

transcultural  
aid  
for  
families

Kitlyn Tjin A Djie  
Irene Zwaan

PROTECTIVE  
MARRIAGES





## Protective Wraps



# Protective Wraps

Transcultural aid for families

Kitlyn Tjin A Djie

Irene Zwaan

Dedicated to Ellen Meijer (1944-2020)

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# Foreword

In 2016 it's once again time for a revised edition. I am glad that this book continues to be a great and lasting source of inspiration for anyone committed to working in the care sector in an honest and non-judgmental way.

The book is the result of a project of Bureau Jeugdzorg Drenthe (youth care agency in the province of Drenthe). All its employees have with great dedication been working on carrying out a special assignment, which in actual fact should not be 'special', but should be normal and continuous: providing truly accessible and well-functioning care for all parents and children in Drenthe, including those who are migrants or Dutch with migrant backgrounds.

As a project team, we knew that quite a lot had been written already about transcultural work. However, we wanted to augment the range of publications with one based on practice and focused on the core of transcultural work for care workers themselves.

In the context of the transcultural work project, Kitlyn Tjin A Djie has trained many workers, both within Bureau Jeugdzorg Drenthe and at our chain partners. The province of Drenthe has been of great support in putting the diversity policy issue high on the agenda.

During the training sessions, the tremendous amount of personal knowledge and experience of case managers, family guardians and care workers became apparent. In their unconscious form, personal experiences sometimes turn out to create barriers in contacts with others. Once brought to light, however, these personal life experiences of course also prove to be the very source for establishing real contact, on a human level and irrespective of belief, history or race.

How to tap into this source, that's what this book is essentially about. This means that it is not a technical treatise on models and methods. It is about knowing and acknowledging your own history, and on that basis dispensing with preconceived ideas and seeking real dialogue with the other person. Even in stressful and hazardous situations.

At a time when imposing norms on 'foreigners' seems to occupy a fairly central position, this choice is as brave as it is necessary. To add to this, I believe that the core of intercultural work is in fact perfectly organically connected to the solution-oriented and systemic approach, to which we have been committed for years in youth care in Drenthe.

I would sincerely like to thank Irene Zwaan and Kitlyn Tjin A Djie for having written this book and in doing so having made the power of protective wraps accessible to professionals throughout the country. I would equally like to thank all our people who have contributed and who have made their stories available in order to share their experiences with their colleagues now and in the future.

Cees Wierda

*Director Bureau Jeugdzorg Drenthe*

*This book was written as part of the more comprehensive transcultural relief project, in which attention was paid to improving the connection between professional care and existing (family) cultures.*

# Justification

This book reflects the views of Kitlyn Tjin A Djie on how to bring out the best in children, particularly migrant children, in youth care. Her philosophy is based on her own life story and her experiences. She supports her ideas with theoretical concepts from anthropology, intercultural communication and system therapy.

Kitlyn uses her own story and the stories of others to substantiate her ideas. In the anthropological and social sciences, the use of personal stories to underpin certain beliefs is also known as the narrative approach. The principle of the narrative approach is that in the stories of people and in the language they use to tell these stories, certain ideas relating to a theme are expressed. Stories illustrate the complexity and diversity of ideas and realities. The narrative method gives people a voice; it ascribes value to the story. It gives meaning to the knowledge of those concerned and places this knowledge in the light of a greater whole.<sup>1</sup> There are numerous ways of presenting and analyzing narratives. There are no real formal rules. You cannot be objective in using narratives in order to substantiate theories. What you can do is draw plausible conclusions if a number of stories point in the same direction. The stories in this book bridge the gap between theory and practice. Kitlyn's own life story led to certain views. She looked for the theory to corroborate these. This theory is subsequently illustrated with stories from third parties.

This book presents the ideas and beliefs of Kitlyn Tjin A Djie. It does not always provide a platform for nuance. And because her views are so interwoven with her own story and experiences, she herself is also prominently present in the chapters.

No ready-made blueprint or prefab solutions are provided in this book. It is intended to offer a new perspective on reality, different from the one you have been accustomed to up till now. This might just raise more questions than it provides answers, but it will certainly make you think. And hopefully it will help you put those case studies where initially you could see no way out in a different perspective, enabling you to give a new direction to solutions.

Most of the stories in this book were told by Kitlyn and by employees of Bureau Jeugdzorg Drenthe. Aspects in the stories that might lead to recognizability such as names, place names, problems and country of origin of clients have in most cases been altered.

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<sup>1</sup> Does, M. van den en A. Arce (1998), 'The value of narratives in rural development projects. A case from Ecuador', *Journal of agricultural education and extension*, vol. 5, nr. 2, pp. 85-98.

# Introduction

This is a book about Kitlyn Tjin A Djie, transcultural system therapist. Kitlyn uses her own story, her family history, in order to show why intergenerational family thinking is so important in the provision of care. And how collective family systems function. Kitlyn's story is about diversity, migration and moving back and forth between contexts and cultures. She herself is a migrant from Suriname (former Dutch colony) with Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Creole and German blood. She originates from Jewish, Catholic and Protestant traditions. Her father stemmed from a patriarchal system, her mother from a matriarchal one. To this day, her family lives all over the world. If there is one person who knows what she's talking about on the subject of diversity, it's Kitlyn. Kitlyn is married to a Dutchman. She has two adult sons and seven grandchildren. She knows better than anyone that it takes certain skills to keep the door open for dialogue with 'the Other'<sup>2</sup>. She calls attention to the consequences of migration. She offers tools for the care worker to contribute to the welfare of those who have lost their way as a result of a life phase transition such as migration. To achieve this, it is essential to switch between cultures, to look at things from different angles and to set aside sacred cows. In order to be able to do that, some knowledge about the other person is required, such as culture, family structure, traditions. But more than that, care workers must be aware of their own cultural stock-in-trade. They must be able to deploy a personally vulnerable part of themselves to allow for genuine contact with the client. Different strategies and methodologies can be of assistance in this respect. It is important to look for protective wraps for the client. 'Protective Wraps' is a term for providing protection by wrapping someone in familiar circumstances. Rituals, photographs, bringing back experiences from the past, creating situations to offer some safety and warmth in a difficult phase of someone's life.

This is also a book about the province of Drenthe, with its very diverse social landscape. There are many rural areas and relatively few cities. There is a peat culture and a sand culture. There is the history with the Moluccans (inhabitants former Dutch colony), the train hijacking (see chapter 3). Drenthe has its own traditions, its 'noaberschap' (the unwritten rule to always help your neighbors), the villages with greens surrounded by farms, but also the dolmens, the war, the secrets, the poverty. In Drenthe, different dialects are associated with different cultures.

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2 Levinas, E (English 1969) *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Drenthe is beautiful, Drenthe is wide and complex. Drenthe offers an attractive environment that illustrates how an original Dutch culture can carry diversity within it, and how the different Dutch cultures can interact. It is also revealed how it relates to the consequences of immigration. In this book, Drenthe represents a small part of the Netherlands. Because each province has its own history and cultural characteristics.

Bureau Jeugdzorg Drenthe wants to be accessible to all young people. That is why in 2005 a diversity project was launched, in which Kitlyn partook. At the time, she trained all Bureau Jeugdzorg Drenthe employees in transcultural communication. As a result, they were better equipped to deal with clients who 'speak a different language' from that of the care worker. Her trainings were like a warm bath. Without tools or programs, she lures participants into a kind of extended personal conversation, during which everyone tells fascinating stories. As one of them put it: "Alignment with the family stories of the other participants is the best teacher. To be aware of your own cultural heritage makes you a good care worker." Bureau Jeugdzorg Drenthe had positive experiences with Kitlyn's philosophy and working method. That is why in 2006, Irene Zwaan and Kitlyn Tjin A Djie were asked to write this book, of which the first edition appeared in 2007.

In addition to Kitlyn's stories and theories, the experiences and stories of the employees of Bureau Jeugdzorg Drenthe are recorded in this book. In Drenthe it is demonstrated that the intercultural dialogue not only applies to migrants. Wherever there are differences, wherever there is diversity in the broadest sense of the word, attention should be given to intercultural communication. This includes the communication between men and women, young and old, protestant and catholic, employer and employee, care worker and client; in short, this way of thinking is valuable in all forms of communication.

This book can be read as a novel, a storybook. In her work with migrants, Kitlyn started off with her own story, her intuition and experiences. She was convinced that in order to help children who end up in the care sector, white Dutch mindsets don't work. Subsequently, she found the accompanying theory. This book, too, starts off with the story. The story of Kitlyn and the stories of Bureau Jeugdzorg Drenthe employees. Together, the stories paint a model. 'Protective Wraps' is a model in which different theoretical concepts provide tools for shaping the dialogue with the unknown stranger in an honest and human way.

## **Addition to the 4th revised edition**

The Dutch version of *Protective Wraps, transcultural aid for families* was born in Drenthe, after which it took off and landed in various places throughout the country. There have been a number of developments, some of which are worth mentioning here.

An important impulse, for example, was that at the presentation of the book in Assen, capital of the province of Drenthe, several organizations joined forces to establish the platform Protective Wraps in Drenthe. This platform, consisting

of organizations for education, care and welfare work, has made an important contribution to the distribution of Protective Wraps in the rest of the Netherlands.

Supported by a European grant, an implementation study was carried out at seven organizations in the western part of the country, with very positive results. As a foundation for this study, PIONN (management consultancy) has developed and defined a scientific substantiation for the working model of protective wraps, which can be found on the website.

The protective wraps model is taught as a social studies subject in higher professional education. Various organizations across the country are trained in working with protective wraps.

The province of Utrecht has deployed protective wraps at eight youth care institutions, with a view to lowering thresholds for migrant children and their families. Research conducted by Forum into the impact of the project showed that there was a high appreciation for protective wraps among the participants in the training courses. The cultural sensitivity of care workers turned out to have increased significantly.

Gradually, we started putting up a house around our work: Bureau Beschermjassen (Protective Wraps Agency). Through this agency we offer training courses: basic trainings for beginners as well as trainings for those who want to teach the model to others. Kitlyn also gives lectures, workshops and in-company trainings throughout the country, meant for everyone who wants to create scope for diversity at work.

From time to time we receive comments on the fact that the book is focused too much on migrants. In such cases we argue that there is very little literature to be found on the influence of migration on family continuity in we-oriented systems, and that this book fills the gap. We also receive many positive signals regarding the major role played in the book by the provincial context of Drenthe. After all, many care providers working in cities in the northwestern Netherlands themselves have roots in the provinces of Zeeland, Limburg, Groningen or Friesland.

The protective wraps model contains a number of theoretical as well as practical elements. Everyone, regardless of personal or professional background, can make use of it. Apart from care workers, the participants at the training sessions include police officers, theater makers, midwives, civil servants and university college teachers. It's all about safety at the workplace, knowing your history, doing justice to yourself and establishing relationships with others based on your contact with yourself. No fixed methodology is entailed; everyone can set to work with it right away. At the same time, this occasionally makes it difficult to generate exposure. Databases for effective interventions, subsidizers and governments require SMART descriptions. The protective wraps model does not easily fit into such a demarcated frame. Which is precisely the strength of the model.

## Addition to the 5th revised edition

The transition in youth care has led to all kinds of district teams and low-threshold facilities, where boundaries that previously existed between disciplines and organizations are less pronounced, and professionals reinforce each other instead of following separate tracks.

In 2015, Kitlyn was commissioned by the municipality of Amsterdam and Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences to provide Protective Wraps training courses to all the *Samen Doen* teams (secondary care teams for the support of families with complex problems) in the city. As usual, there were eye-openers, in particular with regard to the influence on both the professional and the client of family, history and culture over several generations. And when the entire team looked at one particular case with the aid of a genogram and lifeline, they were pleasantly surprised to note their collective knowledge and the added value of looking at case histories in that way. It became clear, for example, that the root of the problem was not a no-good child, but a family with a history of loss and ruptures, causing one parent to suffer from depressions, the other taking refuge in alcohol and the elder brother developing a gambling addiction. All those individual problems have a joint source, which is anchored in history. So it pays for all of us together to look at the one case. The participants in the training virtually always returned home cheerfully: "From now on we will see things in a different light and ask different questions!"

On balance, almost ten years after the first edition, we can conclude that the protective wraps model increasingly fits in with the framework of today's society, in which the government is focusing more and more on citizen participation and individual strength. However, the fact that an entire family history is involved remains a blind spot, both in case histories and in your conduct as a professional. This means that we will continue our mission with a great deal of passion and conviction, and that we have much pleasure in presenting this revised 5th edition to the world.



# Reading Guide

## **Chapter 1: Kitlyn's story**

Kitlyn tells her life story. She talks about her experiences in Suriname, her migration, and the issues she comes across as a Surinamese in the Netherlands. Her personal and professional findings have resulted in 'Protective Wraps'. The ingredients in this book can all be traced back to her story as told in this chapter.

## **Chapter 2: Protective Wraps**

This chapter is about 'Protective Wraps'. By means of the protective wraps model, people who are in an important life phase transition, as is the case with most of the clients in youth care, are embedded in the group or culture. Looking for anchors, pillars of support, rituals or equivalents from the past helps people to compose themselves and to resume their lives.

## **Chapter 3: Diverse Drenthe**

This chapter is about the social, cultural and historic landscape of Drenthe. Experiences of care workers in Drenthe show the extent to which 'Protective Wraps' achieves alignment in the province. By zooming in on Drenthe, it is made visible how one small part of the Netherlands itself contains diversity and how 'the Other' is dealt with here. You also receive tools to help you unravel diversity in different contexts.

## **Chapter 4: The power of families**

Families have a self-healing capacity. Because this frequently is a blind spot for care workers, attention is paid to how families function, making a distinction between family systems directed towards the individual, such as those in the Netherlands, and the more collectively oriented family systems of non-Western migrants.

## **Chapter 5: Impact of migration**

Migration has a major impact on people from collective systems, partly because it affects the continuity of the functioning of the extended family. Herein lies a large part of the causes of problems in families. This chapter provides an insight into the consequences of migration, so that as a care worker you can take this into account.

## **Chapter 6: Intercultural competencies**

This chapter provides an overview of the intercultural competencies required for an open dialogue with ‘the Other’. This involves knowledge of your own cultural baggage and that of the other person. You should be aware of your sacred cows in order to be able to keep switching perspectives. Empathy and compassion are basic requirements in intercultural communication. Finally, you should be aware of the fact that there are always blind spots in communication.

## **Chapter 7: Tools for intercultural dialogue**

A number of tools are discussed that can be used in the contact between the care worker and the client. Subjects addressed are working with genograms, making a visual overview of the history and structure of an extended family. The lifeline helps to get an idea of important life phase transitions. Attention will be paid to TOPOI, an analysis model for communication. Working with contextual questions, life stories and testimonials will also be discussed.

## **Chapter 8: New perspective on the provision of care**

‘Protective Wraps’ offers a new perspective on the care practice. This chapter examines how it relates to conventional views on the provision of care. It also describes how it fits in with existing methodologies such as Signs of Safety, the Solution Focused Approach and the Family Network Consultation. In addition, we will discuss how it relates to the beacons of New Style Welfare.



# Kitlyn's story

Kitlyn Tjin A Djie understands the art of breathing life into theoretical concepts. She does this by examining her own life story like an anthropologist. In this way she invites others to discover their own story. To look at the history and structure of their own family. Because their own story provides them with tools in the dialogue with the Other.

“I like to start off stories at the beginning. Where my cradle once stood. Or where my name comes from. Getting rooted, as it were. My name Kitlyn comes from the Chinese word Kit-ling. Kit-ling in Chinese means ‘enough’. By the time I was born, my father reckoned that there were enough daughters. I was the fourth in a row of six girls. The fact that my father changed Kit-ling to Kitlyn leads me to point out that he is a second-generation migrant child. He has experienced the pain of loss of the first generation of migrants. But he has not personally experienced that loss. He wanted to give me a Western name. By calling me Kitlyn, he connected the West with the East, Lynn being an American name. Explaining this provides an opportunity to look behind the story. It makes me feel supported by my family. It is universal, everyone is part of a family, whether they like it or not. Talking about my family makes people find their way to their own family.

My father was Chinese, stemming from a patriarchal system. In 1866, his grandfather migrated from Themsewui in Southeast China to Suriname. My paternal grandfather married a Vietnamese woman, born in French Guiana. She introduced the French *élan*. My mother is Surinamese, stemming from a matriarchal system. Her father was Portuguese-German. Her mother had a Creole father, who was a direct descendant of the enslaved. Her mother’s mother was from the indigenous Caribbean tribe.

## **Suriname**

I grew up in a privileged environment. I lived in a district of Paramaribo of which everyone said: ‘I wished I could live there.’ In a beautiful house, the top part made of wood and the lower part made of stone. It was very striking, with trees leaning forward under the weight of orange flowers. It was a safe nest, a dream house. My father was a white-collar worker. Initially he worked as a station manager for a North American airline. Subsequently he worked for a Dutch company. Rock Hudson and other movie stars came by to visit us. During stopovers, they had to be entertained for the day, with a festive lunch prepared by my mother. Together with people from the district, my father built a swimming pool where only posh people came to swim. My mother’s closet was full of cocktail dresses and evening robes. I remember my parents as each other’s partners rather than as parents. Sometimes my father got home with my mother in his arms. The two of them were always interacting with each other. One of the girls from our neighborhood remembered how mad about each other my parents were, while her father was always cheating on her mother. ‘I wished I had a father like yours, a father who adored my mother!’ she said.

I was a headstrong child. My mother always says that I was the weirdest child she had. I had such a quick temper! I have pushed my sisters out of the window. I was crazy about my father. He was a big friend rather than a father. He told stories about Pete Puff, a little boy who would let out a big stinky puff when danger threatened. That’s how he chased away danger. But my mother was more reserved. She had to be strict, because my father wasn’t.

I remember very well that as a child I felt I had special gifts in communicating. At a very young age – and I knew I was different in that respect – I was able to have