

17. Cross-cultural communication in intimate relationships

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1. Introduction

In this article I will attempt to provide an overview of recent research in cross-cultural intimate relationships. Of course, such an undertaking immediately poses the question: what is a cross-cultural intimate relationship? I will focus on only one type of intimate relationship, namely romantic and sexual couple relationships with various degrees of duration, commitment and exclusivity, ranging from life-long monogamous marriage on the one hand to short-lived prostitution encounters on the other. It could be argued that couple communication can never be cross-cultural as each couple forms their own personal 'mini-culture' no matter where the partners come from. Alternatively, it has also been suggested that men and women each have their gender-specific cultures (Maltz and Borker 1982; Tannen 1986, 1990), and in this view each and every heterosexual couple would engage in a cross-cultural relationship. For the purposes of this paper, I will engage with neither of these two extremes on the definitional cline [see the Introduction by Spencer-Oatey and Kotthoff]. Rather, I will consider an endogamous relationship one in which the partners share the same national and linguistic background, and, conversely, a cross-cultural couple one in which the partners come from different national and/or linguistic backgrounds. I will thus ignore couple relationships where the partners come from different class, racial, regional or religious backgrounds although many studies of intermarriage focus on these (e.g., Stoltzfus 1996; Breger and Hill 1998; Ata 2000; Sollors 2000).

The paper is organized as follows: in the next section I will explore beliefs about exogamy and endogamy, as these provide the context in which cross-cultural communication in intimate relationships occurs. I will then provide demographic evidence for a sharp increase in international intimate relationships over the past 30 years and will discuss some of the reasons for this trend. I will argue that globalization in its various forms has facilitated meetings for partners from diverse backgrounds. Three aspects of globalization in particular are relevant, and I will discuss each in turn: increased international mobility, increased international data flow, and increased international cultural exchange. Throughout, I will concentrate on cross-cultural communication during the "early days" of an intimate relationship, i.e. when the relationship is considered or is just being established. I do so for two reasons: first, I have explored communication issues

once a cross-cultural relationship has been established elsewhere (Piller 2001a, 2001b, 2002, *in press*), particularly language choice, the assumption that communication in cross-cultural intimate relationships is a “problem” *per se*, arguments, and the bilingual education of children in such relationships. Second, and more importantly, it would be wrong to assume that an intimate relationship is characterized by cross-cultural communication for an extended period just because the partners come from different national and/or linguistic backgrounds. As elsewhere, cross-cultural communication cannot be defined on the basis of the identities of the interactants, but rather on the basis of what it is that interactants orient to: only if they orient to cultural difference and culture as a category is actively constructed, can a communicative event be considered cross-cultural (Piller 2000; Scollon and Scollon 2001, Spreckels and Kotthoff in this volume). The more established a cross-cultural intimate relationship becomes, the rarer cross-cultural communication will be.

2. Endogamy and exogamy

Many societies around the world see endogamous relationships – marriage within one’s own group – as the norm, and intermarriage as the exception from the norm that is in need of explanation. By contrast, a relatively small number of societies routinely practice exogamy, and consider intra-cultural marriage a deviation from what is typically done. Examples of traditional societies that consider intermarriage the norm include the Banoni on the Solomon Islands (Lincoln 1979) and the Tucanoan in the Vaupés region in the North West Amazon Basin of Brazil and Colombia (Jackson 1983). The Tucanoan have a strong taboo against endogamy, and group membership is defined on the basis of one’s “native” language. Residence is patri-local and language usage is dual-lingual, i.e. each partner speaks their “native” language and receives the partner’s “native” language back. A child grows up hearing the father’s language spoken widely, but also the language of the mother, and those of other female relatives, all of whom would be in-married. Thus, children grow up multilingual but consider their father’s language their “native” language. Intermarriage is also fast becoming the predominant practice in some non-traditional societies such as Australia, where a 2004 newspaper article reported that “love is changing the face of Australia” (Gibbs and Delaney 2004). According to Gibbs and Delaney (2004), 22 % of the Australian population claimed more than one ancestry in the 2001 national census – a figure that reflects the intermarriage rate of previous generations, and is presumably significantly higher today.

It is against this background of different ideologies about intermarriage that intimate cross-cultural communication occurs. Ideology may be clearly stated as societal rules or taboos as in the Tucanoan case, or it may be implicit in practice

as in the Australian case. Clearly, ideologies that consider intermarriage the norm are the exception globally. Even if ideology is implicit in practice, assumptions about intermarriage as exceptional may continue to exist simultaneously. Gibbs and Delaney (2004) provide an example: after having reported on the demographic findings regarding increased intermarriage in Australia, the authors go on to note with a certain air of surprise that "it appears that intermarriage is well-received". The interview excerpts with partners in cross-cultural relationships that follow clearly indicate that the interview question was regarding any negative experiences, and are summed up as follows: "The *Herald* talked to a dozen couples who said they experienced negligible racism in Sydney. They searched in vain to find examples of a hostile look or whispered taunt".

Therefore, in the following I will concentrate on cross-cultural intimate communication in contexts where intermarriage is exceptional and/or regarded as exceptional (usually both).

3. Cross-cultural intimate relationships and globalization

In 1960, 19,458 German citizens married a non-citizen in a state-registered ceremony in Germany. By 1995, that number had risen to 50,686 (Statistisches Bundesamt 1997: 22). An even steeper increase can be observed in Japan: in 1965, 3,500 marriages between a Japanese citizen and a non-citizen were registered. By 1997, that number had risen to 27,000 (Radford and Tsutsumi 2004). The figures for the USA provide the same picture of an increase in international marriages: in 1992, 128,396 immigrants were admitted as spouses of US citizens. Ten years later, in 2002, 294,798 spouses of US citizens were admitted.¹ These three examples must suffice to prove the point that international marriages have, on a world-wide scale, increased enormously over the past decades. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that marriage is only one form of an intimate cross-cultural relationship: it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide statistics on intimate relationships other than those sanctioned by the state. Intimate cross-cultural relationships not included in the marriage statistics take many different forms, and would, *inter alia*, include gay and lesbian couples, cohabitation and de facto relationships, and short-term relationships. Statistics that can be considered indicators of these types of relationships further confirm the finding of a tremendous increase in intimate cross-cultural relationships in recent decades. For instance, an indicator would be the figures of women who enter a country on an "entertainer visa" in countries where such a visa class exists, as it does in Japan. In the 1990s around 60,000 "entertainers" annually entered Japan from the Philippines (Radford and Tsutsumi 2004) to work in bars, cabarets and nightclubs, in other words to provide some form of "intimate labor", be it sexual or non-sexual companionship.

This increase in cross-cultural intimate relationships is directly linked to globalization. Globalization can be defined as “a social change, an increased connectivity among societies and their elements [...]; the explosive evolution of transport and communication technologies to facilitate international cultural and economic exchange”.² Three aspects of globalization in particular can be isolated that have facilitated cross-cultural intimate relationships: increased international mobility; increased international data flow; and increased international cultural exchange. I will discuss each in turn.

4. Increased international mobility

Globalization is characterized by unprecedented numbers of people moving around the world, be it for the purposes of study, employment, pleasure, or to flee from persecution, to name but a few. Obviously each instance of international mobility increases the chances for people to meet and find a partner from elsewhere. For instance, in my research with English-and-German-speaking couples (Piller 2002), I found that the majority of participating couples had met while one partner was abroad as an exchange student. Others met while one or both partners were working abroad, where “work” includes military service. Indeed, statistical evidence that the mere fact of overseas residence increases cross-cultural relationships comes from marriages between male US citizens and female German citizens registered in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 1997: 23). This is the only group of international marriages registered in Germany that saw a significant decrease in the period from 1960 to 1994. In 1960, 6,062 German women married a US national (which was then by far the largest group of foreign men to enter marriage with a German woman in Germany; the second largest group were Italian men with 1,215 registered marriages). However, in 1994, only 1,728 German women married a US national. As it happens this decrease – during a period where international marriages overall increased around 2.5 times (see above) – runs parallel to the stationing and eventual draw-down of US troops (Herget, Kremp and Rödel 1995). In another example, Walters (1996) points out that a number of the Anglophone wives of Tunisian men in his study first met their partner while they served as Peace Corps volunteers in Tunisia. Waldis’ (1998: 196) research with Swiss–Tunisian couples where the female partner is Swiss and the male partner is Tunisian found that there were three circumstances in which the partners had met: while the Tunisian men studied overseas in Switzerland, while the Tunisian men worked overseas in Switzerland, while both partners studied or worked abroad in France, or while the Swiss women holidayed in Tunisia as overseas tourists.

In addition to the fact that increased international mobility for a range of purposes creates chances for cross-cultural intimate relationships to emerge,

people may actually engage in international travel with the express aim of entering an intimate relationship as is the case in travel for sex and romance. Travel for sex and romance is not in itself a new phenomenon: the scarcity of women in the American West in the 19th century, for instance, saw many Chinese women migrate to the US for relationship reasons (White-Parks 1993). They either came as "picture brides" of Chinese men, where the marriage had been arranged by their families back in China, or they came as prostitutes, often having been sold or forced into the sex trade. Old as the practice may be, travel for sex and romance has exploded in recent decades. It is useful to make a distinction between travel for sex, or, less euphemistically, "prostitution travel", which is illegal in many contexts and oftentimes involves slavery and human trafficking, and romance travel, which centers around the mail-order bride industry and where both partners choose to enter a cross-cultural intimate relationship under legitimate circumstances. At the same time, there is a fine line between the two, as has become apparent, for instance, in cases of internet relationship scams. Given that the demand and supply countries for both sex and romance travel tend to be the same, it could also be argued that sex and romance travel are two sides of the same coin.

The extent of international prostitution travel can be gleaned from websites devoted to the fight against the sexual exploitation of women and children.³ These show that throughout the 1990s the international mobility of both prostitutes and their clients increased tremendously. For instance, approximately 500,000 women annually are trafficked as prostitutes into Western Europe (Hughes et al. 1999). In many Western European countries, migrant prostitutes significantly outnumber local prostitutes, as for instance in Germany, where 75 % of prostitutes are foreigners (Hughes et al. 1999). At the same time, an estimated 200,000–400,000 German men annually travel abroad as prostitution tourists, with the Philippines, Thailand, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Hong Kong as their main destinations (Hughes et al. 1999). Figures for other industrialized countries show a similar picture of high demand for international prostitution, both as regards in-bound prostitutes and out-bound clients: Japan, for instance, has about 150,000 foreign women in prostitution, and Japanese men constitute the largest group of prostitution tourists in Asia (Hughes et al. 1999). The suppliers in this global division of sexual labor come from impoverished nations in Asia and Latin America, and, since the end of the Cold War, Russia and Eastern Europe.

Global economic inequality similarly underlies the legitimate side of the business of romance travel, which centers around the mail-order bride industry. Kojima (2001) analyses the mail-order bride industry as a system for the global division of reproductive labor. Women in industrialized countries have on an individual level been successful in freeing themselves from the imperative to marry and have children, but they have not succeeded in changing the underly-

ing system of capitalism and patriarchy which depends upon gendered unpaid work for social and human reproduction. Consequently, the gap is being filled by migrant wives and mothers. Like prostitution travel, romance travel is immensely gendered: men from industrialized nations go on “romance tours” to choose an overseas bride, while women from underdeveloped nations migrate to join their overseas husbands and take up residency with them. A “romance tour” is a form of package tourism where a mail-order bride agency organizes for a client to meet a number of available women in a given destination with the aim of marriage. The package typically includes airfare and hotel, arranged meetings with individual women or parties with a number of women, marriage contracts and legal assistance, and wedding arrangements. “Cherry Blossoms”, a US-based international marriage agency, for instance, offers romance tours to Shenzhen (China), Lima (Peru), Cebu City (Philippines), Bangkok (Thailand), and Ho Chi Min City (Vietnam), where the agency introduces the client to five women per day for a period of up to seven days “or as needed if you do not need so many. Most of our men go for at least two weeks so once they have time to get to know some of the women they have met better before returning home”. “Cherry Blossoms” claims on their website that over 90% of the men who use their tour services get engaged and then marry within a year of their tour.⁴ Instead of or along with individual introductions, agencies also organize “socials” for the men to attend along with a number of local women seeking marriage. The male–female ratio in some such socials is 12:2,000 (O’Rourke 2002). Indeed, many of the clients who provide testimonies about their experience with the US-based agency “Russian Brides” gush about the wide selection, as this correspondent: “I picked four that I liked the best, Sveta, Maria, Natasha, and Nadia. I had a wonderful time with all four. It was hard to choose between them. In the week I spent in Moscow, I had more dates and fun than I’ve had in the past ten years with American women”.⁵ Romance tours, as well as the mail-order bride industry more generally, have been enormously facilitated, if not enabled, by the internet, and it is to this medium that I will now turn.

5. Increased international data flow

It is not only increased international travel that has resulted in the tremendous increase in cross-cultural intimate relationships, but also increased international data flow, using such technologies as the Internet. Today, virtual meetings are as common as physical meetings. My students, who are in their 20s often tell me stories of how they met their partners online, or that they are conducting virtual relationships, with only very limited actual physical encounters – something I, in my late 30s, still find remarkable. The internet has removed some, even if not all, of the constraints of space on love. It is in this space that dating and match-

making agencies of all kinds are booming, including mail-order bride services. The modern mail-order bride industry began in the early 1970s with personal ads and print mail-order catalogues (O'Rourke 2002). However, it was only with the spread of internet access that the industry started to boom. In 2002, O'Rourke (2002) estimated that, at the time, there were around 2,700 agencies worldwide, with around 500 based in the US. From the mid-1980s onwards an estimated 5,000 mail-order brides from the Philippines alone entered the US each year, a total of 55,000 as of 1997 (Hughes et al. 1999). The advantages of the web-based agency over newspaper ads or print catalogues are obvious: To begin with, the database can be kept up-to-date at all times, so that customers do not need to worry that the prospective partners they are interested in might already have been taken. Most sites emphasize this fact in their advertising, for instance:

If you watch our site closely, you will notice that 50 beautiful women are added to it every week. But what you might not notice, unless you bookmarked many ladies' profiles, is that we also de-activate many profiles every week. Approximately 5–25 such deactivations each week result from daily client requests and contacts from ladies asking to be removed from our site as they have entered a serious relationship. We honor these requests without hesitation.⁶

Furthermore, the genre of the personal ads has changed with the new medium. Personal ads are no longer a minimalist genre where the advertiser has to be concise because they are paying per word or even per letter (Bruthiaux 1996). Web-ads typically include a closed list of attributes (age, physical measurements, ethnicity, religion, smoking status, etc.), plus a photo, and two open-ended sections where the advertiser can describe themselves and their desired other.

Finally, prospective partners do not have to rely on the personal ad in isolation, rather the membership system of many sites offers an opportunity for instantaneous communication. If a client is interested in an advertiser they can initiate a chat session with them. Cristina, whose "real-life success story" is featured on "Filipina Heart" describes the process as follows:

I dont know where to start my fairytale like story. I was in filipinaheart only to chat with my friends but i did not expect that i will meet the man that will give me happiness, love, and everything to me. one day, i go to the internet cafe to close my profile in filipinaheart because i am so busy studying but there is this man named garry that popped up in my computer screen only a few minutes before i can close my profile. i am not really interested to talk that day but i felt something for him and that talk last for hours and we promised to talk everyday either in filipinaheart or phone. we communicate everyday [...]⁷

If a site does not offer a membership system (where the men pay for access to the data of all the women advertising on a site), the client can purchase the contact details of the women they are interested in on a case-by-case basis ("add to

shopping cart”), usually with discounts for bulk buyers. The liberalization of the telephone market has also meant that even frequent and long international telephone calls to conduct a romantic relationship have become affordable from many industrialized countries. Indeed, some mail-order bride websites also offer telephone deals: “[W]e have found a pre-paid phone card company that offers incredibly low rates for all of your domestic and foreign calling needs. Calling the Philippines used to be very expensive to say the least. Now, it can be done at a very attractive price. Do your wallet a favor, and take a moment to check out these cards through our link.”⁸

Thus, websites offer far greater choice to their customers, both quantitatively (number of potential partners) and qualitatively (extended basis on which a choice is being made). While the internet offers many advantages for cross-cultural intimate communication, it also has well-known dangers. Mail-order bride sites often function as “shop-fronts” for organized crime and lure women into prostitution, and even if they do not, the danger of entering an abusive relationship is high. The mail-order bride industry is poorly regulated, and most of the regulations aim to prevent immigration fraud rather than protecting the women who enter a country as mail-order brides, and who are oftentimes dependent on their new husband in many ways, not least for their residency status. Unsurprisingly, the incidence of domestic violence in such marriages is higher than in marriages resulting from other encounters (O’Rourke 2002). Intimate cross-cultural encounters on the internet can thus easily become a vehicle of exploitation as in this case of a Russian mail-order bride in the US:

My internet meeting with Ed led to my being victimized in three ways. I was a victim of domestic violence, of sexual assault, and trafficking ... There were no pimps or organized crime rings. In my case, the internet was the vehicle for my sexual exploitation. It enabled Ed, a sexual predator, to lure me across the world into a situation in which I had no choice but to submit to his sexual demands. I was not his first victim, and I will not be his last. I have heard that he has a new Russian bride, and my heart bleeds for her.⁹

6. Increased international cultural exchange

Globalization is also characterized by an increase in international cultural exchange, in particular through cultural exports emanating from “cultural centers” such as the movie industry in Hollywood and Bollywood, or the music industry in London, New York, and Hong Kong. Increased international mobility and increased international data flow explain the increase in cross-cultural intimate relationships as a function of increased chances for cross-cultural encounters. However, at the same time, the fact remains that some people actively seek out a partner from a different cultural background as the mail-order bride phenom-

enon makes abundantly clear. Therefore, in this section, I will argue that it is globalization as increased international cultural exchange that is instrumental in encouraging an increasing number of people to actively seek out a cross-cultural intimate relationship. Cross-cultural desires in this view are not some kind of inner state, but rather a discursive construction (see Cameron and Kulick 2003a, 2003b for a full discussion of desire as a discursive construction). In this understanding public discourses – be they a Hollywood movie or a pop song – provide structures that individuals can draw on.

In previous work (Piller 2002, in press), I have described that a number of the partners in long-standing cross-cultural intimate relationships I interviewed explained that, at the beginning of their relationship, the fact that their partner came from another culture was part of the attraction. One German woman, for instance, said of her US-American husband, “I always wanted to marry a cowboy”. Another German woman has the following exchange with her British partner:

Erika¹⁰ @and if you weren't an Englishman, you wouldn't stand no chance. not like a snowball in hell, so.@ @@@ das hat fuer mich ne grosse Bedeutung, dass du Englaender bist. ((that is very important for me that you are an Englishman.))

Michael immer noch? ich glaube am Anfang war das mal.
is that still the case? I think that used to be so in the beginning.

My data show that partners in a cross-cultural intimate relationship may initially see each other as a representative of their culture. The more established the relationship is the less partners see each other as cultural representatives, and the more they see each other as individuals. In her study of Russian–American marriages, Visson (1998: 102) similarly observes that partners tended to see themselves as individuals, but their spouses in cultural terms, “as products of a ‘foreign’ culture”.

Takahashi's PhD research provides a further important contribution to our understanding of cross-cultural desire as a discursive construction within a specific context: this researcher shows that some Japanese women actively seek out an English-speaking partner because they take them to be good-looking and considerate ladies' men, similar to the media images of celebrities such as David Beckham, Tom Cruise or Brad Pitt (Piller and Takahashi 2006; Takahashi 2006). There are numerous sources from which these images of Western men as attractive, caring, loving, and giving emanate: there are of course Hollywood movies and numerous other US cultural products, but, more crucially for our discussion, international cultural interconnectedness has reached such levels that these images also emanate from Japanese cultural products, such as *manga* and *anime*, Japanese pop songs (as opposed to American ones,

which are available simultaneously), women's magazines, and the advertising for the English-language-teaching industry. As Takahashi's (2006) ethnographic research shows it is particularly in situations where Japanese women experience serious dissatisfaction with Japanese society, and particularly Japanese men, as for instance the experience of severe bullying or divorce from a cheating husband, that they decide to actively pursue the possibility of meeting a Western partner.

Dissatisfaction with Western women also emerges as the main reason that mail-order bride websites give for American men to pursue a partner from outside their own culture. I will now shift away from the focus on women that has previously dominated research in cross-cultural desires (as in most language-and-gender-related enquiry; see, e.g. Piller and Pavlenko 2004), and explore the cross-cultural desires expressed by Western men on these sites in greater detail. There are four aspects to these discursive constructions: representations of what Western men are like and what they desire in a relationship; representations of what Western women are like and why these "default partners" are not being considered; representations of foreign women – I will concentrate on Filipinas – and what makes them desirable; representations of Filipino men, their "default partners", and what makes them undesirable or unsuitable partners for Filipinas. I will briefly discuss each. To begin with, it is important to bear in mind that categories such as "Western man" and "Filipina" are member categorizations (Sacks 1992; Antaki and Widdicombe 1998, Spreckels and Kotthoff in this volume) on the websites. One site, for instance, has the following slogan: "Western Man + Filipina = Happiness. You do not have to be good with Algebra to know that is a winning equation!"¹¹ In this example, as in numerous others, the categorization is a member categorization as it is used on the site, and it also provides evidence for the fact that advertisers on this website (be they Western men or Filipinas) approach each other (initially) in cultural categories, i.e. as representatives of their respective cultures.

Western men

According to O'Rourke (2002: 477), surveys have repeatedly shown the following characteristics of US-American men who seek the services of a mail-order bride agency:

[A] median age of 37, where ninety-four percent were white; fifty percent had two or more years of college, while less than one percent lacked high school diplomas; fifty-seven percent had been married at least once before; and seventy-five percent hoped to father children through the mailorder marriage. Additionally, the men surveyed were, for the most part, politically and ideologically conservative and financially successful.

In her analysis of 60 personal ads placed by men on the "Filipinaheart" site in early 2004, Mooring (2004a) also found – on the basis of their demographic details which form part of a check-list on this site, as they do on most – that the majority of these advertisers (75 %) were 36 years or older (up to 65). Most were Christians (only 22 % identified as "Other", "No Religion", "Buddhist" or "Jewish", in this order). In their open-ended self-descriptions the most frequently occurring attributes, in descending order, were: "attractive/good looking", "honest", "financially secure/successful", "great sense of humor", "loving", "caring", "romantic", "family-oriented", "religious/god-fearing", "fun-loving", "understanding", "simple", "faithful", and "open-minded". The composite picture produced from those 60 ads is one of a traditional head-of-the-family, breadwinner husband-and-father. This is also the image espoused in the marketing statements of the websites themselves. The following is an example:

This site caters to the classical American gentlemen. Men who understand that man and women are different, and someone a lot smarter than us made us different for very good reasons. What you are looking for is someone 100 % loyal and who fulfills all the other roles a traditional wife fills. What I found is that women from the Philippines meet that criteria and are more compatible with American gentlemen than American women. [...] I've seen an understanding of the social order from Philippine people I've not seen in any American younger than 60 to 70 years old. What this means is **the Philippine people teach social and family skills that Americans have abandoned**. But not all Americans. There are still plenty of American men who appreciate and desire those skills and understanding.¹²

Western women

The above quotation also mentions that American women lack compatibility with American men. Negative representations of Western women are pervasive on these websites and their frequency testifies to the fact that the writers see endogamy as the norm, and feel they need to justify their search for a foreign partner (see above). Western women are represented as "liberated" (which is always used in quotation marks), selfish, aggressive, and materialistic. Statements such as this one abound:

I know many of you are tired of the US or Canadian singles scene like I was. You know ... insincere girls who like to play games or expect constant material gifts. But these Asian ladies are honest, faithful, rarely lose their figures as they age, are extremely supportive, and care more about your heart than your wallet. For them, nice guys finish first! I know that is a new concept to many who are reading this ... I know it was for me. Don't settle for a demanding and unappreciative woman. The age of the internet has opened up a whole new world of opportunity. It's time you meet the woman you truly deserve! Life is too short to settle for a "6" when you can have a "10"!¹³

Much of what is said about Western women is said by implication, through contrasting them, implicitly or explicitly, with Filipinas, as in “they rarely lose their figures when they age”, which implies that Western women do.

Filipinas

Foreign women are everything that Western women are not, or are no longer. They are the ideal of conventional femininity: beautiful, petite, devoted, religious, obedient, submissive, and sexy. Previous research has shown that Orientalist images (Said 1978, 1993; Spurr 1993) predominate in the images of Asian women in the West, and particularly in the US (Marchetti 1993; Uchida 1998). The image of Asian women is dominated by the “Madame Butterfly”, or, more recently, “Miss Saigon” stereotype, which portrays Asian women as exotic, sexually available, submissive, obedient, domestic, sweet and passive. For her honours thesis, Mooring (2004b) collected generalizations about Filipinas from six different mail-order bride sites,¹⁴ and found that they largely coincide with the image described by Uchida (1998). The following is typical:

Filipina women are renowned for their beauty, femininity and traditional family values. They are sincere, devoted and they believe in a lasting marriage. The majority of our members are in the Philippines. Our personal opinion reflects the fact that Filipina women stand out among Asian women in terms of charm, openness, intelligence, education and trustworthiness. In addition, Filipina women make excellent wives, and they excel and value their husbands as their priority. They are very affectionate and romantic, and their focus and goals is giving their man tender loving care, surpasses all the women in South East Asia. They are well educated in their different respective professions and you'll find them very mature in their thinking. They are mature for their age and view older men as more stable and responsible partner. These ladies are very feminine and gentle, cultured and passionate. They enjoy the outdoors as much as indoor activities. Their outer physical beauties coupled with their wonderful personality, high level of intelligence, sense of humor and sincere devotion to their man creates one of the strongest relationships you could ever hope to find.¹⁵

On many sites, as on this one, there is also evidence of defending the “Filipina brand” against competitors, namely other Asian women. The strongest “selling points” in this respect are their English ability and their Christianity, but other differences that make Filipinas more attractive to Western men than other Asian women are mentioned as well:

We are different from most Asian cultures. We are loyal to family unit more than country. We are comfortable loving and marrying men of other race, while most Asians “lose face” if marry outside their on culture. [...] Marry a Filipina, and you not have to eat with chopsticks or bow all time.¹⁶

The same competition can be observed on Russian mail-order bride websites, where Russian women, who are relative newcomers to the scene, with the industry only dating from the end of the Cold War, are positioned vis-à-vis Asian women: “Western men see Russian women as more mature and usually more educated than their Asian counterparts”.¹⁷ However, their main competitive edge seems to be their race: Russian women are similarly exoticized as Asian women, but they have the added bonus of being White: they “have a European face but the patience of an Asian”.¹⁸ Similarly, a feature in the *Sydney Morning Herald Magazine* entitled “Reds in the beds” (Phelan 2000) described Russian mail-order brides as “sexy, willing [...] Olgas, Svetlanas, and Natashas.” The “earthy, exotic soul of Russian women [is said to be] very attractive, partly because the Russians have a much more traditional approach to relationships and forming a comfortable home life”. In sum, “here are exotic white women who know their place”.

Filipinos

The emasculation of Asian men is a frequent trope in Orientalist discourse (Marchetti 1993; Spurr 1993; Pennycook 1998), and mail-order bride websites are no exception. In the same way that Filipinas are everything that Western women are not, Western men are everything that Filipinos are not, as in this example:

We, being Filipinas in general, think of Western gentlemen, particularly Western European and North American men as God-fearing, hardworking, and deserving of much love, respect, and admiration. Please understand this the right way, but frankly we take pleasure in being submissive to the reasonable demands of our husband. Western men make us feel comfortable, and even protected, as we naturally look to Western men for high moral and spiritual integrity. Ok, so we like taller guys and Western features, maybe because of movie heroes. Too many boys here playboy, drinker, gambler, and abuser. American (USA & Canada) man have reputation of treating wife in good manner.¹⁹

Indeed, the fear of (sexual) abuse and violence which the anonymity of the internet engenders, and which is well-founded given the high incidence of international sexual exploitation (see above), is always present on these websites. However, it is banished in two ways: either it is projected on scamming competitor websites or, more frequently, on foreign men. In addition to projecting fears, negative representations of non-Western men also allow the Western suitor to take up another traditional male subject position, namely that of the knight-in-shining-armor who comes to the rescue of the damsel-in-distress. Numerous male advertisers mention their abhorrence of women being mistreated, for example: “I am searching for a Life Partner. I can and will offer her my understanding and love. I am very responsible and loving and I don’t like it when a man mistreats a woman. I am looking for a woman that I can give all of my love to [...]”.²⁰

Summary: increased international cultural representations

Orientalist discourses that emerged with the colonial expansion of European nations and, later the USA, continue to persist. However, while Said's (1978) original analysis focused on representations of "high culture" such as novels and academic scholarship, they are now well and truly engrained and almost universally disseminated through pop culture. The "Madame Butterfly" stereotype is a good example: while the Puccini opera (first performed in 1904) is a typical product of high-culture with the limited distribution that entails, the "Miss Saigon" musical ran for over 10 years each in both London and on Broadway and toured internationally, ensuring a much wider distribution. It has always been one feature of Orientalist discourse to represent the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as a sexual one where the colonizer is associated with masculinity and the colonized with femininity (Hyam 1990; Spurr 1993). The expanded dissemination of Orientalist discourses has also led to an expansion of sexual relationships between men from industrialized countries, and women from underdeveloped ones. In the era of globalization, a Western man no longer has to be a colonialist to enjoy "exotic" romance.

While I have focused on the desires expressed by Western men, my discussion would be incomplete without a short mention of the desires expressed by the women, even if only to avoid the impression that the women are passive victims of neo-colonial relations. They are not. Like the men they are part of a similar international cultural realm, and many of the women actually mention movie stars in describing some desired traits of their prospective partners. Many of the women advertisers are college-educated and, technologically speaking, they have internet access. It is apparent that it is precisely those Filipinas who have access to international cultural exchange who choose to seek a partner from elsewhere.

7. Conclusion

Intimate communication is often perceived as an immensely private space that is not accessible to observation and research. Like others (e.g. Dryden 1999; Gubrium and Holstein 1987, 1990; McElhinny 1997), my analysis here, as well as my previous work with cross-cultural couples (particularly Piller 2002, in press; Piller and Takahashi 2006) demonstrates that the private–public distinction cannot hold. The positioning of a cross-cultural intimate relationships occurs within a societal space in which intermarriage is either seen as the norm, or – usually – as an exception that needs to be justified and accounted for. Furthermore, large societal-level processes such as globalization provide the structure within which individuals can agentively develop and pursue cross-cultural desires. I have here focused on the ways in which globalization as a macro-process is interlinked

with cross-cultural intimate relationships (see also Reisigl in this volume). I have singled out three aspects of globalization that mediate cross-cultural intimate relationships and have exemplified those with data from previous research and, particularly, mail-order bride websites. These aspects of globalization are increases in three domains: international mobility, international data flow, and international cultural exchange. These provide increased chances for partners from different cultural backgrounds to meet but they also turn on the desires of individuals to meet a cross-cultural partner. Internationally disseminated ideologies of gender, race, and family pitch (in the present case study) American men against American women, and Filipinas against Filipinos, and other Asian women. These positionings find their parallel in international economic relationships: in the same way that other forms of labor have been outsourced from industrialized countries, sexual, reproductive and emotional labor is being outsourced. In the same way that other international outsourcing has removed employment regulations from the control of the state and the unions and has weakened workers' rights internationally, "intimate outsourcing" is weakening the cause of gender equality internationally. It is within this larger framework that individuals pursue their personal happiness.

Notes

1. <http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/aboutus/statistics/>; last accessed on 29/09/2004.
2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globalisation>; last accessed 29/09/2004; see also Bouchara in this volume.
3. E.g. *End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes* at <http://www.ecpat.com/eng/index.asp>; *Coalition Against Trafficking in Women* at <http://www.catwinternational.org/>.
4. <http://www.blossoms.com/cgi-bin/html0s.cgi/28173.1.418454620598222596>; last accessed on 30/09/2004 All quotes from mailorder bride websites are verbatim.
5. http://www.russianbrides.com/client_comments8.html; last accessed on 30/09/2004.
6. <http://www.russianbrides.com/faq1.htm>; last accessed on 30/09/2004.
7. <http://www.filipinaheart.com/success.cfm>; last accessed on 30/09/2004.
8. <http://www.manilabeauty.com>; last accessed on 01/10/2004.
9. <http://action.web.ca/home/catw/attach/catw2003report.pdf>; last accessed on 30/09/2004.
10. All the names are pseudonyms. The transcription conventions are as follows:
Intonation and tone units
 , clause final intonation ("more to come")
 . clause final falling intonation
Paralanguage
 @ laughter (one @ per syllable, i.e. @@@ = "hahaha")
Translation
italics translations of speech that was originally in German are in italics.

11. <http://www.everlastinglove.com/match.htm>; last accessed on 30/09/2004.
12. <http://www.filipinalove.com/offer.shtml>; last accessed on 01/10/2004; emphasis in the original.
13. <http://www.manilabeauty.com>; last accessed on 01/10/2004; my emphasis.
14. <http://www.filipina-ladies-personals.com>; <http://www.filipinaconnection.net/>; <http://www.filipinacupid.com>; <http://www.filipinalove.com>; <http://www.manilabeauty.com/>; <http://www.everlastinglove.com>.
15. <http://www.filipina-ladies-personals.com/new/meetfilipina.htm>; last accessed on 30/09/2004.
16. <http://www.everlastinglove.com/match.htm>; last accessed on 01/10/2004.
17. <http://www.american.edu/TED/bride.htm>; last accessed on 01/10/2004.
18. <http://www.american.edu/TED/bride.htm>; last accessed on 28/09/2004.
19. <http://www.everlastinglove.com/match.htm>; last accessed on 01/10/2004; my emphasis.
20. <http://www.blossoms.com/cgi-bin/htmllos.cgi/30505.19.936980826016707861>; last accessed on 28/09/04; my emphasis.

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