

**SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW?  
CHAOS AND CALM IN DUAL-CAREER EXPATRIATION**

**Accepted for presentation at**

**US ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT ANNUAL MEETING  
BOSTON, MA, 3-7 AUGUST 2012**

**Citation:**

Inkson, K., & McNulty, Y. (2012). *Somewhere over the rainbow? Chaos and calm in dual-career expatriation*. In Richardson, J. and Doherty, N., "Managing international mobility in academic careers: A multiple stakeholder perspective". Professional Development Workshop at U.S. Academy of Management Annual Meeting, Boston, MA: 3-7 August.

**Copyright © 2012 Kerr Inkson and Yvonne McNulty. All rights reserved.**

**Do not quote, cite, disseminate or re-publish without permission from the authors.**

Kerr Inkson, Ph.D.  
University of Waikato and  
University of Auckland  
18 Park Avenue  
Northcote, Auckland 0626  
New Zealand  
E: [k.inkson@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:k.inkson@auckland.ac.nz)  
T: +64 8 480 2271

Yvonne McNulty, Ph.D.  
Shanghai University  
Sydney Institute of Language & Commerce  
20 Chengzhong Road  
Jiading District, Shanghai 201800  
PR China  
E: [ymcnulty@thetrailingspouse.com](mailto:ymcnulty@thetrailingspouse.com)  
T: +86.186.2137.7193

**SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW?  
CHAOS AND CALM IN DUAL-CAREER EXPATRIATION**

Kerr Inkson and Yvonne McNulty

K: Our presentation is on international dual-career couples.  
 Y: And our data is from our own, personal experiences.  
 K: What we want to do is to present you with some scenes from our own careers.  
 Y: We'll role-play these, very fast-forward: four careers in fifteen minutes!  
 K: As we do so, think about what you see. What are the plot dynamics?  
 Y: What are the key issues? Write notes if you want to.  
 K: We'll have a little discussion at the end.  
 Y: And we'll hand out notes on what we make of it all.  
 K: Now, we're going to start with the story of Yvonne's international career.  
 Y: I'm going to play the role of me.  
 K: And I'm going to play the role of Steve, Yvonne's hunky, spunky, hot  
 businessman husband ... Oh dear, do you think I'm right for this part, Yvonne?  
 Y: Well, you're both Scottish.  
 K: True. OK, I'm Steve. We take you back to 1998 – our wedding!

*Facing audience, as in facing a priest*

Y: I do.  
 S: I do.  
 Y: Aaah, look, the Sydney Opera House at sunset.  
 S: Beats Scotland in the summer. But -- let's take the promotion to Chicago ... it'll  
 pay off the mortgage.  
 Y: We'll come back, right?  
 S: Oh for sure. Two years tops. But you can't work – there's no visa for you, only for  
 me. You'll be a trailing spouse.  
 Y: No worries. I'll finish my degree and come back and get the promotion I've been  
 promised.

*Separate, on mobile phones*

S: I thought you liked Michigan Avenue?  
 Y: I do, but not without you.  
 S: What? I can't hear you ... hang on a sec ... they just called my flight, I'll call you  
 from Cincinnati. Go have dinner with your girlfriends. Go shopping.

*Off the phone, still apart*

Y: I'm bored, I'm lonely. Too many coffee mornings ...  
 S: I'm loving it, the job is fantastic ...  
 Y: Tennis, charity work, being Mrs Nobody ... my brain has gone to custard.  
 S: The money, the title, the travel, the networking!  
 Y: I'm going backwards. I miss my job. We should never have come here ....  
 S: Should have done it years ago.  
 Y: It's not me.  
 S: It's perfect for me.  
 Y: Let's go home.  
 S: I want to stay. Come with me on my business trips ... see the US for free!  
 Y: He does have a gazillion frequent flyer miles ....

S: She sees more of America than I do!  
 Y: The corporate hotels are amazing!  
 S: Drinks at the Blues Bar? Sorry, we're at a company conference in Hawaii.  
 Y: Christmas party? Sorry, we're skiing in Utah.  
 S: Maine for thanksgiving.  
 Y: San Francisco for 4<sup>th</sup> of July.  
 Y/S: Christmas in New York! (laughing)  
 S: I'm sailing off the cape with Phil and the boys.  
 Y: I'll spend the weekend with Phil's wife in Florida ...  
 S: Shall we have kids?  
 Y: [blank stare]  
 S: I travel too much - I need a reason to be home more.  
 Y: Isn't your bride enough reason?  
 S: The company doesn't see it that way.  
 Y: I graduated last week. My first degree.  
 S: Congratulations.  
 Y: What's the point in having a degree if I can't work?  
 S: True.  
 Y: Raising kids by myself while you travel isn't what I want.  
 S: I've been promoted!  
 Y: Home to Sydney?  
 S: Philadelphia!! But I won't be traveling as much.  
 Y: I still need a reason to get out of bed in the morning.

*pause*

S: The Sydney mortgage is paid off. Let's buy a condo here. We can put down some roots. We'll join the country club.  
 Y: Let's play golf - I'll join the women's league.  
 S: I'll play on Saturdays with John.  
 Y: Let's get a dog!  
 S: Let's have a baby!  
 Y: I've just finished my second degree. I need to work.  
 S: You can't work. We'll get deported.  
 Y: My thesis on *The Trailing Spouse* has got to be a ticket to something!  
 S: Can't you just enjoy being a lady of leisure?  
 Y: No. I'm on the board of a non-profit. I've enrolled for a PhD.  
 S: I want kids! Come to my conference in Seattle?  
 Y: I can't. I'm going to the Academy in LA.  
 S: Do you really need a PhD?  
 Y: No, I don't need a PhD. But I do need a reason to get out of bed every day.  
 S: I need you to do the corporate wife thing!  
 Y: Sorry, I'm writing chapter three of my thesis. And that's my first journal paper published.  
 S: How much were you paid for it?  
 Y: [blank sheepish stare]  
 S: It's a good thing we don't need a second salary .... And there I go, getting promoted again!  
 Y: Our third thanksgiving in Philly. My, how time flies.  
 S: Two cars, a condo, a share portfolio, house in Sydney. Cash. Life is good.  
 Y: And it gets better with a baby on board!

S: Our little Lauren! But our 6 years are up – our US visa expires next year. Back to Sydney?  
 Y: What are you, nuts? I'm specializing in international management. My thesis is on expatriation! We need to be in Asia. Singapore, silly!  
 S: Right. The company needs an Asia manager. Singapore. Hong Kong as a back up?  
 Y: Yep. Whatever. Just make sure it's past Dubai and not as far as Darwin.  
 S: For my career?  
 Y: Yes, darling. For your career. And mine. Let's self-initiate ... because in Singapore they have live-in maids!

*New position, fanning themselves*

S: Boy, the heat!  
 Y: Try being pregnant with a 9 month-old on your hip.  
 S: The job is different here.  
 Y: The Asian century and all that. Right where we need to be ...  
 S: I do like it – they revere foreigners!  
 Y: There's a bit of tension in the community though ... colonialism's still alive, to the locals we'll always be expats.  
 S: I don't miss the US at all.  
 Y: I miss the Academy. It's a long-haul flight now.  
 S: My business travel is more reasonable.  
 Y: You're still gone all week!  
 S: Yeah, but I'm home on the weekends for family time!  
 Y: And I'm here all week doing time ... alone ... single with no dating privileges. And you come home for clean shirts. What a deal!  
 S: You have a maid now.  
 Y: Just what every working mother needs ... a wife!  
 S: I don't like renting again.  
 Y: So let's buy something here and stay while the kids are young and the live-in help is cheap.  
 S: I'm a bit stuck. I don't think my boss will promote me ahead of the locals ... the underlying colonialism irritates them.  
 Y: Quite.  
 S: So I'll find a new job! Forget about loyalty.  
 Y: We're locals anyway ... and the headhunters are calling you.  
 S: Love my new company! All that social capital put to good use at last!!  
 Y: And the girls are on the waitlist for United World College. It's one of the top ten schools in the world.  
 S: ... Love my new title! "President, Asia" ... Just the promotion I was looking for.  
 Y: And I graduated again! A doctorate!  
 S: Congrats honey. I'm really proud of you.  
 Y: Thanks. Actually, I'm proud of myself. Not bad for a trailing spouse without a work permit, across three continents, eight moves, and needing a reason to get out of bed every day.  
 S: No more studying then?  
 Y: I need a job!  
 S: Without business travel I hope.  
 Y: The consulting jobs pay well. Travel and independence.  
 S: How will that work with the kids?  
 Y: That's my third interview with Deloitte. Just think - no more nappies!

S: Earth to mummy: let's get serious here. Lauren and Cate need you.  
 Y: Surely *you* can cut back? I've been supporting you for over 10 years!  
 S: This could be a nightmare.  
 Y: Millions of couples face it every day.  
 S: In their home country.  
 Y: With family support.  
 Y/S: (lightbulb) We need *two* live-in maids!  
 S: And a job with no travel.  
 Y: (lightbulb) Academia!

*Pause*

S: The extra salary is great – the Singapore mortgage is nearly paid off. Property in three continents.  
 Y: The working mother juggle is hard. How do mums do this without two maids?  
 S: The kids miss you. Care to cut back?  
 Y: Academy again – a week off without the kids or hubby!  
 S: Darling? Darling????? The kids miss you.  
 Y: I miss them too. They're more than I need. But they're also not enough.  
 S: Singapore is starting to irritate me. The condo's not where I want to raise my family. I'm an MD – MDs live in houses! We need a backyard!  
 Y: I work just round the corner! It's a dream come true. Four publications in one year!  
 S: We could finally get a dog. Put a swing in the back yard.  
 Y: We'll never find another international school as excellent.  
 S: Let's move again ... this isn't 'real life'. It's too fake.  
 Y: It's an expat bubble, perfect for working mothers. And home to my little third culture kids.  
 S: ... whose mandarin could do with improvement. Care to take the next step in your global career darling?  
 Y: How about China?  
 S: You took the words right out of my mouth!

*Both bow.*

K: And so, Yvonne and Steve have just moved to Shanghai.  
 Y: Ni-Hao! We hope this brief resume of international dual-careers has given you food for thought. Next, we want to provide you with a glimpse ahead -- into the international dual end-of-career, where issues of dual careers become entangled with issues of retirement. And to do that, we are going to look at Kerr's career. This time, I'm going to play the role of Kerr's wife, Nan.  
 K: And here's the story so far. Nan and I are Scottish, and lived and worked in Britain when we were young. I'm a career academic, Nan's a career schoolteacher. In 1970, we moved with our baby son to a three-year job in New Zealand, where we then had a daughter ... and stayed on beyond the three years ... and on ... and on ...  
 Y: We pick up the story in 1997 – twenty-seven years after Nan and Kerr's arrival in New Zealand.

K. They've made me Associate dean. Had you noticed? It's easier in New Zealand, I couldn't have done this in the UK.  
 N. What about me? Assistant Principal.

K: You've done well. We've both done well. (*Stops, looks around*). There's something missing though?

N: You mean the kids?

K: The kids! That's it! Where are they?

N: They've gone to live in Britain.

K: Both of them?

N: Yes.

K: Britain! But we turned our lives upside down to get away from all that! To give them a better life. Suppose they settle there and start families? They'll be depriving us of our grandchildren!

N: Just as we deprived *our* parents of *their* grandchildren.

K: !!!!! (*pause*). Why have they gone to Britain anyway? The quality of life is much better here.

N: New Zealand is boring for the young. Too small, hadn't you noticed?

K: It's rank ingratitude, that's what it is.

N: Don't worry. They say they'll be back in two or three years.

K: But that's what *we* said, back in 1970!

N: It's ok, Gordon's come back. He and Jesse are having a baby. A grandchild for us.

K: And Eileen?

N: Staying in London forever.

K: Why?

N: She has a great job with the BBC. Documentary producer. Lots of international travel. She couldn't do that here. Anyway, it doesn't matter. You now have two grandsons, just across town.

K: Have I?

N: D'you know, for some reason I'm – what's that Kiwi word – buggered.

K: You mean tired?

N: Yes, I'll retire now if you don't mind.

K: I don't mind. I feel the same way. Can I retire too?

N: If you want.

*They sit momentarily. K starts to move around again. After a moment, N follows him*

N: I thought you were supposed to be retired!

K: I couldn't get the hang of it. I went back. Anyway, what about you?

N: What about me?

K: All this voluntary work. We're two of a kind.

N: Full-time job for a half-time salary!

K: Better than a full-time job for no salary. But there's this McNulty thing --

N: Who's McNulty.

K: Australian. Very pushy. Wants me to help her turn her PhD thesis into a book.

N: You don't have to do it, do you?

K: She's very persuasive.

N: You've always been too soft.

N: We can't go on like this.

K: I'll resign. One more Academy. Boston. Finish the books and papers. Then spend a year in Britain.

N: Renew family ties.

K: See Eileen.

N: Live in Scotland, near my sisters.

N: It's a long way. A 30-hour journey.

K: We can still do it. Stopover in Singapore.

N: Yes, we can do it. But for how long? Into our seventies, into our eighties? And with gas prices doubling every five years?

K: Our son is in New Zealand. Our grandsons.

N: Our sisters, our nephews, our nieces, all in Scotland.

K: We'll Skype them.

N: It's not the same.

K: Where do we belong?

N: Scotland.

K: New Zealand.

N: Everywhere. Anywhere.

K: Where we are. I don't know.

N: All the places – all the people – we loved and can't go to.

K: All the places we could have gone to and didn't.

N: But while it was happening, it was so – good. Wasn't it?

K: Yes. It was – good!

N: It still is, you know.

K: Yes .... it still is.

[ < > ]