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The intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children

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**The Intercultural Adaptation of
Expatriate Spouses and Children**

*An empirical study on the determinants
contributing to the success of expatriation*

Anees Janeer Ali

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RIJKSUNIVERSITEIT GRONINGEN

**The Intercultural Adaptation of Expatriate Spouses
and Children**

*An empirical study on the determinants contributing to the
success of expatriation*

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ter verkrijging van het doctoraat in de

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aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

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Prof. Dr. J. Soeters

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Sincerely,
Anees
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March 2003

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***When I hear the word 'culture',
I reach for my gun!***
— *Herman Goering*

Author's Personal Experiences while Living in the Netherlands

I first came to Holland in September 1997 to complete my Master's degree. I did not do much in the way of preparations to adapt to the living in the Netherlands thinking that I would not face problems. In fact, I never thought much about adapting to a country that is different from my own. At that time, I had only one thing in my mind: to study and complete my degree. Goodness, was I wrong!

Prior to the move, I did not know much about the Netherlands. The image I had of the country was one filled with beautiful and colourful tulips, yellow wooden clogs, charming windmills, endless dikes, and mounds of cheese. I remember very well the first day that I stepped foot in the Netherlands. It was on a Sunday afternoon, and from Schiphol Airport, I took a two-and-half-hour train journey to Groningen after a 14-hour non-stop flight from Kuala Lumpur. Nobody was waiting for me, either at Schiphol or Groningen Central Station. Nobody told me that almost everything is closed on Sundays in Groningen, even the Guest House where I had made a reservation to stay for three nights. To think about it, I believe that was my first culture shock in the Netherlands! The taxi driver left me at the Guest House and there was a note at the door saying that newly arrived guests would have to call a security guard in order to get in. I left my two big suitcases unattended in front of the Guest House and tried to locate a telephone booth. Unfortunately, the only telephone booths available were card-operated. I asked at least five people who passed by if I could use their telephone cards. Strangely, nobody had a telephone card and one person told me to buy one at the Post Office, which is of course, also closed on Sundays. I was tired, hungry, and angry and at the same time I was worried about the luggage that I left in front of the Guest House! I just walked down the street until I saw a cafe and asked a kind young lady whether I could use the telephone in the cafe. Luckily, after leaving my luggage for 45 minutes unattended, they were still there. After the check-in, I was exhausted and took the longest nap in my life.

I woke up the next morning and hurried to the university, registered, and followed a class right away. Jet-legged, I spent the whole afternoon in bed and woke up at 6:30 pm just to find out that all the shops were already closed! Loneliness hit me right away and I felt trapped in my hotel room. Not knowing anyone in the city and how to move about in Groningen, I spent the whole night watching TV and eating the instant noodles that I brought from Malaysia.

In the following days and months, I started making friends at the university as well as at the hostel where I stayed. I was busy with assignments, books, and exams and I believe that I did not do much in order to adapt myself to the Netherlands as I spent a lot of time in the hostel room and also in the computer room studying and completing assignments. At the end of September the following year, I finished my Master's degree and returned to Malaysia.

(Continued in Chapter 9)