk with purpose – look like you are going somewhere. Helen found the need to do this annoying for a long time. But eventually her attitude changed and went from “Forget this!” to “OK fine. I give up. You can’t change the world.” She advised me to take a plastic shopping bag wherever I went, whether I was going to need it or not. According to her there is nothing less sexually attractive in Morocco than a woman going grocery shopping for her husband’s dinner.

Helen, herself, came from a privileged background, with the North American perception of personal privacy. Her religious background was flexible, as her mother was Catholic and then changed to Protestant. She found that her move to Morocco and her husband’s culture required a major adjustment on her part. The lack of privacy was a major problem, and as well, her western manners were seen as snobbish and unhelpful to the rest of the family. For example, she was hesitant to help in the kitchen when she first came, because she was trying to respect her mother-in-law’s space. As she explained to me, at home, to barge into another person’s kitchen and make yourself at home is considered rude; whereas in Morocco her behaviour was considered lazy and snobbish. She had to “pull herself together” because her husband’s family resented her behaviour.

She felt that she had very little independence because she and her husband had a very modest income. In spite of his Ph.D., he was only making \$200.00 US a month. Helen had three years of her Arts degree, part of which she acquired in France and she planned to finish her degree in history, but unfortunately she was unable to find a job that could contribute significantly to the family income.

Her first job was teaching English to soldiers and it did not prove very lucrative. However, when there was a money crisis she found that there were compensations to living in such close quarters with her husband's family. When Helen had to return to the United States to deal with a family problem her new Moroccan family sat around a table and pooled their savings in order to finance her trip home.

When Helen had her first child, her parents flew from the United States to be with her and her father was really proud of her for adapting to her straitened circumstances, although he did cry when he came to the hospital to visit her. It happened to be January and the hospital was unheated, there were no sheets or blankets on the bed and a cat had been sick on the floor and no one had cleaned the mess.

According to Helen, there is "nothing wrong with the doctors in Morocco", but you have to pay for them and Helen and her husband did not have the funds to pay the doctors. Helen pointed out that at the time she was very young and "saw life as an adventure".

Driving in Rabat was another thing she found very challenging. Initially she experienced enormous anxiety and had a lot of difficulty coping with the aggressive driving culture. Her sister came to visit her for three months early in her marriage and Helen talked a lot about her driving problems until finally her sister got fed up listening to her complaints and told her to “get some balls”. In her account, these strong words had the happy result of forcing Helen to grit her teeth and compete on the road with the rest of the traffic.

Helen was a member of the American Woman’s Association and was involved in the creation of The Great Rabat Cope Book (see Appendix D) which was available for members of the expatriate community in order to help them find their feet in a bewildering environment.

Helen was also the Head Librarian of the AWA library and she was in charge of everything from cataloguing books to paying the bills and felt she was doing a good job, although she found it to be immense drudgery. She said that the reason she took over managing the library was that she was “blackmailed into it” and described the position as a “hot political potato”. She said she often felt that she was undergoing “some painful medieval torture” while trying to fulfil her responsibilities.

Helen mentioned that they were having ongoing problems with the electric bill at the AWA Library. The electric company has threatened to cut the power off again, having switched it back on less than a week previously. Helen found this frustrating as the bill has been paid, according to her, for months and was completely up-to-date. So Helen resorted to a different, more Moroccan, method

of solving this problem. She asked her husband to talk to a director at the Rabat Electric Department (RED) whom he knows, and lo and behold the problem appeared to be resolved.

Helen told me that this was a really good example of how things work in Morocco, trying to solve a problem through official channels can lead to frustration and using a less formal solution involving personal contacts with patrons and brokers often appeared to be the only one that worked.

While I was visiting Helen I noticed that she had several French language copies of a tawdry serial romance called 'Angelique', on her bookshelf and I was familiar with its 'bodice ripper' reputation, so I commented on this to Helen.

It turns out that the series was originally written in French and Helen said that she had initially read some of them while going to school in France as a way of practising her French. Since she had, over time, indulged herself by reading the entire series, at least 20 books, by the time she was done she felt she really understood the grammatical nuances of the French language. This skill led her to her most recent employment where she was occupied in translating English manuals into French.

Helen had two children, a girl about thirteen and a boy about nine. Both children went to a local French school and planned to attend University. Both of Helen's children have visited the United States and did not have much difficulty interacting with American children while they were there.

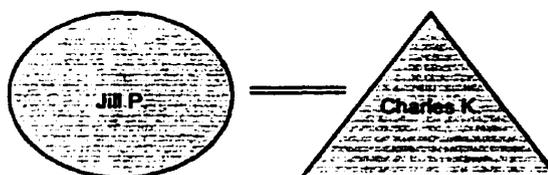
Helen was not particularly pleased with the French school system in Morocco as she felt that there is a lot of unacknowledged bullying that occurred,

and her daughter tended to be a target because of her American background. However, even if she could afford to send her children to the American School she would not. She felt the American School isolated students from Moroccan culture and she did not want that for her children.

Helen was very well adapted to Morocco and the cross-cultural lifestyle, but she found her experiences within the expatriate community less satisfying, which was not surprising as she was in a way a threat to its external boundary. I got the impression she was most comfortable remaining on the periphery of the expatriate community and only wanted to interact with it on an occasional basis, rather than daily which happened to be a requirement of the Head Librarian.

7.4 Jill P.

Diagram 4 – Powell/Keene



I was first put in contact with Jill P. when I was speaking to her husband Charles, at the American Consulate. After he had heard about my research in Rabat, he suggested that his wife would be the ideal person to help me. Jill was at that time the assistant to the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) and was temporarily in charge of the position, since the permanent person was on vacation. The CLO was the liaison for social events for the American community

and was also expected to help when people had questions about Morocco and if they should happen to run into difficulties with the local authorities.

One social event that Jill organised as the CLO was a bus trip to Fez in which 20 Americans took part. Jill brought her husband with her as he had expressed an interest, and she was annoyed to find that all the guides and bus drivers asked him for instructions even though they knew that she was the CLO running the event.

Jill had a Ph.D. in psychology and explained that her thesis was on how the brain functioned after certain types of brain damage. Because of her familiarity with brain trauma injuries, Jill utterly refused to take cabs in Rabat. When I asked for her reasons for that she said, "I would far rather trust my own driving than that of some anonymous cab driver".

She and her husband were newlyweds when they moved to Morocco in mid-1996 and they have found that their social life is quite limited. They have no family in Morocco and have made no close friends and as a result they felt a sense of isolation. This was not their normal behaviour as in Washington they were much more socially active, but in Rabat they mostly rented movies.

Jill had noticed that there was a definite social gulf between Moroccans and Westerners, and disclosed that they did not have any Moroccan friends except those that they met through the course of their work, and they were more like acquaintances. The position of the CLO did encourage some interaction with host nationals but it was mostly working relationships and she did not feel comfortable pursuing the association beyond the professional level.

Both Jill and her husband, Charles, have noticed that the Rabat American School appeared to be the centre for social activity, as it was for many Americans, but that presented difficulties for expatriates such as themselves, who were without children.

Jill definitely felt that she did not have enough friends in Morocco and both she and her husband used the internet as a conduit to social support provided by friends in other countries. One example she shared with me was a friendship between her husband and a friend who is now in Paris. According to her, their relationship had strengthened since they began communicating over the internet.

Another major obstacle Jill had encountered was the difficulty she had found in trying to get a job. Since her spouse was employed by the Embassy she automatically received a Moroccan work permit but she still found it difficult to find employment. In her opinion, her Ph.D. made her qualified for the position of CLO and indeed almost every other job to which she applied, but she came to the conclusion that everything in Morocco was accomplished through contacts. It was not what you knew, but whom you knew.

Jill had managed to obtain three paid positions since she relocated to Morocco. Her first job was as an instructor teaching cross-cultural psychology at the American University in Ifrane. However this position required a 90-minute drive each day from Rabat to Ifrane, one way. Jill tolerated this for six months but decided at the end of her contract that it was not worth the drive. She then managed to get a job with the Rabat American School (RAS) but felt undervalued because she was probably the only Ph.D. teachers' aide they were ever going to

get. She did feel there was one major benefit to working at RAS; it was an excellent way to interact with the English Speaking community. However the position was hardly any challenge to someone of her background and she did not seek a second assignment.

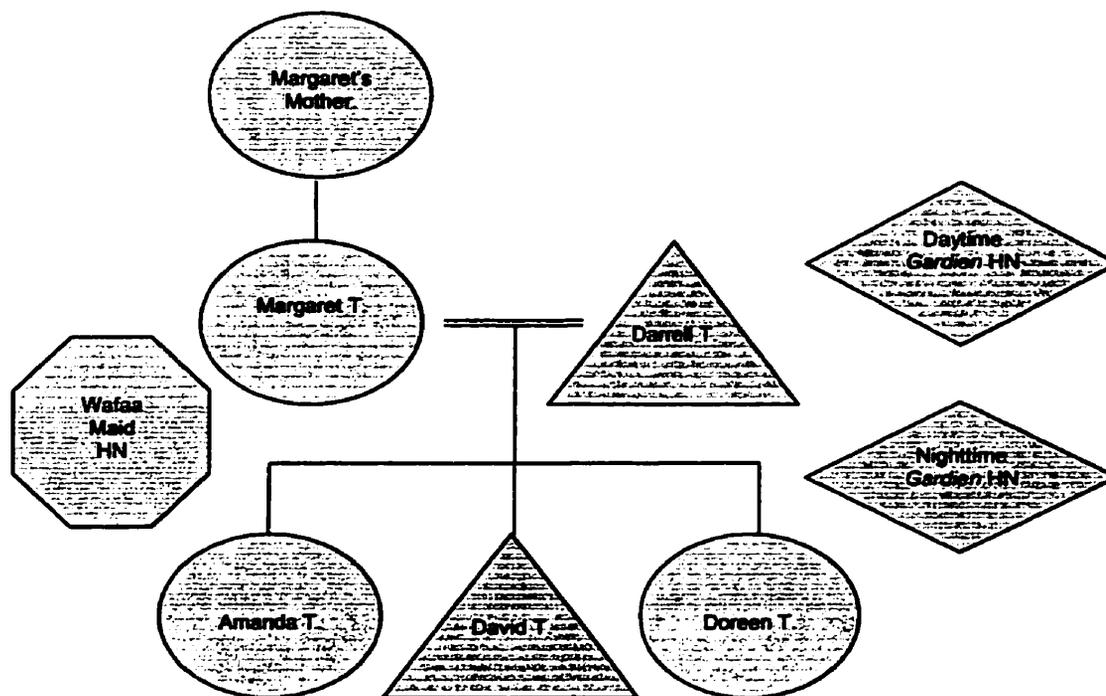
When the CLO position became available she applied for it, but was disappointed to find that she was only hired on a temporary basis as an assistant.

As she became more familiar with the workings of the expatriate community, she noticed that most trailing spouses seemed to find part-time work that was not necessarily in their field of interest. The best advice she could offer to other expatriates in Morocco trying to become employed was to learn French.

Jill also felt that there was a general feeling of discrimination against women in the workforce in Morocco especially when it came to hiring. She had one man, a trailing spouse, who asked for the CLO's help in finding a job, but he found employment on his own in his field of interest within three weeks. She felt that this might be an indication of gender discrimination, but she was not yet willing to say for sure.

7.5 Margaret T.

Diagram 5 – Trigg Circle



I met Margaret through Lauren, as the two of them were very close.

However I found it difficult to communicate with her, as Margaret appeared to be suspicious of my motives and tended to discourage any more than the most brief and superficial level of interaction. Prior to their relocation, both Margaret and her husband, Darrell worked for the British Government and she decided to take a leave of absence when Darrell was assigned to Rabat. She had three children and the two eldest were matching in ages and sex to Lauren's two children. They had been in Rabat approximately the same amount of time as Lauren and Geoff and their third child was born in 1996 during their Rabat assignment. At the time of this interview the term of Darrell's assignment was almost complete

and Margaret had notified her employers of her pending return. She received notice that she had been promoted to a new position which Margaret found gratifying as she felt she was getting right back on to her career track after having her daughter, Doreen.

Margaret was quite integrated into the expatriate community and she joined an aerobic group with a friend for a daily workout at the American school. As well, she was part of an adult choir that also met at RAS. Additionally, Margaret was employed part-time at the American School as a kindergarten teacher's assistant.

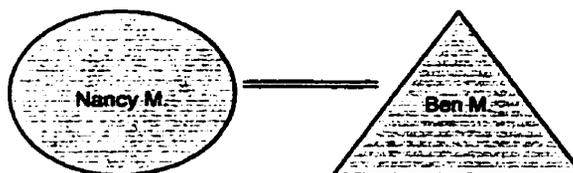
Margaret's mother was visiting the family for two weeks and this was not the first time she had been out to visit Rabat. Apparently she visited about once a year and stayed for several weeks each time. Margaret and her mother got along extremely well and seem to be quite content with their lot.

Margaret was the only trailing spouse I spoke to that was unreservedly delighted with her maid. Wafaa was apparently a paragon of all the virtues, who could cook, clean, was reliable, did not steal and best of all, and adored all of Margaret's children, especially the baby, Doreen. However, other than her positive interaction with Wafaa, Margaret did not appear to spend much time with Moroccans and some of the experiences she related to me dealing with host nationals were clearly negative.

Margaret was very socially active within the expatriate community but she exhibited some caution whenever she encountered a new person, whether it was a Moroccan or another expatriate.

7.6 Nancy M.

Diagram 6 – Maples Household



Nancy was a dark haired British woman in her mid-twenties and relocated to Morocco in 1997 after her marriage. At the time of this interview she had only been married nine months. Her husband, Ben, was a British expatriate who worked for one of the foreign-owned textile mills. Nancy described herself as “self-motivated and prepared to go out and find the life I want and make the best of what [was] on offer”.

Prior to her wedding Nancy worked approximately 58 hours a week as a full-time hairdresser in England, and she thought she would just transport her skills to Morocco. However, she discovered that it was actually quite difficult to get a home-based business functioning in Rabat. There are governmental restrictions to opening a hair salon and a partnership with a Moroccan can be a nightmare of bureaucratic red tape. She was not comfortable with the idea of working for someone else, and developing connections in a new environment can take a lot of time. She also felt some apprehension about opening a home-based business in a residential community as she was uncertain how well her neighbours would receive her entrepreneurial efforts. When I eventually visited her home, it became clear that her concerns were quite valid.

Nancy lived in an upscale suburb of Rabat in a brand-new and very beautiful villa. The house had large gracious rooms and enormous marble counters in the kitchen. Nancy, herself, was not terribly impressed with it; as the “plumbing [was] unreliable and sockets [were] always falling out of the walls, also our blinds frequently need[ed] repairing” and the kitchen cabinets had no shelves. What was worse, the bottom ‘shelf’ was actually the tile floor. Since ants are endemic in a hot climate, Nancy felt it was terribly unhygienic to store kitchen implements on the floor, not to mention the immense amount of wasted cupboard space. The heating in the house was inefficient too, as the only fireplace was located in a small salon separate from the main room and kitchen and very little heat was able to transfer to the rest of the house.

Nancy found that she was the one who did most of the socialising and contact-making with host nationals as well as within the expatriate community. Occasionally Nancy and her husband spent time with his co-workers, but none of these people were Moroccan, they were all European. Nancy says she knew many Moroccans as well as a large assortment of expatriates as she was a member of the American Woman’s Association (AWA), and both she and her husband tended to socialise with her friends.

Nancy’s involvement with the AWA was a consequence of a chance conversation that she had early in her sojourn, and resulted in many contacts with host nationals. She also found the AWA a useful setting in which to make contact with other trailing spouses. Women she described as, “ladies whom I feel I [could] depend on for anything. It [was] not just the being “English

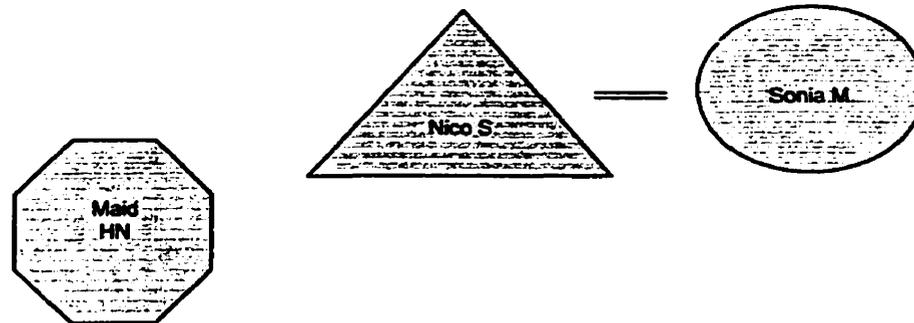
Together”; they [were] such wonderful women, I am forever in their debt, how they have welcomed me into their homes”.

Nancy was interested in “working offshore” for another three to five years in order to save enough money to buy and furnish a house. However she would prefer to “live in a non-Muslim country as I travelled around the world for five years previously and I always found Muslim countries aggressive and not open to outsiders and change, where other religions were more welcoming”.

Nancy described her time in Morocco as her “year of self-development, a learning process about myself and the world. Hopefully I have made a small difference to people’s lives and help them on their way to realising what they are capable of”. Nancy’s involvement in the expatriate community was quite tangible and she did not appear to find the lack of children a barrier to social interaction with other trailing spouses.

7.7 Nico S.

Diagram 7 – Saugues/Morton Household



Lauren F. had mentioned repeatedly that I should meet Nico, a Portuguese man married to an Irish woman, Sonia, who worked at the British Embassy. Lauren had been quite anxious for me to meet him, mostly because he had some serious difficulties with the expatriate community when he and his wife first moved to Morocco. Nico worked in films and had some training in Australia in Business Management. He became addicted to surfing while in Australia and had luckily discovered a group of Portuguese expatriates in Rabat that surf in Morocco. He told me ruefully that this was mostly how he spent his time, although it was not his original plan.

Nico met his wife when she was working in Portugal, and they have been married for four years. They lived in Portugal for two months, and then moved to England. Nico did not find it difficult to find work in England as he was employed as a film co-ordinator, a member of the production crew, in London.

The couple then moved to Morocco on October 19, 1995 and from that point on Nico began to realise the challenge he was facing as a Portuguese

male, a trailing spouse, married to an Irish woman while living in Morocco. He explained to me that his problems had much less to do with Moroccans reacting negatively to his status than to his fellow expatriates reacting disapprovingly to his situation.

Initially, Nico thought that he would have no problems adapting to life in Morocco and was confident his background would lead to a reasonably good job. He also felt he was adaptable enough to be accepted by the English group even though he was Portuguese. Unfortunately, he found it more difficult than he expected. First, he could not find a job in his field as a result of his weak French and he turned down the only position he was offered, because he felt the low pay was insulting.

Eventually he decided that since he could not get a job in his field, he should spend his time more productively trying to help his wife's career by fitting in with the British expatriate group in Rabat. He joined the British Diplomatic Spouses Association (BDSA) and tried to contribute to that group. However this strategy did not work out well and Nico's attempts to fit in were rebuffed by some individuals who wielded what he felt was an inordinate amount of influence. Nico and Sonia suddenly found themselves isolated from almost all social interaction with the British Community.

His wife, Sonia found herself unhappy with her job, mostly because their social life was terrible, and the isolation they felt was intense. The situation affected her work life immensely as she did not feel comfortable working late (something that would normally be expected in her job) because of her concern

for Nico. Nico was not sure what prompted the rejection from the BDSA but he eventually tended toward ascribing it to racism.

Nico found himself responding to the isolation he and his wife were subjected to in an interesting way. He began to isolate himself from the English expatriate community by refusing to interact with other members and when he was obliged to communicate with members of the “in-group” he was always very careful not to talk about any controversial topic. He found that he was continuously paying attention to his conversation, behaviour and even mannerisms; in other words, he became obsessed with his appearance and behaviour.

Eventually Nico located a group of Portuguese expatriates who lived in Rabat and from that point on he mostly socialised with them. There was a sizeable group of Portuguese who worked in international development and he told me that he preferred their company, “because I can relax with people of similar culture”. It also helped that they were of a similar age. Since his humiliation, he made a point of keeping his embassy life separate from his Portuguese friend’s lives although he felt that the “embassy group is the correct group”.

Nico felt it was important for the trailing spouse to get a job during an overseas assignment. He felt it was essential to develop outside contacts that were independent from the world of your spouse. As well, not only was the position of a househusband extremely unusual it was also ‘financially not powerful’, which he felt was a clear drawback.

Nico was not active in the English Speaking expatriate community. He attended embassy receptions in order to support his wife's career but he was always very careful when meeting new people who were involved in the Embassy milieu and he was careful not to talk about controversial topics. He also made the attempt to present himself as 'western' as possible. Nico disclosed that "always trying to be Western, which [was] different, and meeting new people, and presenting the Western image. [That] can be very exhausting." Fortunately, he kept his social interaction separate from his embassy contacts and his connection with the Portuguese expatriate community was very supportive.

7.8 Michael H.

Diagram 8 – Harrison Household



Michael was an English man who originally came to Morocco to set up transmission towers for cellular phones. Michael explained that most of his socialising was done with a local running club which was where he originally met his wife Clarissa. Clarissa was Spanish and was employed at the Spanish embassy. Both Clarissa and Michael used to do a lot of socialising with other members of the running club, but because of some thefts that have occurred at parties that were held in member's homes, the frequency of the social events had

been reduced drastically. If any social occasions were organised they were not held at private residences and you “darn near need a pass to go to the bathroom”.

It used to be that a running club party would be held every Saturday night, and Michael had a very busy schedule: language lessons twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, then the American Club on Wednesdays and Fridays and the British Social Club (BSC) on Thursdays after the language lesson, then a party on Saturday night and Sunday to recover. Unfortunately social occasions held by the running club are now very rare.

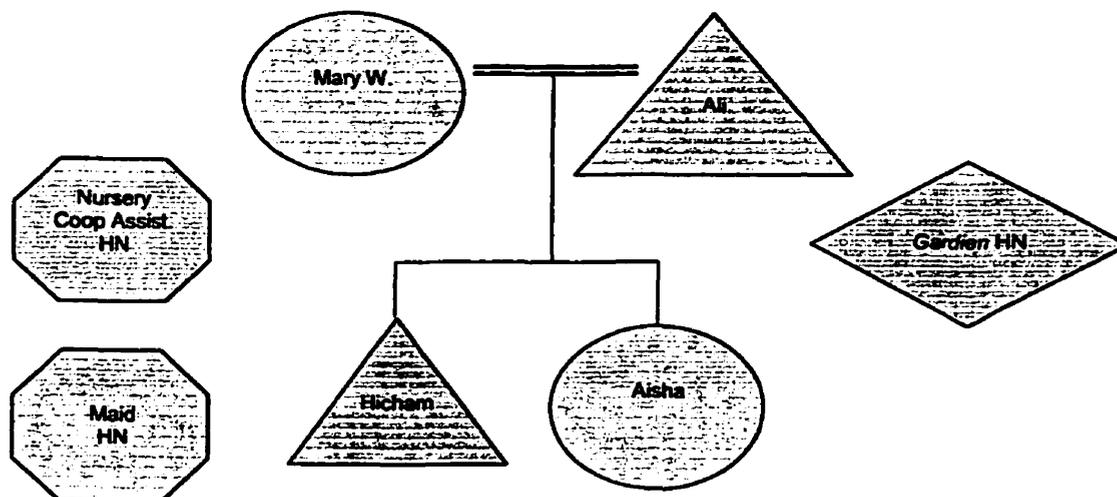
Since the running club has reduced its social activities, Michael who is unemployed, spends most of his time alone. When pressed he said he occupied himself by going for walks, watching traffic accidents during rush hours and listening on his ham radio.

Michael did not belong to the AWA library as he felt out of place in an all-women group. He was also unwilling to attend any social functions with Moroccans and explained that as far as he could tell all Moroccans only want to get a visa to a foreign country. He described an incident in his language lesson in which people are asked why they want to learn a foreign language and according to him, 90% of people answered that they want to go overseas and leave Morocco. Michael and Clarissa are very negative about Moroccans and expressed the idea that most Moroccans only wanted to get to know Europeans for what they could get. Men wanted a visa and sex – women wanted a visa and

marriage. End result is the same in their opinion; Moroccans wanted what they could get.

7.9 Mary W.

Diagram 9 – White Family



Mary W., an English woman who ran the second RAS Nursery Co-op in Rabat was a dark haired woman in her mid-30's that lived in an older villa close to the Embassy District in Rabat. I was invited to her home for a luncheon that was served in her beautifully kept backyard. In the corner of the backyard was a swing set, apparently for the children from the Nursery Co-op.

Mary had a Bachelor of Arts in Business that she received from the London School of Economics. She also studied at a graduate school in France in order to improve her French and enhance her international marketability. While she was in France finishing her degree she met Ali, a Moroccan, whom

she eventually married. Ali is a member of the Moroccan Civil Service and at the time of my fieldwork was progressing quickly in his career.

After Mary graduated she worked for Marks and Spencer in England in Personnel Management. Mary had two children; a son, about nine, and a daughter, six months. When her son was three she put him in the Nursery Co-op in order to ensure that he had some practice with English as both she and Ali tended to converse in French almost exclusively. Mary found the Nursery Co-op very useful, for not only did they take care of Hicham each morning, but also she found a well-established social support system that she could rely on.

Once Mary attained some familiarity with the early childhood group, she realised that managing it would be an ideal way to use her business and interpersonal skills, as well as to make money, so when the position became available she applied and was accepted.

Mary took her responsibilities with the Nursery Co-op very seriously and evaluated her assistants strictly. One thing that Mary felt was an unofficial requirement of her position was to provide a social support network for the mothers. She maintained an up-to-date list of doctors, dentists and pharmacists; and also acted as a social and information resource that provided contacts within the expatriate community.

Mary was very careful about protecting her personal interests and retained her British passport. She kept her financial affairs quite separate from her husband's and made sure that any property that they acquired was legally registered in her name. She also insisted upon returning to England to give birth

to her children, which ensured that they were British citizens with British passports. Both children had a Moroccan first name but an English second name, so if necessary they could use them interchangeably. Mary also owned and maintained a residence in England and she took her children there periodically in order to maintain a working address. This resulted in benefits for both her and the children, should the situation deteriorate in Morocco either personally or politically.

I asked Mary about the "Father's Consent Form" that was required for children of Moroccan fathers that are leaving the country with the mother and she became quite vocal on the issue. Mary acknowledged that each time she takes the children to England she gets the form signed and notarised. However one day she intended to challenge that bit of red tape, since in her thinking both her children have British passports and are therefore not Moroccan and not subject to the same rules.

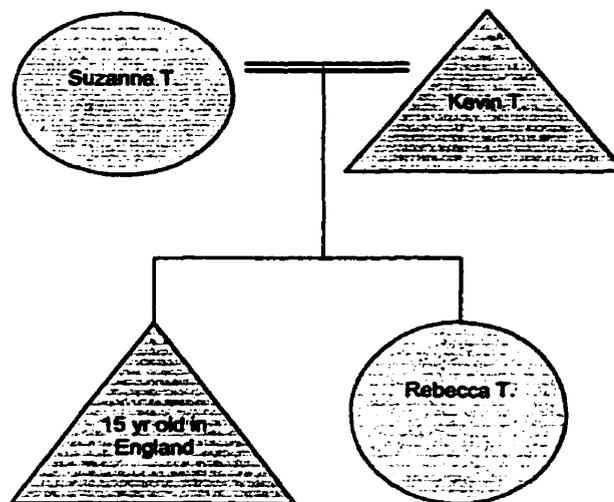
Mary also wanted me to understand that in her opinion, the cultural divide between Morocco and the West is particularly dangerous when dealing with romantic relationships. Women end up with terrible financial, legal and emotional problems if they are not completely cognisant of the legal status of such relationships in Morocco.

One other thing that Mary reiterated was that she felt that most Moroccans, as individuals as well as collectively, have no flair for innovation. New ideas and different ways of accomplishing a task are met with a blank stare and passive, but very effective, resistance. Change, especially in the attitude

toward girls and women, will be a very long time coming. This reality dominated every decision she made and she felt that the legal ramifications of this reality are something every woman should be sensitised to prior to living in an Islamic country.

7.10 Suzanne T.

Diagram 10 – Thompson Family



One of the mothers at the Nursery Co-op agreed to participate in my study and we decided to meet just outside the Pizza Hut in Agdal. Suzanne was a tall and thin blond woman. Since I was taking advantage of the air conditioning inside the Pizza Hut and watching for her through the windows, I was able to observe her for a moment without making her aware of my presence. She was wearing skin-tight black leather pants and a tight white tee shirt with spaghetti straps, and when she did not immediately see me, she sat down on the curb to wait. It was a startling sight for Morocco; a 40ish, pretty, blond woman dressed

in revealing black leather and an equally revealing tight white tee shirt, sitting on a curb on a busy corner of Agdal. That was my first inkling that Suzanne was an unusual trailing spouse, one whose style might be more to make the new cultural situation adapt to her, than the other way around.

After our interview began, I asked Suzanne if she dressed or behaved any differently while she was in Morocco as compared to England. She said no, she was affectionate with her husband in public and generally refused to modify her behaviour or dress just because she was in a foreign country where, she well knew, such behaviour went against the norm.

Suzanne met her husband when they were both working for the same company in England. When their company decided to downsize, her husband was offered a position in Morocco and Suzanne was laid off. Initially her husband spent three months in Rabat alone, and when he decided to accept a 12-month contract it became necessary for Suzanne to consider relocation. Suzanne, her 15-year-old son from a previous marriage, and her daughter, Rebecca age three, came for visit in the summer and quite enjoyed themselves. However, her son decided he did not want to live in Morocco for a year and choose instead to live with his father in England.

Initially Kevin's company was helpful getting the family established; they assisted the family in finding an apartment and even asked for pictures of their English home, so they could make an attempt to furnish the apartment in a similar style. Suzanne did not feel this attempt was particularly successful, but she was grateful for the effort.

Suzanne had worked her whole life and said she really enjoyed being employed. This was the first time that she has been out of work and she felt more than a bit bored. Unlike most of the trailing spouses I spoke to, Suzanne was offered a job almost immediately upon her arrival in Rabat. One of the senior staff that her husband worked with asked Suzanne to work as his secretary, as she knew company procedures, had experience and was already in Morocco. However she was hesitant to take the position; apparently her husband felt that it would be too much for the two of them, living and working together.

Suzanne and her husband had interacted extensively with the expatriate community since their arrival in Rabat. They patronised the American Bar and the British Social Club (BSC) every week, and they once also spent a weekend with friends in Gibraltar. In addition, Lauren invited Suzanne and her family and another family with a daughter about the same age as Rebecca, to spend a day on the beach with them and that was apparently quite successful.

Suzanne and Kevin took Rebecca everywhere they went, which presented some difficulties when they went to either the British Social Club or the American Bar. Children are not encouraged at these places, but Suzanne was not willing to look for a "child minder" in Morocco. The American embassy kept a list of domestic servants looking for work and Lauren suggested that Suzanne investigate it as all potential employees listed had prior working experience with English speaking employers and had received good references. However, Suzanne was hesitant to pursue this option.

Suzanne was not enjoying her experience in Rabat and told me that she phoned home every evening in order to talk to her mother. She particularly found it difficult driving in Rabat. Initially she had had access to a company car and her husband had arranged for her to get driving lessons prior to venturing out on a solo effort. Unfortunately Suzanne said she was too upset by the horns and lack of familiar driver courtesies to pay attention to local landmarks that would help her navigate her way around the city, and she ran into difficulties the very first time she drove her daughter by herself to the Nursery Co-op. Suzanne arrived at the Co-op easily enough and dropped off Rebecca, but when she left she got hopelessly lost. Eventually she ended up wandering about for two hours completely confused about where she was and how to get where she wanted to go. Finally she stopped at a phone booth and called her husband. She was so upset she was in tears, and she had to stop a man on the street to speak to her husband so that the two of them could figure out where she was, and give her directions to get home. To cap off her horrible morning, when she finally made it home she hit a post in the parking garage and as a result her husband suggested that she not drive for a while.

When I spoke to her, Suzanne was planning to return to England a week before her husband at Christmas and hoped to get the house decorated for Christmas and start Christmas entertaining. Suzanne was hoping that both she and Rebecca will have adjusted better to Morocco by the time they go back to England, and that she will wonder what it was that she had missed about England.

7.11 Overview of Case Studies

A realisation that came to me as a result of writing up and analysing these case studies is that most trailing spouses were creatively involved in constructing and collectively sustaining the expatriate community. While this does apparently reduce difficulty of neophytes coming to terms with a cross-cultural environment, the expatriate cocoon simultaneously had the effect of insulating expatriates from the challenges and opportunities involved in experiencing contrasting cultures. Very few expatriates appeared to grasp, even vaguely, the schema of the host nationals. Consequently the opportunity of understanding their own culture in contrast to another was lost. It bears repeating that expatriates do not adapt to the host culture; they adapt to the expatriate community. For most people expatriate relocations are not genuine cross-cultural experiences, and indeed this is probably the most that can be expected from the ordinary mortal who is just trying to get by.

8.0 Elements of International Assignments

Many couples assume that living overseas will require an initial period of adjustment and then life will resume a predictable pattern similar to the one they left behind. As these case examples show, clearly that is not the case. Much of the life of the trailing spouse is governed by factors over which s/he has no control and circumstances that are not foreseen.

International assignments often consume an immense amount of time on the part of the leading spouse and, whether it is anticipated or not, many of the more crucial decisions pertaining to ongoing living conditions, social activity and lifestyle become the exclusive purview of the trailing spouse. The end result, according to Lauren, is that the majority of decisions that were shared in the home country are instead, “made in the absence of the partner”. Abroad “[t]here are less joint decisions about everything.” The responsibility for the family unit and the family’s adjustment tends to fall to the trailing spouse.

Inevitably the trailing spouse becomes ‘the point person’, the individual who most interacts and is most familiar with the host culture. However, this responsibility has its drawbacks; unilateral decisions made can directly and sometimes overwhelmingly affect every member of the family, and consequently the stress level on the trailing spouse can become excessive.

8.1 Adaptation to Amenities and Perception of Difference

The basic essentials of any moving experience, international or domestic, involve housing, shopping, education, healthcare, cost of living, socialising and interacting with host nationals, and socialising and interacting with other expatriates – in essence the ongoing day-to-day basics of living. The questionnaire developed by J.S. Black and G. K. Stephens (Appendix B) attempted to measure many of these areas of adaptation. As well, the questionnaire went on to evaluate the perception of difference between the home

and host environment. It was also possible to use this information to compare the leading and trailing spouses' adaptation levels and perceptions of difference.

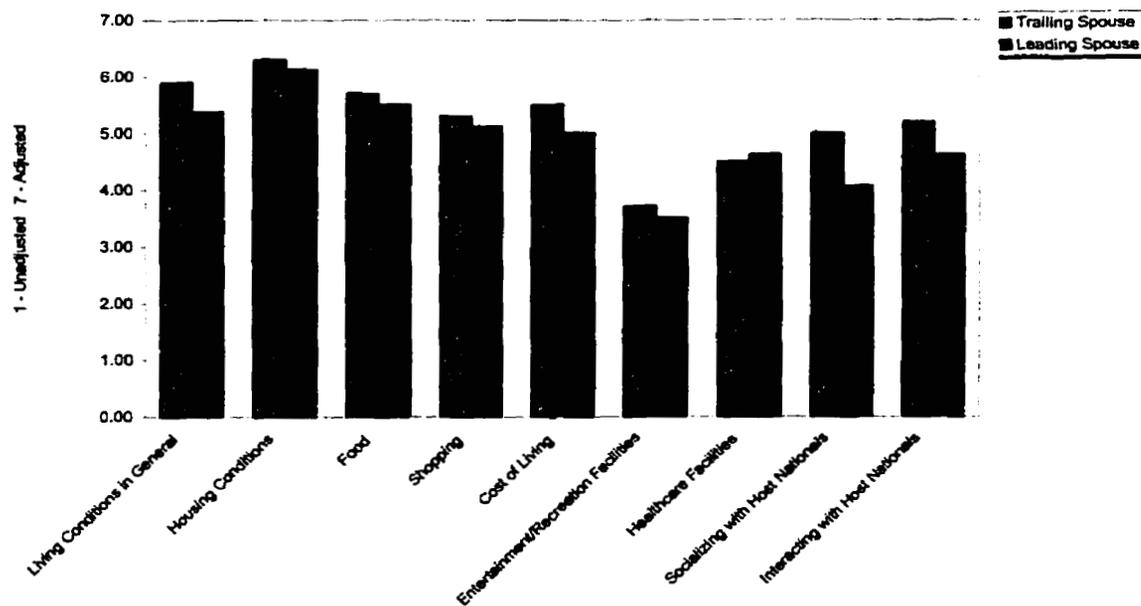
The results of administering this questionnaire to my research subjects indicated that, with one exception, trailing spouses scored higher in all areas measured than did leading spouses. However, not one trailing or leading spouse gave full marks to any of the elements identified and consequently it appears (as one would perhaps expect from the core material in Section 6) that no one was fully comfortable with the host environment.

Interestingly, while trailing spouses indicated a higher comfort level with the host culture than leading spouses did, they also appeared to be more conscious of the differences between cultures. In only two out of eight areas did the trailing spouse perceive less difference between the host and home culture than did the leading spouse; one area was the assessment of the transportation system and the other was the availability, quality, and types of foods.

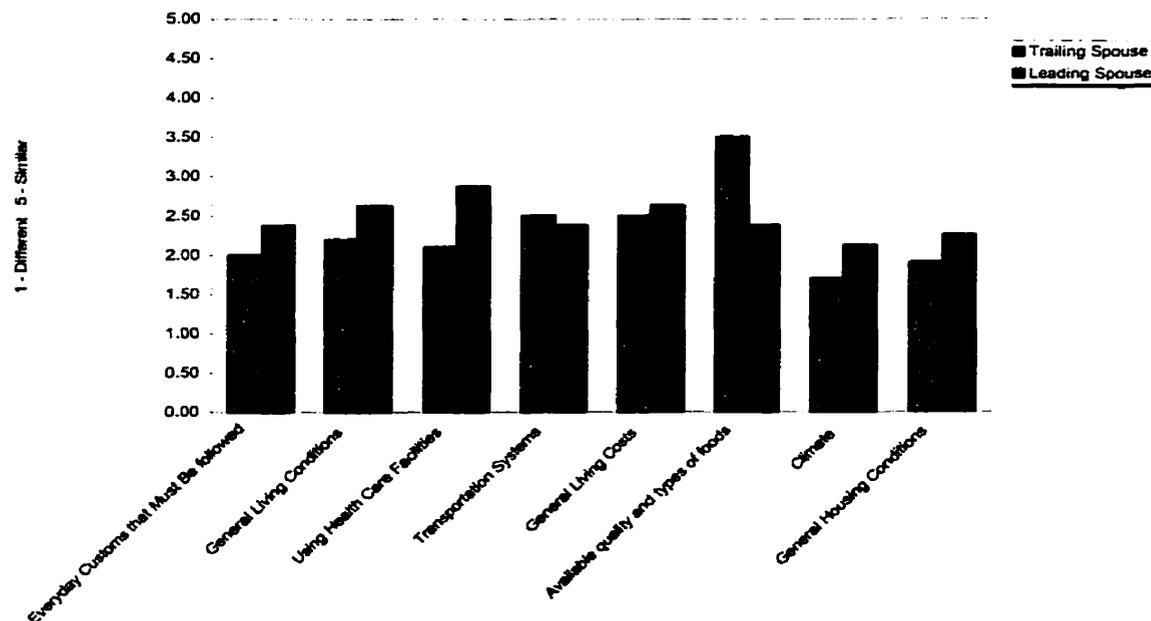
Most expatriates, both trailing and leading spouses, drove their own vehicles and consequently any assessment of public transportation systems would have to assume that familiarity with the public transportation system would be low. As well, trailing spouses, by virtue of their responsibility for maintaining the household, would be more familiar with grocery foodstuffs that are available and presumably would then base their perception of similarities or differences in this area. Leading spouses, on the other hand, are more likely to be assessing the variety and quality of restaurant foods, and would thus perceive a difference based on that area.

During the research it became evident that two areas of importance were missing from this questionnaire. The two areas not measured were (1) effect of educational institutions on adjustment and (2) adjustment to socialising and interacting with the expatriate community. I will comment further on these points in Section 8.3 and 8.4 following.

Figure 6 – Adjustment to Amenities: Leading and Trailing Spouse



**Figure 7 – Perception of Difference between Home and Host Culture:
Leading and Trailing Spouse**



8.1.1 Healthcare Facilities

The one area in which the leading spouse consistently exhibited a higher degree of adaptation than the trailing spouse is in the area of health care facilities. In general everyone who had dealt with the Moroccan health care profession was satisfied with the expertise that they encountered. Nevertheless, differing expectations between Western and Moroccan concepts of what was included in “health care” could result in major problems. Drugs and nursing care are extras in the Moroccan system, and the trailing spouse is most often responsible for ensuring that the antibiotics, painkillers and nursing care that may be required are available prior to any procedure. Betty B. told me that she planned to complete at least three major tasks before any medical procedure

would commence. First, meet with the medical professional to discuss requirements; second, meet with a pharmacist to get all the medicine required and any additional information needed; third, arrange for specialised nursing care if needed and finally, arrive for the procedure early in order to have time for unexpected additions or changes.

Lauren, unfortunately, was not completely aware of the ramifications involved in having an operation inside the Moroccan health care system. She was aware that she did need to provide her own nursing care and did take a friend with her, but she was unaware that she also had to provide her own painkillers. After her operation, which went very well, she asked the matron in the clinic for a painkiller. The matron shook her head and explained that painkillers were something you provided yourself. Lauren spent the entire first night after her operation without any pain medication, "not so much as an aspirin".

Since most trailing spouses would be the ones to provide nursing care for family members, an information lapse of this type would cause stress and even guilt for individuals involved in an already stressful medical situation.

Leading spouses score higher on the Black and Stephens questionnaire in this area but this can be explained by the obvious circumstance that they are often absorbed in their work and probably only peripherally aware of the differences between the two systems and challenges accessing the Moroccan health care system. As well most leading spouses are male, and the division of labour between the sexes in the home society often assigns responsibility for

managing the health care of their families to the female partner. Consequently the high score that leading spouses exhibit in this area may well be due to their unfamiliarity with the health care system.

8.1.2 Housing, Food, Shopping, Cost of Living

Owing to the privileged financial position enjoyed by the majority of expatriate families, they were able to maintain a higher standard of living than what they were accustomed to in the home environment. As a result, the expatriate population in Rabat wielded a certain amount of economic influence and to service their needs a sophisticated shopping mall catering to European tastes had recently been built. Another shopping option that was available, but only for American families, was the American naval commissary in Kenitra, and one informant told me that some Americans never shopped anywhere else.

Not all expatriates patronised these establishments, either because they were over-crowded or they were not conveniently located. These expatriates frequented smaller “super marchés” and “tabacs” owned and run by local Moroccans. However shopping at these smaller establishments did require some adjustments. Nancy M. highlighted these adjustments when explaining the differences in shopping patterns between the home and host country. She noted that living in Morocco required more frequent trips for groceries. Nancy explained that “shopping is basic, we are used to a variety of prepared foods – we are spoilt for choice [at home] ... We can buy most things but meals have to

be prepared from scratch which takes time and [a] visit to three or four shops each week.”

8.1.3 Interaction with Host Nationals

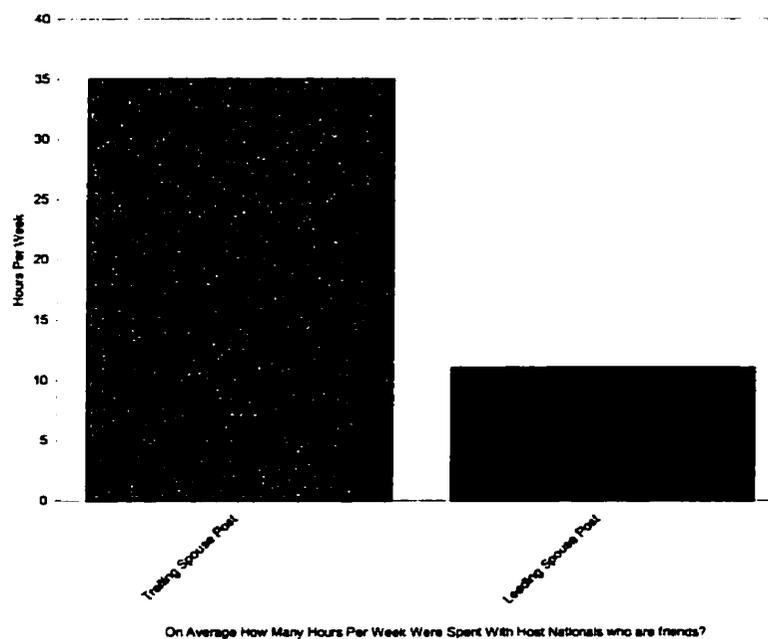
The leading spouse is often required, during the course of his or her employment, to interact with host nationals in order to accomplish job goals and is almost always in a supervisory role. Still, once the leading spouse returns to his or her residence, the trailing spouse acts as a filter or buffer between the leading spouse and any host nationals that he or she might encounter. In order to provide effective filtering or buffering the trailing spouse must often resolve conflicts with host nationals without any of the support that their partner would reasonably expect to receive from the corporation in a similar situation.

Even so, the trailing spouse scored higher on the Black and Stephens questionnaire that measured adjustment level to interaction with host nationals than did the leading spouse. Since interaction with host nationals was by definition expected in an overseas assignment, I expected that leading spouses would be selected and trained by their MNCs in order to succeed in this area. I anticipated that leading spouses would score higher than the untrained and unselected trailing spouses. This was not borne out by the data.

In addition, the Community Integration Index shows that trailing spouses spent approximately 35 hours per week interacting with host nationals. This was in contrast to the 10 hours per week the leading spouse spent in the same activity (see Figure 8). The untrained and unselected (except by virtue of their

marriage) spouse appeared to interact more often and more successfully with host nationals than did the highly selected and better trained, leading spouse.

Figure 8 – Interaction with Host Nationals



8.1.3.1 *Gardiens* and Maids

Most Westerners are not accustomed to dealing with domestic servants but in Morocco labour is very cheap and wealthy families are expected, indeed almost required, to hire *gardiens* and maids. *Gardiens* are always male and their responsibilities range from providing a security presence, opening garage doors, performing gardening duties, and keeping an eye on children when they are playing outside. Maids are inevitably female and assist in housework including child care and sometimes shopping. In my admittedly small sample, I found only one really successful relationship between a trailing spouse and her maid.

According to Mary W., relationships with maids are often stormy because expatriates do not realise that it “requires a specific attitude” to deal with servants, an attitude that is disturbingly alien to most Westerners.

Mary took some training in personnel management when she was at university and worked in that area after she graduated. She made it clear to me that the Western management techniques that she practised in the corporate world did not work when dealing with Moroccan maids. In the corporate world the emphasis is on motivation and more of a “hands off” style of supervision but Mary felt these sensitive techniques are an abysmal failure when applied to Moroccans. Mary found that she had to be extremely assertive, almost rude. “When you feel angry about something you should let them know in no uncertain terms, any concern about their feelings or moderating your temper only results in them flouting your instructions and repeating the negative behaviour.” Basically, she felt that the employer had to treat maids and *gardiens* in an authoritarian manner, with little use of the sophisticated management techniques with which Westerners are more comfortable. While Mary is probably an extreme example of the expatriate attitude to domestic servants, she exemplified the frustration that many trailing spouses experience when dealing with Moroccans in an employer/employee relationship.

My research suggests that most trailing spouses coping with a domestic servant find such an authoritarian and confrontational approach demeaning to themselves as well as their servants. As a result, cultural misunderstandings and frustrations appeared frequently to escalate into conflict and often these

situations ended in the peremptory dismissal of an employee. Indeed, many of my informants found maids to be more trouble than value and dispensed with their services entirely. As Lauren attested “they are often more work than they are worth and anyway, I can keep my home up to my standards rather than constantly chivvying at someone else.” The unlikelihood of a ‘facilitator intervention’ in such a situation, the trailing spouse would be left annoyed and frustrated, while relations with the host national community would be damaged. The importance of this type of damage is often trivialised but it can obviously have a detrimental impact on future relationships with the host national community.

8.2 Socialising with Host Nationals

One of the more interesting revelations of this research was that successful social contacts with members of the host national community were primarily developed by the trailing spouse. Many of these host national social contacts arise during participation in volunteer activities, such as the AWA Tombola or Christmas Bazaar fundraising activities. One of my informants explained that host nationals who chose to befriend expatriates generally “are all people who have experience of Western culture. It is hard to make friends amongst those ... who have no experience of foreign people.” In other words, most host nationals who readily intermingle with trailing spouses are people who voluntarily choose to spend time with expatriates. These host nationals are often

somewhat familiar with the schema of the expatriate community and are thus able to interact without challenging cherished concepts.

Many host nationals who socialise with foreigners have also at some point in their lives, been expatriates themselves and not only do they have an understanding of the cultural assumptions of these outsiders, but they are familiar with some of the problems and confusions that bedevil the expatriate experience. As well, some host nationals feel that contact and interaction with the expatriate community provide an extra dimension to their lives. Faouzia, the host national who was employed to assist Lauren with the Nursery Co-op, found a level of acceptance and sympathy in the expatriate community that was not available in her own.

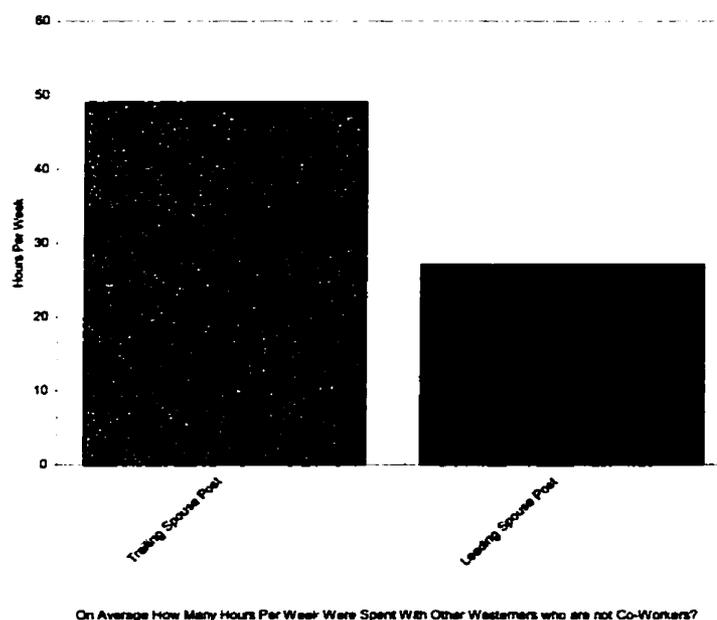
Social relationships with host nationals that are developed by trailing spouses tend generally to be voluntary and informal, and the relationships are negotiated to be mutually beneficial.

By contrast, social contacts with host nationals that are developed by leading spouses tend to be structured and formal. Company-sponsored get-togethers are attended by host nationals who often feel it is inappropriate to bring their wives to social events with co-workers where their wives would be expected to co-mingle with both male and female foreigners. Trailing spouses are expected to attend these company-sponsored social events and behave as they would at a similar social gathering in the home culture. The male/female ratio on such occasions tends to be very lopsided.

In addition, male host national co-workers in a traditional Muslim culture are not comfortable interacting freely with the wives of colleagues and as a result trailing spouses can feel ignored, inconsequential and insulted – and that is true even of trailing spouses who understand the cultural norms behind the behaviour. Lauren described an embassy function that exemplified this situation exactly. This was a formal event that involved Moroccan military officers, none of whom brought their wives. Lauren did not enjoy this gathering at all and later indicated that the experience was formal, boring and tedious. It appears that social contacts with host nationals developed by the leading spouses tend to be involuntary and formal, and do not lead to true ongoing social relationships.

8.3 Interaction with Expatriates

As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire by Black and Stephens did not measure the effect of ongoing interaction with other expatriates. However, my Community Integration Index did attempt to assess the amount of time spent in such interaction and the results revealed that approximately 50 hours per week was spent by the trailing spouse interacting with members of the expatriate community. The leading spouse spent less time, approximately 25 hour per week (see Figure 9), but this can be explained by the time consuming nature of their assignments.

Figure 9 – Interaction with Other Expatriates

As the leading spouse is consumed with work, the trailing spouse often assumes the task of building and developing social networks for both of them. Relying upon interaction with members of the expatriate community minimises the risk that either spouse will be confronted with anomalies that can challenge and unsettle accepted classification systems. As well, other expatriates can serve as a resource for finding acceptable solutions to practical problems that arise during a cross-cultural assignment. Social interaction with members of the expatriate community can be seen as a safe choice for the trailing spouse, chances are very high that these people will support the shared classification

system and assume some of the responsibility of negotiating an acceptable reality.

However, these are also the individuals who might well be in competition with the leading spouse for a promotion or an attractive assignment, and consequently these relationships might be fraught with pitfalls. Disputes with spouses' co-workers do occur, and can damage the career of the leading spouse. Lauren explained to me that the "attitude of the trailing spouse can make or break their partner's relationship with colleagues and others in the community. Some trailing spouse's can be unreceptive or even hostile to their partners colleagues. Spouses of those in senior positions can make or break other people's careers".

It is a major conclusion of this research that the trailing spouse is the person who interacts with a wider network of people and who consequently has a greater level of influence on relationships in the expatriate community and the host national culture than the leading spouse. The trailing spouse's management of the social network is crucial for the success or failure of an expatriate assignment and for that reason the trailing spouse's influence should not be underestimated. Indeed, so crucial is the role of the trailing spouse that one queries the very term itself, which has become fixed in the literature, but which connotes a false sense of passivity and a lack of agency which belies the real situation.

8.4 Education

One important area that both the Black and Stephens questionnaire and the Community Integration Index both failed to take into consideration was the importance of the educational institutions available to the children of expatriate families. The Rabat American School (RAS) functioned as one of the main foci of social interaction in the expatriate community. Not all expatriates had children, or even children attending RAS, but many activities designed for students were open to all members of the expatriate community. For example, the Halloween Carnival sponsored by the Rabat American School encouraged participation of expatriate volunteers. As well, aerobic classes for adults and rehearsals for singing groups were held at RAS and were open to all expatriates regardless of student enrolment.

For those expatriates who did have children enrolled at RAS, the social relationships between parents were entered into through relationships among their children. Betty was an experienced trailing spouse on her second assignment to Rabat. Her first assignment had ended after three years when she insisted on returning to the home culture because she felt overwhelmed and unable to cope. After an 18-month hiatus, she and her husband were asked by his company to return to Rabat. Betty refused to return unless her conditions were met, namely, both her children be enrolled in RAS. This was very important to Betty, as her previous experience in Rabat had been circumscribed by the decision to home school her children, the result being her isolation from the expatriate community. Her second foray into the expatriate community of Rabat

was much different, and her participation with RAS resulted in supportive social relationships and an ability to develop her own social identity.

The importance of the educational institution was an unforeseen, yet important element in the adaptation of trailing spouse to the expatriate community.

9.0 Social Support for Trailing Spouse

The original intent of this research was to examine and evaluate the various social support networks that were available to assist the trailing spouse adapt to cross-cultural environments. Social support networks are “a network of ties one keeps with other individuals which serve to fulfil affiliation needs, validate perceptions and behaviours, and provide resources such as information, encouragement and advice.” (Woytowich 1992:38, Fountaine 1986, Black 1990). Somewhat arbitrarily I separated these social support networks into various levels of complexity, ranging from informal networks to highly regimented systems, from dyadic interactions to those with numerous members.

Nevertheless, it became apparent during the course of my research that there were more than the original five social support systems that had previously been identified and those could better be conceived as overlapping rather than as discrete systems. Furthermore, of those original five, two of social support systems did not function as expected. Even so, social support systems in all their numerous guises did, with varying levels of success, assist trailing spouses adapt to cross-cultural environments.

9.1 Ad Hoc Social Support

My research suggests that one of the most important factors that facilitate cross-cultural adaptation is the development of an informal social support network within the local expatriate community. This network is invaluable because it gives the trailing spouse access to a group of people who are knowledgeable and understanding of the pitfalls and processes of adaptation, and perhaps more essentially, are willing to share that knowledge.

One of the more important advantages of joining a volunteer organisation is that membership change is expected. New members join and established members leave without disrupting the essential structure of the group. This fluidity of membership means that as members leave, positions within the organisation become available for those who may not have felt confident in their abilities to challenge the incumbent.

Some organisations seem to draw their members only from the expatriate community, for example the "Very Little Theatre" did not have many Moroccan members. On the other hand the membership of the American Woman's Association (AWA) was at least 50 percent Moroccan. It appeared that Moroccan women of a certain social and financial background found the AWA to be an organisation they were interested in joining. The main criterion for membership was an ability to speak English and the AWA provided an excellent forum for Moroccan Women to practice their English. Consequently a new

trailing spouse would find it easy to connect with host nationals who spoke English as well other expatriates of a similar social status.

In short, it appears that access to an Ad Hoc Social Support network provides important resources for trailing spouses, as well as giving them the opportunity to use their skills and talents in activities allow them to feel that they are making valuable contributions to the community.

9.1.1 Volunteer Organisations

The most effective way for trailing spouses to link up with an *ad hoc* social support network is to join a volunteer organisation, and in Rabat there was a considerable range of such organisations from which trailing spouses could choose. In the publication, The Great Rabat Cope Book, published by the American Women's Association in order to help expatriate families to adjust a chapter offering advice on how to deal with culture shock makes this point clearly and advises trailing spouses to "GET INVOLVED: AWA ... assisting at school, your church, etc." (1995:33). Implicit in this advice, is the assumption that developing relationships with other expatriates helps to diminish the stress of the transition process.

Not only does joining a pre-existing organisation give individuals an instant entrée into a potential support network, it can also often, later on, give people meaning and direction to their lives. As the literature makes clear, and as I heard again and again in my interviews, one of the most persistent problems that trailing spouses encounter during their cross-cultural assignments is the feeling

that they are wasting their skills, talents, energy and time. Whatever volunteer activity a person chooses can partially make up for this by giving them a feeling of accomplishment and by being involved with a group, as well as, in most cases, positive and constructive feedback.

That was what Nancy M. found when she joined the American Woman's Association. Not only did Nancy connect with many women – both host nationals and expatriates – but she also became deeply involved in the Community Development Committee (CDC). One of the principal programs that Nancy was immensely proud of was the support the CDC gave to a literacy program for Moroccan girls. The CDC supported a woman's co-operative in Salé called Nakasha, whose employees produced rugs, carpets, bags and hammocks from factory floor waste. Adult women who worked there were encouraged to take a literacy course during their breaks each day. After the program had been running for some time, literacy instructors noticed that women were bringing along their young daughters to the classroom and eventually the courses began to include the young girls, as well as the mothers. Not only was Nakasha providing income for unskilled women, but it also combated the problem of illiteracy among women. Nancy found her position as head of the CDC to be extremely satisfying and worthwhile and she enjoyed the feeling that her time, energy and talents were being utilised in a constructive way. Nancy's dedication to her volunteer position was not unusual among trailing spouses and many of my informants expended much time and effort contributing to their volunteer organisation of choice.

9.2 Structured Support Systems

Organisations such as the AWA are, by their nature, multi-purpose and tend to be staffed by volunteers who are committed, not only to assisting trailing spouses adjust to their new environment, but also to making positive contributions to their new environment. They are, however, informal organisations to which leaders are appointed from within the group. By contrast, formal social support systems are set up by external groups for the express purpose of providing assistance for expatriates living and working in a foreign environment.

One such example was supplied by the American Embassy. The American Embassy maintains the position of Community Liaison Officer (CLO) and this staffer acts as an information resource, assists trailing spouses to find employment, organises social gatherings, and provides basic social support services for all members of the family. The CLO is often a highly qualified trailing spouse who is also an expatriate and who therefore well understands the problems that most foreigners will encounter. However, this individual is, understandably, focused mostly on American expatriates, and while they do not withhold their time and service from non-US expatriates, their priorities were clearly centred on US nationals.

9.3 Corporate Support Systems

Somewhat surprisingly, Corporate Support Systems (CSS) did not prove to be as effective as one might have anticipated, and did not always seem to assist in the adaptation process. In fact, in at least one case, such a system actually appeared to be counter-productive. Often the CSS was most effective in assisting families *prior to* their actual arrival in Rabat and in this capacity the CSS was invaluable – in the matter of providing literature that enabled the family to anticipate their situation, in greeting them at the airport and helping them to find housing. However following the initial settling-in process, there was some feeling among trailing spouses that the CSS seemed to work against them, rather than for them. As I will discuss in the following sections it was almost as though the trailing spouse was perceived as either a nuisance, or a free resource that the CSS could exploit in situations in which no one else wished to become involved.

9.3.1 The Exploitable Trailing Spouse

Lauren experienced both of these aspects of the Corporate Support System (CSS) she was involved with during her tenure in Rabat. An example of exploitation by the CSS occurred when a UK national attempted to commit suicide by diving head first off a cliff. Luckily for him, he landed fairly close to a group of Moroccan picnickers who immediately rushed to his aid. They managed to get him to the hospital for medical treatment and the local police force discovered the smouldering remains of his personal papers not far from where he jumped. The police were able to ascertain that the young man had been carrying

a British Passport, but until he regained consciousness his identity was unclear and the British Embassy assumed the task of caring for this young man who was effectively indigent. Even after he regained consciousness and was able to communicate the situation did not improve.

As noted earlier, while medical care for the poor was assumed by the Moroccan government, nursing care was extra, and the Embassy designated Lauren to locate and secure nursing care for this young man. In the suicide case, Lauren received a phone call from the Embassy asking her to provide food, sheets, pillows, blankets and nursing care and other requirements for this young man's care. Since the situation was fairly serious Lauren did not feel free to refuse the appeal but as time wore on her involvement was taken for granted, and this expectation began to seem more and more of an imposition.

The embassy appeared to feel that once they had allocated the task of day to day nursing to Lauren, they could effectively wash their hands of the affair and their responsibility was solely to return the young man to England. The assumption was that Lauren, as a trailing spouse, was a resource to be exploited and then ignored.

9.3.2 The Expendable Trailing Spouse

Lauren also found her Corporate Support System (CSS) seemed to consider her a nuisance during a conflict that she had with her landlord. Lauren's family was paying the rent on a villa that had been located by the embassy prior to their arrival from England. They were renting from a host national who

appeared to feel that ownership of the villa entitled him to unrestricted access. On the other hand, the plumbing in the basement often backed up, and the landlord refused to fix it claiming that it was not his responsibility.

As the embassy Management Officer (MO) was expected to supervise these kinds of conflicts, Lauren informed them of the situation hoping for some mediation. Unfortunately the CSS was unwilling to become involved and the ongoing dispute became quite acrimonious. Eventually the situation became so unendurable that Lauren stated her firm intention of moving out of the villa for the last six months of their posting. Such a move would require the Embassy to set up another rental agreement for the new abode. At about that point, the Embassy sent four employees, along with the landlord, to assess the situation and to reconfirm, again, with the landlord that he was not allowed unrestricted access to the villa without 24 hours notice. After this inspection, the landlord was also required to fix the plumbing in the basement.

While eventually the Embassy did have to get involved in the dispute with her landlord, Lauren felt that if they could have ignored her for the final six months of her assignment they would have. In this particular case, it was clear that even sophisticated organisations that are specifically set up to manage expatriate/host national disputes were unable to function effectively in order to minimise such conflicts. Contrary to the expectation that the Corporate Support System invariably works to assist trailing spouses, this CSS seemed to work against them.

9.4 Family Support Network

An unexpectedly important factor that seemed to facilitate successful adaptation by the trailing spouse to the cross-cultural environment was the presence of school age children. Of necessity, children are enrolled in school and make friends with their classmates, and the school system operates on its own inexorable schedule. As a result, the neophyte trailing spouse is provided with a number of ready-made links and is able to connect with the parents of their children's classmates, who are coping with similar problems.

One example of this type of networking was the Candlelight Readaloud that took place at the Rabat American School near the end of October. The "readaloud" was an event for children in the elementary grades and it was scheduled to start just after dusk. The children came dressed for bed, provided with their teddy bears and quilts or pillows, and sat on the floor. Candles were lit inside Moroccan coloured glass lanterns and set up in two rooms; the library, and a spare classroom. In the library volunteers read stories for the older children such as Edgar Allen Poe's 'Telltale Heart'. In the spare classroom they read stories for the younger children which were somewhat less frightening.

There were several volunteers who took turns reading to the children, many of whom were parents, and some who were also dressed in pajamas and dressing gowns in keeping with the ambience of the occasion.

Most parents, when they were not reading to the children, took the opportunity to socialise with each other during breaks by gathering on the sidewalk between the two rooms and exchanging information. Since it was

relatively early in the school year, and yet late enough at night that both parents would be likely to attend, neophyte expatriates would find this an ideal occasion to network with parents of comparable school age children. While this occasion was ostensibly organised for the children, it appeared that the parents derived the most benefit.

Furthermore, the Rabat American School (RAS) sponsored many adult-orientated programs, such as aerobics classes and choir practices, directly aimed at expatriates, in addition to offering part-time and volunteer positions within the RAS staff.

Since social relationships with leading spouses co-workers, both expatriate and host nationals, tend to be fraught with tension and pitfalls, many people rely upon the relationships developed independently of the company's (or embassy's) social milieu. Parents of their children's school friends are, as a matter of course, members of an acceptable social status and level of education. Often, they also have experience as either expatriates themselves, or as host nationals who have knowledge of the western perspective and as such are able to relate to the problems of the trailing spouse.

Problems between children and conflict with school administrations can and did occur and cause difficulties in adaptation, but these problems were, by their nature, common to both domestic and international situations. However, by drawing parents into their orbit, they have the effect of "normalising" their situation through the mechanism of working together to solve familiar problems.

Contrary to my initial assumption that children would complicate adjustment and hamper adaptation, it appears that children enrolled in school, if anything, facilitate the development of a social support network that assists the trailing spouse to adapt to a cross-cultural situation.

9.5 Shared Interests

Another factor in the adaptation of the Trailing Spouse to cross-cultural assignments was the importance of a shared interest or leisure time activity. It seems that any aptitude that is shared with others establishes a connection with individuals that can transcend differences in perception, language and culture.

An example of this occurred when Nico found himself excluded from the British expatriate community. Nico had a talent for painting and in casual conversation during an uncomfortable Embassy function he discovered that three other people attending the affair shared his passion. The four of them started a small art group that eventually staged an exhibition of artwork. None of the four of them were fully integrated members of the expatriate community: two were Moroccan women and one was a French woman married to a Moroccan, however although their cultural backgrounds were very different, they were able to transcend these differences.

Of all the factors that were studied during the course of this research, a shared interest appeared to be the most likely element to encourage individuals to adapt to the host culture, rather than the expatriate culture. The ability to connect with a person or a group, that share an interest in some activity

appeared to transcend cultural differences and promote adaptation beyond the expatriate community.

Of course, this was the most difficult method with which to develop a social support network. Moroccans are exceptionally friendly and outgoing people, but their culture does not encourage the development of community groups, and therefore connecting with people of similar interests within the host culture can be a very hit or miss proposition.

Male trailing spouses face unique problems when attempting to adapt to cross-cultural situations, if only because they tend to be a male minority within a predominately female category. As the options for developing social support networks tend to be fairly limited for men, the practice of finding individuals who share a mutual interest is possibly the most effective, albeit difficult, method of developing a social support network.

9.6 Confidante

One of the two most important factors in the successful adaptation of the trailing spouse was the ability to form at least one close, indeed, intimate friendship with another individual. This individual should be either in a similar situation or has been through the same experience. This person could be a host country national, but most often, among my research subjects, it was another expatriate.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines *confidante* as “[a] person trusted with knowledge of one’s private affairs”. During the cross-cultural adaptation

process, many people need someone with which to explore their feelings of alienation, frustration and confusion, in other words, someone with whom to express thoughts and feelings that should remain confidential.

Since leading spouses are also undergoing their own adjustment to a new work culture as well as a cross-cultural environment, trailing spouses often act as the 'confidante' for them. However, it is preferable to introduce a third perspective into a tension filled situation such as cross-cultural adjustment, and as a result, the 'confidante' of the trailing spouse should ideally be someone outside the family.

Lauren felt this aspect of the adaptation process was so important that she knowingly created an opportunity for such a relationship to develop. One of Lauren's Nursery Co-op parents was having a very difficult time adapting to Morocco and so Lauren invited her and her family for an afternoon at the beach. Lauren also purposely invited another family with children of the same age, who shared much the same background as the faltering trailing spouse. The afternoon on the beach with the three families was a great success and resulted in an ongoing relationship between the other two women that appeared to alleviate much of the despair and confusion felt by the faltering trailing spouse.

This aspect of the adaptation process is so important that The Great Rabat Cope Book advises people to "[d]o try to share your reactions, problems, feelings and experiences with a friend. The challenges (not the problem) can be eased by encouraging and sympathetic friends" (1995:33)

Consequently, the need for a patient and receptive 'confidante' is very important to the adjustment of the trailing spouse. This is not only because the need to express one's frustrations must be met, but also because individuals can brainstorm solutions to various problems, and even if neither friend knows the solution, at least the trailing spouse does not feel isolated and adrift in a foreign sea of confusion.

9.7 Role Model

One of the most important factors that affect successful adjustment of the trailing spouse is the presence of a role model. This role model may or may not be a close friend, but should be an individual who will spend time familiarising the trailing spouse with the new environment and demonstrate a high degree of successful adjustment. A role model is different from a confidante in that the relationship with a confidante is essentially a dyadic and personal relationship involving the disclosure of intimate details of one's life, whereas a role model can function in that capacity for many people at the same time, and one does not need to know a role model personally in order to find inspiration in their doings and image. Confidantes can be, although not always, trailing spouses who are in, or have in the past experienced, comparable throes of cultural disorientation and the confidante relationship enables them to listen sympathetically and share their experiences and feelings freely. By contrast, relationships with role models are typically more restrained and distant and do not involve the opening up of one's intimate life.

Role models are expected to share their expert knowledge of the problems and pitfalls of adjustment both to the expatriate community and the host country. Such sharing would ease the practical problems of adjustment for the trailing spouse, but even more important, a good role model would also share what they perceive as cultural patterns that lead to, what was heretofore, inexplicable behaviours by host nationals and other expatriates. This sharing would assist the trailing spouse deal with situations that may not have been anticipated by either the company, the trailing spouse, or any of the other expatriates that have been used as a resource in the adjustment process. An understanding of cultural patterns (or, at least the appearance of such an understanding in the eyes of the junior party) communicated by an effective role model, would assist adjustment and help the trailing spouse to design appropriate responses in unanticipated situations – for example, what to take along as presents and how to dress and behave if invited to a host national's house. In other words, the trailing spouse would feel as though they understood, however dimly, the strange cultural situation with which they find themselves.

Role models however, are an extremely scarce resource for a trailing spouse to find. The ideal role model appeared to be a trailing spouse who has married a host national and had made the host country their home. However, due to the enormous emotional investment necessary, many individuals do not often feel it worthwhile to spend time with people whose assignment is only expected to last three to five years (Newsbreak 2000). As one potential role model put it to a trailing spouse who was getting ready to leave Morocco, "she

really would have liked to know me better, but she felt as if she was always having her heart ripped out when friends left and she was left to pick up the pieces.” Consequently, individuals with an enormous wealth of cross-cultural adjustment knowledge may sometimes deliberately avoid close contact with a newcomer in need, simply to protect their own limited energy and emotional resources.

Moreover, while trailing spouses who have married host nationals head many volunteer organisations, their willingness to devote the time necessary to assist the adaptation of newcomers becomes reduced with each protégé that they adopt. Eventually their enthusiasm wanes. Since their unwillingness to involve themselves in relationships that only endure a maximum of three to five years (Newsbreak 2000), their invaluable knowledge and support as role models tends to be lost.

As well, male trailing spouses find role models to be an even scarcer resource. Due to the relative lack of understanding of the unique problems faced by men in the trailing spouse position, and the comparative novelty of the phenomenon, men find themselves isolated and unable to make connections with either confidantes or role models.

Consequently, while role models appear to be the most effective and efficient resource for trailing spouses to rely upon, their relative scarcity on the ground appears to hamper the adjustment of trailing spouses. This is a severe lack and as a result, numerous trailing spouses suffer through an extended and

uncomfortable adjustment process that would not be necessary had a role model been available.

10.0 Discussion and Summary

While it is understood that adaptation occurs at the level of the individual, and that the experience of adaptation will be different for each and every trailing spouse, there are some general conclusions that can be drawn from this study. Some of these conclusions, are in fact applicable to trailing spouses even in domestic relocations, while others are more specifically directed at the expatriate experience in what would be identified as an "exotic" locale, a setting where the expatriate does not share the language or cultural patterns of the host society. As I have noted, the expatriate community can be likened to a sort of cocoon, which helps the expatriate to cope by insulating him or her from the host national community. In some extreme cases, such as Algeria, Libya and Saudi Arabia, western multi-national corporations have created institutionally complete communities that fully isolate the expatriate from the surrounding society. It is uncertain how relevant my findings are to these more structured environments, however, it seems logical that in these settings the internal social processes of the expatriate community described in this thesis would be even more powerful.

A caveat with respect to my findings is the fact that the expatriate community studied was composed of English speaking expatriates, half of whom were unilingual. It is generally believed that English speaking expatriates are notorious for refusing to learn the language of host nationals and yet expect to

function as if in their home environment. While English speaking expatriates were the subjects that I was interested in studying, the conclusions that I have drawn may not be representative of trailing spouses from some other countries, who as a matter of course speak more than one language.

10.1 Social Support Systems

A finding that is likely universal to all overseas placements is the importance of social support systems to the individual in adaptation. One of my central findings is that social support systems for the trailing spouse are necessary in order to minimise the difficulties of coping with a relocation experience. It is a rare individual indeed who could cope with all the cross-cultural challenges alone and unguided. However, this research also suggests that not all social support systems available for the trailing spouse are equally helpful. Some such systems are ongoing and formal organisations that have existed long before the trailing spouse arrived and will continue to function long after they are gone. Others are small networks or relationships that appear to develop, expand and cease to exist, depending upon the various individuals involved. Additional systems are established by external groups whose directors perceive the necessity of assisting the trailing spouse, but these, mainly corporate, support systems have a patchy record of success. Still others are, in effect, latent functions of existing institutions that acknowledge, as a matter of policy, the need for a social support network and manage to find the resources to partially and informally address them. Finally, there are the completely *ad hoc*,

unpredictable, and personal dyadic relationships which develop — or don't — into role model and confidante relationships. All told, the magnitude of efforts by various institutions, individuals and organisations, to provide the neophyte trailing spouse with social support is remarkable.

Volunteer organisations recognise the unique contributions that trailing spouses can make to their new surroundings and are eager to take advantage of the skills, energy and talents that are available. In return, they provide a non-threatening environment within which trailing spouses may become familiar with other members of the expatriate community, as well as host nationals who speak their language. Many volunteer organisations are headed by expatriate women who have made the new surroundings their permanent home, and who are willing to share their insights and interpretations of the host national culture to those neophyte trailing spouse who are at a loss to know how to cope with their disorientation.

Nevertheless, these organisations are not exclusively focused on interior issues, such as the problems besetting the novice trailing spouse, which affect the membership. While they appeared to be organisations created to assist trailing spouses to come to terms with their new environment they are in fact, organisations that are making tremendous efforts to assist host nationals, mostly women, overcome illiteracy and poverty. In fact, the AWA in Morocco is an association that is accredited by the United Nations, and has a special consultative status to the Economic, Social and Cultural Development Council (ECOSOC) in Morocco.

Role models, individuals who have attained a measure of comfort and success functioning in the new environment, are often to be found as highly placed women within these organisations. Unfortunately, role models are also often reluctant to extend themselves beyond what is strictly necessary for the accomplishment of the goals the volunteer organisation has set. This reluctance seems due mostly to the knowledge that close friendships developed with trailing spouses are doomed to be short lived, and accordingly access to the cultural knowledge and understanding of role models tend to be limited.

Not unexpectedly, the ability to find a friend, a 'confidante' to share the trials and tribulations of the relocation experience is possibly the most effective method of social support that a trailing spouse can find or develop. However, connecting with such a friend is something that requires time to develop and usually necessitates an environment in which to find such a person. As well, these relationships, like all expatriate life, are subject to the whims of the MNCs that send expatriates overseas and repatriate them. So while confidantes are possibly the best social support that trailing spouses can find, they have disadvantages similar to that which inhibits role models from committing to close relationships with trailing spouses, to wit; the short-lived and transitory nature of the relationship. As well, the stresses and strains that such a relationship would be subjected to in a hothouse atmosphere like an expatriate community would also reduce the effectiveness of such a relationship.

One effective social support network that is often overlooked is the one provided by the educational institution available for the children of expatriates

and host nationals. In Rabat, this institution was the Rabat American School, and RAS went out of its way to give trailing spouses the opportunity to network with other parents. Furthermore, they encouraged trailing spouses to get involved in classes offered for adults, or to take a position with the school, either volunteer or part-time, in order to help people become familiar with the expatriate community and for the expatriate community to become familiar with them. However, make no mistake: the primary purpose of this educational institution is to educate children and social support for the trailing spouse is a secondary objective. Additionally, people who do not have children or whose children are not enrolled in the school, find it difficult to access the support offered by this institution.

Fortunately, a social support network can also be developed independently of an existing organisation. Finding others who share an interest in a favourite pursuit is a way of developing such an independent social support network, however in traditional family-orientated societies such as Morocco, making connections with people from outside the expatriate community can be difficult. Moroccan culture is family-based and does not encourage voluntary organisations except for religious groups; consequently this kind of social support, based on shared avocation, is developed only rarely. This difficulty involved in accessing community groups would probably not be a concern in relocations in the home country or relocations to less exotic environments. However, trailing spouses who reside in compounds set up by MNCs in extremely exotic settings are limited in the assortment of people they would be

able to access in order to build a social support network. Should the trailing spouse in some way violate the norms of the community, as some male trailing spouses do, the chances of them being able to build a social support network outside the expatriate community is problematic.

Corporate support systems, by contrast, are not random occurrences. They are in fact, planned and organised systems with the goal of assisting expatriates and their families to relocate with the minimum of disruption. Unfortunately, as we have seen, corporate support systems do not appear to be uniformly effective and in some cases, could actually be counter-productive. Most corporate social support systems appeared to be developed exclusively to deal with practical and business-related problems related to the logistics of living in a foreign country but familial issues (particularly from the perspective of women) and social and cultural difficulties were ignored.

10.2 Increased Responsibilities

In concert with the findings in the literature, and one that would be common to most international relocations is the unexpected level of increased responsibility that the trailing spouse experiences. Most leading spouses find themselves absorbed with their assignment as soon as they arrive at their destination and consequently can escape most of the upheaval involved during relocation. As a result trailing spouses are left alone to cope with all the overwhelming plethora of details of moving that are compounded by the realities of international travel. Also, unlike the western world in which activities

surrounding day to day existence can be managed at a distance, most routine requirements must be met by developing a personal relationship with host nationals and the trailing spouse is the partner on to whom this responsibility falls. They are the ones who are expected to seek out these individuals, develop the relationships and maintain them to ensure that the routine requirements of day to day living are met.

As well as dealing with the logistics of international relocations by themselves, trailing spouses are often required to make substantive family orientated decisions alone – decisions that normally would be discussed with their partner. Additionally, the trailing spouse is expected to resolve most of the emotional apprehensions that other members of the family unit feel. Effectively the trailing spouse acts a single individual, making unilateral decisions with all the attendant stresses and strains that a single parent would encounter, however the trailing spouse has to do this in a cross-cultural environment where chances are s/he does not even speak the local language.

10.3 External Boundaries/Internal Lines

An unexpected finding, one that is probably common to domestic as well as international relocations, could strongly influence the adaptation of a trailing spouse, and has, to the best of my knowledge, gone entirely unnoticed in the literature on cross cultural adaptation. This was the recognition of the competitive atmosphere within the expatriate community (see Section 5.3.1.2). It appeared that such contentiousness was confined, as far as ascertainable, to

either competition between spouses of co-workers (and, as such was beyond the scope of this study, strictly speaking, but the point is that it "spilled over" from the work environment into 'the community'), or to competition for positions within the established social hierarchy.

As the expatriate community was very small, social interaction was frequently between spouses of co-workers. Threats to the career of a spouse and their attending social status were taken very seriously. In some cases, these threats, real or perceived, provoked sanctions that could include an attempt to destroy the career and social status of the leading spouse, or the social status of the source of the perceived threat. Such sanctions usually involved social isolation of the individual and their spouse who either inadvertently or deliberately transgressed social norms.

This competitive atmosphere was not confined to spouses of co-workers alone however, and newcomers to the community who do not have an 'in' into the social group could find themselves treated with unexpected suspicion and hostility. Until an individual establishes an acceptable history or offers auspicious credentials to the social group to which they aspire to belong, they can be consistently rebuffed and socially forsaken.

Therefore, a major factor in the adaptation of the trailing spouse was the contentious atmosphere that trailing spouses can encounter. Inadvertent violation of social norms, or an inability to establish credentials within the community, can result in social isolation and eventual failure of the cross-cultural assignment. One can easily imagine that, in a third world capital city in which a

small number of (for example) foreign petroleum companies were locked in intense competition, vying for influence with the Ministry of Petroleum, much of the character of social and interpersonal relations within the expatriate community would be overshadowed by the business and political issues.

10.4 The "Trailing" Spouse?

As a final thought, and, for me, personally, the most striking finding of this study — and, I should add, one which it took me a considerable amount of conceptual readjustment even to recognise, despite the fact that it was as plain as the nose on my face all along — was the realisation that the trailing spouse, far from being a timid, passive, observer, overwhelmed to the point of "shock" by the unfamiliar, and struggling to accustom themselves to a hostile environment, can in fact be better likened to an active person, making adventurous probes out into a new environment. Many of the social contacts made by the trailing spouse tend to stay within the expatriate community, but it is worth noting that interactions by the trailing spouse with host nationals are triple (see Figure 8) that of the highly paid leading spouse.

Cross-cultural assignments challenge the trailing spouse to "get smart quick" and they should be seen as performing the functions of a sophisticated social researcher; one who is focused on creating a support system or network not only for themselves but also for the MNC employee. The responsibility of the trailing spouse does not stop at that level however, and many function as ambassadors to the local host national community. Trailing spouses build

relationships and understandings that most leading spouses cannot take the time to recognise the need for, much less address. Clearly trailing spouses are more essential to the success of a cross-cultural venture than had previously been understood. But this brings us to a further problem – the very words themselves.

The opposing terms of “leading” and “trailing” — so deeply embedded in the literature — actually *reverse* the social agency involved in cross cultural business expatriate adaptations. The so-called “leading” spouse is really the passive one — stuck all day in an office and embedded in a formal hierarchy of official relations. By contrast the “trailing” spouse is the one who forays out and negotiates on behalf of the inclusive family unit, its relations with the environment and which transforms these relations into real-life, flesh and blood, social relationships.

Upon this conceptual shift, I believe, hangs the future of “expatriate studies”. The received models and their vocabulary, remain grounded in a series of mid twentieth century assumptions and stereotypes about gender, about the boundaries of the domains of business and domestic life, about family relationships, and about agency. The field has been hindered by unquestioned assumptions that have almost pathologised the plight of the trailing spouse, stressing passivity and incapacity.

As my admittedly limited Rabat findings show, however, the successful adaptations cannot be simply linked to prefabricated solutions (such as corporate support services). Each successful adaptation is a sort of personal “liberation”, accepted as a challenge, and worked out *at the individual level*, by an individual,

and, it needs to be said, involving such serendipitous factors as the happenstance of the presence of a role model or confidante when one was needed. This suggests that, perhaps, simple, organised, prefabricated, “welcome wagon” solutions have only limited scope for easing the transition for first-time expatriates. Role models and confidantes cannot be guaranteed to be available when needed, like an Assistant Office Manager IV or a Clerk-Typist III.

Rather than thinking of solving a pathology by building a bureaucracy to deal with the “problems” of the trailing spouse, I would suggest, on the basis of my ethnographic study, that what is needed in this field is a conceptual shift — away from the model of pathology and toward the recognition that most people solve their own problems tolerably well on their own, and that they do so largely in spite of the official systems that are supposed to help them to this end. What trailing spouses need is not more “doctors” to tend their condition, but rather the liberation to realise that, tapping into the fund of experience of those who have preceded them, and with a bit of luck, they can successfully adapt as well.

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