



“Exotic Love at Your Fingertips”: Intermarriage Websites, Gendered Representation, and the Transnational Migration of Filipino and Thai Women

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ABSTRACT. The proliferation of introduction-for-marriage websites has contributed to the growth of cross-border marriages and the so-called mail-order bride phenomenon that shape gendered migration patterns. Drawing from content and discourse analyses of six websites featuring prospective brides from the Philippines and Thailand, this paper explores how the distinctive characteristics of Thai and Filipino women’s representation on intermarriage websites are shaped by Thailand’s and the Philippines’ history and economy. It explains how and why the representation of Thai and Filipino women on intermarriage websites involves power and violence, both symbolic power at the representational level and physical violence in the material world, thus creating unequal Third World-First World power relations that are embedded in international migration circuits. Drawing from postcolonial cultural studies and feminist media theories, it delineates the representational, symbolic, and material forms of power that construct Thai and Filipino women as sexualized and racialized Others. Lastly, the paper examines how violence in (digital media) representation contributes to intensifying violence against women, with emphasis on the medium of representation, the Internet and digital technologies, and how new digital technologies have transformed the mail-order bride business and facilitated the commodification of women from the Third World.

KEYWORDS. Thai women · Filipino women · mail-order brides · Asian brides · intermarriage websites · new information and communications technologies

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of books such as *Falling in Love over the Internet* and *Digital Dating: The Byte-Speed Guide to Finding Love On-Line*¹ is evidence of how the mechanics of love, romance, and marriages have changed with the use of new information and communications technologies (ICTs). Intermarriage websites, in particular, promote marriages between First

World/Western men and Third World women and serve as steppingstones to the global migration of Asian women as “fiancées,” “brides,” or “wives” of foreign men. Dubbed “the twentieth-century mail-order bride business,” these websites feature Third World women in virtual catalogues for First World men to choose and purchase for marriage. There are more than two hundred such websites created in the United States alone, which are earning about USD 2 million a year. Between 100,000 and 150,000 women advertise themselves on these websites each year. First World male viewers pay the agency for contact addresses of the women of their choice, and they are encouraged to buy as many addresses as they can. Digital technologies make organizing and updating mail-order bride catalogues much easier. Like its print version, the on-line bride market is a site of gender-based exploitation and commodification, where identities and power dynamics related to gender, age, race, and nation are at play.

Thai and Filipina women are among those who supply the on-line bride market. Just key in “Filipina” or “Thai women” on search engines like Google or Yahoo and more than a hundred thousand results will come up, most of them linked to various websites that advertise Asian, Eastern European, and Latin American women for marriages. These websites play a big role in cross-border and interracial marriages. We agree with Constable’s (2003, 2004) assertion that we need to question assumptions about the desperation, passivity, or lack of agency of Asian and other foreign brides when they engage in cross-border or transnational marriages. The detailed ethnographic studies in these works debunk common notions about upward marital mobility for these women and consider the multiple economic, social, and other non-economic factors that come into play in these marriages, including love, fantasies, and desires (see also Angeles 2002). Without denying the exercise of women’s agency in marriage, we offer an analysis of the domestic and global processes that make interracial and cross-border marriages imaginable and realizable, focusing on the role of websites and other forms of ICTs.

Although there are some overlaps in the representation of Thai, Filipino, and other Asian women, there are distinctive ways, and also differences, in how Thai and Filipino women are advertised on intermarriage websites. We argue that this distinctiveness stems from specific historical, social, and economic contexts that shape Thailand and the Philippines, as well as Thai and Filipino women in the eyes of the world audience. This paper seeks to address three sets of questions:

(1) How do intermarriage websites represent Thai and Filipino women, and facilitate their migration as brides to foreign men? How are the distinctive characteristics of women's representation on intermarriage websites shaped by Thailand's and the Philippines' history and economy, as sites of American military bases and international tourist destinations? (2) How and why does the representation of Thai and Filipino women on intermarriage websites involve power and violence, symbolic power at the representational level and physical violence in the material world? How does the use of digital technologies in the commodification of women as brides facilitate and perpetuate violence—both virtual and actual—against “Third World” women when they migrate abroad? (3) How do gender, race, and nation intersect in women's representation on intermarriage websites, thus creating unequal power relations between First World men and Third World women that are embedded in international migration circuits?

The phrase “Exotic Love at Your Fingertips,” a slogan of a Western-Thai intermarriage website, encapsulates the unequal and neocolonial power relations between Western men and Asian women. We will discuss the colonial worldview in constructing Thai women as “exotic love” or the “desirable Other” and the power of Western men to define and imagine Asian women as the Other of modern Western women. “At your Fingertips” implies the power of Western men to act upon Thai and Filipino women, whom they can choose and purchase in the easiest and fastest way possible with new ICTs.

Here we employ content and discourse analyses of three Western-Thai intermarriage websites (ThaiLadies.com, MyThaiBride.com, and Thai-the-knot.com) and three Western-Filipino intermarriage websites (filipinaladies.com, WorldClassService.com, and EverlastingLove.com). These sites were accessed on January 30, 2002. The contents of these websites may change frequently, and not all of these might still be available on-line. These six websites are among the many that come up from a Google search under the words “Filipina” and “Thai Ladies.” Both Filipinaladies.com and ThaiLadies.com appear to be run by the same US-based company (a check to the agency is payable to Pacific International Co. in Las Vegas).² MyThaiBride.com was created by a local company in Bangkok, Thailand, and makes explicitly clear that it features Thai women for marriage.³ Thai-the-knot.com presents itself as a United Kingdom (UK)-founded company whose office in Bangkok is run by an English resident manager.⁴ EverLastingLove.com is apparently run by a Hong Kong-based Filipina named “Jen,” an

overseas contract worker who has had unsuccessful and successful courtship experiences with American and European men and who wants to pass on her “courtship secrets” and Asian friends’ connections to her customers. WorldClassService.com appears to be founded and managed by an American man whose father was a soldier stationed in the Philippines during World War II and who found the American dating scene frustrating. Many intermarriage websites also cater to Japanese, German, and other nationalities.

We focus on these six websites in English, which at the time of our research appeared on the first two search results pages, and therefore have a higher possibility of being viewed by Internet users. We analyze the content of these websites, looking at texts and visual images as well as links, advertisements, and various hypertexts that represent the commodification and objectification of women as potential brides. We pay attention to the construction of the “essence” of Thai and Filipino women in the websites, i.e., the qualities that supposedly make them better marriage partners. In analyzing the role of the medium of representation—digital technologies and the Internet—in enhancing power and agency of the male viewer who is also the customer, we underscore the interplay of colonialism, nationalism, and sexism in the discursive representation of Thai and Filipino women on these websites that promote both interracial marriages and transnational migration.⁵

The first section provides a background on gendered migration patterns in the Philippines and Thailand, exploring the contribution of the mail-order bride phenomenon to female migration. The second section explores the relations among (sex) tourism, migration, and mail-order bride websites in their use of women to represent the Philippine and Thai nations. We argue that the history of (sex) tourism in these two countries has shaped the way their women citizens are represented on intermarriage websites. The third section deals with power and violence at the representational level as reflected in intermarriage websites that broker Thai and Filipino women. We draw on postcolonial cultural studies and feminist media theories in delineating symbolic power that constructs Thai and Filipino women as sexualized and racialized Others. Focusing on operations of the male-centric and colonial (ethnocentric) gaze that marks Western male subjects as the universal norm, we point out that far from destabilizing conventional racial and gender identities, mail-order bride websites reify racial and gender stereotypes in constructing Thai and Filipino

women as “more desirable” and “easily available” marriage partners. By extension, these ideal mates are constructed as “ideal immigrants” and “dutiful mothers” who would contribute to the welfare and (demographic) growth of their adopted nations.

The fourth section further examines how violence in (digital media) representation has contributed to intensifying violence against Third World women in general, and Thai and Filipino women in particular. We emphasize the medium of representation (the Internet and digital technologies), how new digital technologies have transformed the mail-order bride business, and how they facilitate the commodification of women from the Third World. While the six intermarriage websites analyzed in the paper may actually contain representations of women being violated, these websites are linked to other sites that feature pornography, live sex shows, and scenes of actual physical violence against women. Our own research process on-line was frequently interrupted by automatic pop-up icons featuring free samples such as the “Napster of Porn.”

The last section analyzes the mail-order bride business in relation to feminist views on transnational migration by linking representational theories to the material world. While cultural studies and media theories may appear abstract and removed from everyday realities, we point out that semiotics, representation, and the gaze in communication and media theories can deepen the sociological understanding of the mail-order bride business and transnational (migrant) interactions by grounding them in social relations. After all, the women represented on the websites are real human beings and intermarriages actually take place, affecting migration trends and many lives in a very real sense. As we emphasize the blurring of the boundaries between the mediated world and the real world—or between the virtual and the material—we argue that there are no clear-cut boundaries between these mutually reinforcing spaces. As far as intermarriage websites are concerned, violence in gendered representation and gendered violence in the real world cannot really be separated. We argue that the mail-order bride phenomenon engages in discursive power in the representational-virtual worlds and discursive practices involving physical/economic power in the concrete world of migrants.

MIGRATION PATTERNS OF FILIPINO AND THAI WOMEN

Most Thai and Filipino women who migrate to other countries had previously participated in internal rural-to-urban migration. Most

Table 1. Number of deployed new hire and land-based workers by sex, 1996-2002

Year	Female	Percent	Male	Percent	Total
1992	129,869	50	130,728	50	260,594
1993	138,242	54	117,995	46	256,197
1994	153,504	59	105,482	41	258,986
1995	124,822	58	89,335	42	214,157
1996	111,487	54	94,304	46	205,791
1997	123,399	56	97,842	44	221,241
1998	133,458	61	85,757	39	219,215
1999	151,840	64	85,420	36	237,260
2000	178,323	70	74,707	30	253,030
2001	186,018	72	72,186	38	258,204
2002	199,423	69	88,732	31	288,155

Source: Philippine Overseas Employment Administration.

Table 2. Number of Thai migrant workers in top 10 countries, 1998-2004

Country	Year							2004	
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Male	Female	
Taiwan	66,732	101,814	110,753	94,126	79,589	75,849	58,648	11,334	
Singapore	4,817	18,181	21,273	20,411	15,354	12,480	10,932	406	
Israel	8,071	12,765	8,764	12,163	12,952	6,327	9,700	911	
Brunei	5,297	6,086	8,607	8,607	7,155	6,118	4,749	931	
Hong Kong	1,247	2,702	5,121	5,488	4,962	4,143	208	3,918	
Malaysia	772	1,723	1,579	2,197	14,619	7,479	4,399	1,454	
Japan	876	5,033	5,207	5,246	4,701	5,037	3,415	2,442	
United Arab Emirates	542	1,310	1,902	1,743	2,171	1,835	1,476	375	
South Korea	780	1,154	2,089	1,180	2,428	8,631	8,691	1,956	
United States of America	221	956	1,520	1,897	1,955	2,331	1,977	766	

Source: Asian Research Center for Migration.

young rural women who move to the bigger cities, such as Manila and Bangkok, confront significant social and economic constraints that force them to look for alternative jobs and experiences, often by applying for work abroad or marrying foreign men. Thus, women outnumber the male population in the urban centers for the marriage market age group (15-29) that are most attracted to interracial marriage (Cahill 1990, 25-26). Previous internal rural-urban migration and city experiences could create fantasies and desires in which women may seek to construct new identities and contest their own marginal positions within their family, community, or larger society. However, their experiences may yield conflicting and ambivalent results.

The mail-order bride phenomenon is connected to the general feminized patterns of overseas migration. According to statistics from

Table 3. Countries where Thai female migrants exceeds male migrants, 1993

Country	Male	Female	Percent of male to female
Hong Kong	815	19,498	4.2
South Korea	68	160	42.5
Japan	9,542	9,779	97.6
Germany	412	704	58.5
Great Britain	319	326	97.8

Source: Department of Labour, cited in Archavanitkul (1995) and Pongsapich (1994: 11-12)

the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, female overseas migration has steadily increased from an even 50 percent of total land-based workers in 1992 to a whopping average of 70 percent of all migrants in 2000-2002 (table 1). In contrast, Thai migration statistics do not appear to be as disproportionately female as in the Philippines. According to the Thailand Department of Labour's statistics, Thai female migrants account for about 20 percent of the overall Thai out-migrants in 1990-1993 (table 2). In Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, Germany, and the UK, the number of Thai female migrants exceeds that of male migrants. Japan, Germany, and the UK are known destinations for Asian brides (table 3).

While it is difficult to know the exact percentage of women who use marital arrangements to obtain visas in these countries, a few research reports give estimates of the number of Filipina and Thai women who left their countries as brides or fiancées of foreign men. The Commission on Filipinos Overseas (Cahill 1990, 77), which is tasked with providing predeparture orientation and counseling sessions for Filipina spouses and brides, showed that in 1988, 4,043 Filipinas were bound for marriage abroad—2,320 for the United States (US), 1,364 for Australia, 167 for Canada, and 192 for other countries. The numbers increased in 1989 when a total of 3,279 (42 percent) left for the US, 2,137 (28 percent) for Japan, 1,391 (18 percent) for Australia, 217 (3 percent) for Canada, and 753 (9 percent) for other countries.

Women comprised about 91 percent of 175,000 Filipinos engaged or married to foreigners between 1989 and 1999. Among these Filipinos involved in intermarriage or interracial relationships, about 40 percent (more than 70,000) were with Americans, 30 percent (more than 53,000) with Japanese, 8.8 percent with Australians, 4.2 percent with Germans, 3.8 percent with Canadians, 1.9 percent with British partners, and 11 percent with spouses or fiancés from other countries (Constable 2004, citing data from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2000).

Another estimate showed that about five thousand Filipina mail-order brides had been entering the US every year since 1986, a total of 55,000 as of 1997 (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women n.d.c).

Filipina-Japanese and Thai-Japanese marriages therefore did not significantly increase until after 1988. The percentage of Japanese grooms married to foreign brides increased from a low 0.1 percent (1,067 out of 954,852 couples) of total marriages to 2.5 percent (20,092 out of 766,001). The number of Japanese women married to foreign men had remained steadily low at 0.3 percent in 1965-1978 period to 0.8 percent in 1978-1993 (Ishii 1996, 149, table 1). In 1993, 6,394 Filipino women and 1,926 Thai women married Japanese men, or 31.8 percent and 9.6 percent of all foreign brides, respectively (Ishii 1996, 151, table 3). The incidence of higher rates of Japanese interracial marriages—notably Japanese men to Filipina, Korean, Thai, and Chinese women—also coincided with the increased influx of women into the growing Japanese entertainment and sex industries.

Likewise, German-Asian intermarriage did not significantly increase until the mid-1980s, following the growth of international sex tourism. Between 1985 and 1988, the period when marriage agencies for Asian women prospered the most in Germany, there were approximately sixty marriage agencies in Germany alone (Ruenkaew 1998, 157). The number of Thai women in Germany had increased significantly since 1975, rising to 1996 levels of 23,870, according to official statistics (Ruenkaew 1998, 144-45). August 1998 figures show 26,443 women out of a total of 31,405 Thais in Germany. This gender imbalance is due to the increasing number of Thais, especially women, who have traveled to Germany to work or to marry German men from the 1980s onward. Thus, in 1994, there were 18,995 Thai women married to men residing in Germany. In 1993 alone, there were 1,468 new marriages between Thai women and German men, closely followed by 1,042 Filipina-German marriages (Mix and Piper 2003, 54-58).

The international marriage market has also become a conduit for human trafficking in sex work. It has been estimated that around five hundred thousand women annually fall prey to traffickers operating in Western European countries (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women n.d.a). In Southeast Asia, it is estimated that 20 percent of women involved in prostitution are either trafficked, kept in prison, or made to work in slavlike conditions (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women n.d.b). Marriage to foreign men has become one of the fronts by which transnational crime networks have been able to establish local

contacts in Southeast Asia, recruit large numbers of women each year, arrange their travel abroad, and connect them with employers in the sex industry. For example, after Japanese sex tours to Thailand and the Philippines gained notoriety in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, Filipino and Thai women were implicated in large-scale trafficking, a pattern that saw continued increases in both legal and illegal female migration to Japan through the 1990s and early 2000s (Dinan 2002). While most Filipino and Thai women in Hong Kong work as domestic workers, most of them work in Japan in the entertainment and sex industries. A report of the Thai Consulate in Tokyo in February 1993 reveals that about eighty thousand Thai women work in Japan in the sex and entertainment industries, most of them illegal immigrants. Estimates of the number of Thai prostituted women who work overseas could be as high as 100,000 (Archavanitkul 1995, 16-17).

THE REPRODUCTION OF NATION AND COLONIALISM IN TOURISM AND INTERMARRIAGE WEBSITES

Just as Thailand has become signifier for sexuality and Thai women the signifier for prostitutes (Cook and Jackson 1999), the Philippines and the Filipina have become the signifiers for the “domestic,” the world’s biggest supplier of nannies and “mail-order brides” (Angeles 2002). Focusing on the connections between the representation of Thai and Filipino women on intermarriage websites and the similar historical, social, and economic contexts of Thailand and the Philippines, we compare how Thai and Filipino women and (sex) tourism figure in mail-order bride websites. We note similarities between the language of tourist advertising and the language used on intermarriage websites, in which both Thai tourism and Western-Thai intermarriage websites associate Thai/Filipino women with nature (i.e., landscape, beaches, tropical weather) and the Thai/Philippine nation.

Tourism has become a more important source of foreign exchange for Thailand compared to the Philippines. Tourism was Thailand’s top foreign exchange earner between 1982 and 1996, still vibrant after the economic crisis of 1997 and the post-9/11 jitters created by potential terrorist attacks on tourist resorts as what happened in Bali, Indonesia. In 2000, international tourist arrivals in Thailand generated about USD 7 billion (National Identity Board 2001). In contrast, the Philippines relies more heavily on about USD 8 billion yearly remittances from its more than eight million overseas contract workers, about 70

percent of whom are women. In 1973-1983, the Philippines, like Thailand, was a popular tourist destination, constructed like Thailand as a “tropical paradise” with stunning scenery, unspoiled beaches, friendly people, a colorful history, and a fascinating mix of cultures. Due to poor marketing efforts and the constant supply of news on its political instability, the Philippines did not attract international visitors as much as its neighboring countries did, with tourist numbers languishing in the 2 million mark in the past five years. Without considering the negative impacts of international tourism on creating sustainable economies, the industry has remained a steady generator of foreign exchange, facilitating human mobility.⁶

Tourism relies heavily on Thai and Filipino women to amass huge revenues, particularly those connected to the sex tourism industry.⁷ Sex tourism is a symptom of economic disparities between developing countries in the South and industrialized countries in the North. To keep their stature in the unequal international economy and pay its foreign debts, the Thai and Philippine states turn a blind eye on prostitution and sex tourism (Bishop and Robinson 1998; Chant and McIlwaine 1995). While the internal problem of rural poverty due to the collapse of village economy and traditional agriculture is partly responsible for the growth of prostitution, the historical roots of the problem are undeniable. Residues of US military bases in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War were entertainment places and massage parlors, which had been developed as part of the sex tourism industry to guarantee their own survival after the war (Truong 1990).

While women and women’s bodies have simultaneously become used as symbols for the nations (McClintock 1997), women themselves are generally excluded from the process of nation building. And yet, many states rely heavily on women and women’s bodies to promote tourism. Truong (1990) notes sexist advertisements of Thai National Airline: “Smooth as silk is a beautifully prepared meal served by a delicious hostess.”⁸ “Some say it’s our beautiful wide-bodied DC-10 that causes so many heads to turn at airports throughout the world. We think our beautiful slim-bodied hostesses have a lot to do with it” (Truong 1990, 179). While the use of women and women’s images to promote tourism is not new, the use of tourism language on intermarriage websites is notable for its exploitation of similar signifiers that conflate syllogisms such as women/paradise, tropical beauty/exotic charm, sex/sun, beach/bitch.

Some intermarriage websites adopt the language of tourism but use it the other way around. Instead of using women to advertise tourism on mail-order bride websites, the local landscapes and culture are used to advertise women. Either way, Thai and Filipino women are reduced as parts of nature, local culture, and landscape for tourists (and mail-order bride customers) to enjoy and experience. In many examples, the websites advertise Thai/Filipino women and a trip to Thailand and the Philippines at the same time. Thai-the-knot.com entices potential customers thus:

You are about to marry one of the most beautiful women in the world, and in one of the most beautiful countries in the world. So explore the true meaning of the words exotic and paradise, by honeymooning in one of the many tropical island resorts such as Phuket, Ko Samui, and Ko Phi Phi island, where the film *The Beach* was made.

On MyThaiBride.com, images of Thai women are juxtaposed with images of temples and the natural beauty of the country. From MyThaiBride.com, a customer can follow a link to the website of the Tourism Authority of Thailand. The website presents an image of a tanned, long-haired, smiling Thai woman in a colorful swimsuit beside a traditional Thai fishing boat. The background is a white beach, crystal-clear sea, and bright blue sky. The image is an intentional combination of the oriental beauty of a female body and the tropical landscape and Thai culture. The fact that the image is on a mail-order bride website makes it obvious that the beauty is to be viewed and enjoyed by Western male customers who are interested in finding themselves a Thai wife.⁹

Surfing through thailadies.com and filipinaladies.com, Western male viewers can enjoy the excitement of exploring Thailand, the Philippines, their cultures, and women. The websites are packed with facts and information about Thailand and the Philippines, providing information on their respective histories, geographies, cultures, traditional wedding ceremonies, as well as basic language lessons, telephone codes, and travel tips. The thailadies.com website boasts:

Here you will find a variety of information about the Kingdom of Thailand, its culture and people. We feel that taking time to read the articles and information will enhance your appreciation of Thailand, and in particular, appreciate more the legendary grace and natural beauty of Thai ladies.

“Appreciation” here refers to “appropriation” and is not based on mutual respect but on Orientalism, marking Western men as superior to women from non-Western cultures.

The words “dream,” “exotic,” “beautiful,” “oriental,” “legendary,” and “elegant” are frequently used to describe both the country and the women advertised on the websites that ground their advertisements on the already established popularity of Thai tourism. The phrase “Thailand is the land of smiles,” the niche used to promote Thai tourism, is ubiquitous on Western-Thai intermarriage websites. The use of tourism language on intermarriage websites reproduces, perpetuates, and even takes advantage of the constructed association between women and national culture and female objectification.

Because of the infamous reputation of sex tourism in Thailand, most websites try to ensure the customers that they provide “decent and respectable ladies” only. Thai-the-knot.com clearly states, “We constantly enroll decent Thai Ladies who all have good jobs, working in banks, offices, etc.” MyThaiBride.com asserts that “all of the girls of My Thai Bride are good ladies. They have respectable jobs and have never been involved in nighttime business.” The website further boasts:

One of the best things about the girls of My Thai Bride is that they are very traditional. They do not engage in intimate relations without a commitment. You will find that they have had very few relationships. In general, these girls are respectable, trustworthy, honorable, sensitive, and caring.

Thus, Thailand’s and the Philippines’ infamous sex tourism industries have shaped the discursive and material representation of Thai and Filipino women on intermarriage websites. Many websites emphasize that the women they supply are “nice” and “decent” women, “not bar girls” involved in the sex industries. Western-Asian intermarriage websites base their advertisements on the good girl-bad girl dichotomy to contradict the popular image of Thai and Filipina women as “gold diggers.” EverlastingLove.com, for example, proclaims in its banner that they have only “Filipinas who have passed medical and background checks” with no criminal record, serious illness, or undisclosed marriage that might disqualify them from obtaining an immigration visa.

Hence, the promiscuous bar girls and prostitutes are placed in opposition to the “traditional” and “family-oriented” women on the

marriage market who observe conservative and moral codes of sexual conduct. The mail-order bride business and sex tourism are portrayed to be two sides of the same coin, in that both rely on an orientalized imagination of Thai women by Western men. In the discourse of sex tourism, Bishop and Robinson (1998) point out that Thai women are thought to be playful, cheerful, lighthearted, and naturally and culturally sensual. In mail-order bride advertisements, the same cultural traits and characteristics of Thai and Filipino women are used to represent them as good wives; conversely, women in sex tourism are characterized as enjoyable prostitutes. The websites try to draw a fine line between the “good girl” and the “bad girl,” the “wife” and the “prostitute.” However, the distinction between the two is blurred, considering the objectification and commodification of women by the intermarriage agencies as well as the emphasis on women’s bodies and sexualities on the websites. Moreover, the orientalized discourse on Asian women, both in the sex industry and in the mail-order bride business, seems to neglect the complicity of First World men, the First World economy, and the colonial history of American rest-and-recreation in placing Thailand and the Philippines, as well as Filipino and Thai women, in their current position.

“EXOTIC LOVE”: COLONIAL MALE GAZE AND POWER IN REPRESENTATION

Power relations in Western-Asian intermarriage websites occur at the representational level. Drawing on representation theories and feminist media theories, especially the analysis of the male gaze in feminist film theory, we examine how Western-Asian intermarriage websites perpetuate the fantasy of oriental femininity that Western men have toward Asian women, in general, and Thai and Filipino women, in particular. Western-Thai intermarriage websites stand for the virtual Western male gaze, telling what Manderson (1997) called the “parables of imperialism and fantasies of the exotic.” It is the space where Western men’s subjectivity is exercised while Asian women are reduced to “exotic love” or the “desirable Other.” The “otherization” of Asian women is grounded on the basis of their gender, nationality, youth, and race. Policies around the (de)regulation of sexualities are often grounded on these identities (Jeffrey 2002). This otherization of Thai and Filipino women on intermarriage websites as sexualized and

racialized Others reinforces the construction of the Western male as the universal subject.

The major strategy employed by intermarriage websites in constructing Thai and Filipino women as better for marriage is “stereotyping,” the process that involves power relations at the representational level. Stuart Hall (1997) argues that power is not constrained to physical coercion but includes discursive power to represent someone in certain ways. Stereotyping is dangerous because it reduces people to a few, simple, and essential characteristics that are represented as fixed by nature. The practice of closure and exclusion often occurs when there are gross inequalities of power, one aspect of which is ethnocentrism (Hall 1997, 257-61). Similarly, John Berger (1972) points out that the representation of women in Western classical art and contemporary advertisements reflects the male gaze upon women and women’s bodies. He further draws the similarities between European Renaissance oil paintings and contemporary advertisements in promoting private property, consumerism, and the objectification of women’s bodies.

Drawing on the psychoanalytic exploration of women’s objectification and the male gaze in films (e.g., Mulvey 1999) and of women’s representation and self-representation in cyberspace (e.g., Sullivan 1997), we argue that the male gaze in conventional film and cultural representation is carried into the intermarriage websites. Like mainstream narrative films seen through the male protagonist’s point of view, the appearance of women in intermarriage websites fulfill male voyeurism and/or male fetishism in women and women’s bodies. In intermarriage websites, men are the active viewer/potential consumers, while women are presented as passive eroticized and sexualized objects to be looked at. The six intermarriage websites we examined use the male gaze as their major strategy, by focusing on images of Thai and Filipino women who look charming, feminine, usually smiling, and, in some cases, sexually inviting. On the first page of ThaiLadies.com, a picture of a Thai woman clad in a two-piece swimsuit emphasizes the body and sexuality of Thai women to attract Western male viewers. This representation contradicts the later “Meet the Women of Thailand” section, which describes Thai women as sexually reserved and demure in their relationships.

Other than visual images of the women, the accompanying texts on the websites also emphasize the women’s physical beauty. MyThaiBride.com describes the Thai woman as the “beautiful, petite,

feminine, affectionate, sexy oriental girl who has a happy and pleasant personality.” The website often goes to great lengths to explain the physical attractiveness of Thai women. Thai-the-knot.com entices their customers thus: “You are about to marry one of the most beautiful women in the world.” The same website persuades male customers to buy the video and digital video disc (DVD) featuring Thai women:

To see our ladies in our brochure does not give them any justice, but to see them on videotape gives you a true indication of their femininity, beauty and personality ... Our regularly updated video will show you moving footage of how the ladies move with such grace. Also you will hear them introduce and describe themselves to you, giving you a true indication of their charming personality.

In *filipinaladies.com*, Robert Henderson, author of the book for sale, *Secrets of Dating Asian Women*, details his sales pitch:

They are gorgeous, graceful, respectful of themselves and other people, courteous, fun-loving, understanding of men’s natural sexual needs (sometimes including variety), pleasant, faithful, gentle, not as concerned with men’s age or physical condition and, not least of all, charming to a degree so incredible that it is simply impossible to truly communicate in writing. All that, I didn’t even mention the most obvious—they’re the most beautiful women on Earth.

The websites further encourage male viewers to move beyond looking at still images to watching motion images on video and DVD.

The construction of Asian women on the websites illustrates the power of the male gaze in reducing Thai and Filipino women into objects of male desire. On *MyThaiBride.com*, pictures of feminine-looking Thai women are juxtaposed with the images of beautiful scenery, temples, and Thai classical art. It suggests that Thai tropical landscape, classical art, and traditional cultures have produced Thai women who are uniquely attractive and inherently possess “good wife” qualities (read: servile, compassionate, and family oriented). Thai women are laden with racial and gender stereotypes. *MyThaiBride.com* pushes the view even further:

In all the world the most beautiful women are oriental. For decades western men have appreciated the oriental femininity and beauty. The most beautiful and feminine oriental women are Thai. Their grace, feminine beauty is legendary ... the teachings of the centuries-old Thai culture creates Thai girls who have high moral commitment to their

families, and are supportive of their husbands ... Thailand is the land of smiles. Thai women have happy and pleasant personalities; they are joyful with their husbands, compassionate and patient with their children.

Here we see parallel discursive strategies of representation in the websites marketing Filipinas, like *filipinaladies.com*, that easily connect marriage and migration:

Filipina ladies are known not only for their physical attractiveness and gracefulness but also for their inner beauty and charm. They possess character traits that men from all over the world find irresistible. With their winning smiles and quiet ways, Filipinas are pleasant company. They quickly make new friends wherever they go. Most speak English well, a big plus for English-speaking men. However, because they are accommodating, Filipinas adapt easily to living in other countries. You will find them all over the world.

More important, websites marketing Filipino women, like those selling Thai women, essentialize female gender identities and the Filipino family culture. *Filipinaladies.com* claims that “Filipinas make excellent marriage partners. Devotion to one’s husband is part of Filipino culture so they are affectionate and supportive at all times. They love children and give much of their time and effort to raising a happy family.” In a section called “Western Men Find Filipinas Attractive” in *EverlastingLove.com*, a similar valorization of Filipino women and their culture is made in an attempt to convince Western men that they have made the right choice:

American men find Filipinas to be patient and willing to stand by their husbands during hard times. That we are raised with high values of honesty, fidelity, and do not feel the need to control our men.... That we view family and married life as first and foremost. That most of us may be called “homebodies” because we desire to focus on the domestic needs of our children and our husband. That while we are conservative in our views, we are fun to be with, and while shy and humble, we are as fierce as a lion when necessary. As a group we are slim, petite, short, warmly shy and loving one-man women.

Addressed to Western male viewers, the websites are based on the construction of Thai and Filipino women as the sexual and racial Other, marking European/North American men as subject agents, and Western women, especially feminists, as “unromantic moderns” who no longer commit to marriage and duty to the family. The flip side of

this simultaneous commodification of Asian women and exaltation of Western men as “good husbands and providers” is the pathologization and demonization of the Western women’s movement and the “modern Western woman,” especially “feminists.” Western men who may have a history of domestic violence or sexual abuse may turn to Asian women available in the bride market. This is partly due to the gains of Western feminism and the women’s movement, which have made women in the North more assertive of their rights and less likely to tolerate male violence and abuse. Why Western men would prefer dating Asian women to the “modern Western women” who have been swayed by feminism is a frequent theme on websites advertising Filipina and Thai women. Here another line of difference is drawn between the “liberated” (read: bad) Western woman and the “traditional” (read: good) Asian woman. Such representations reflect sexism, antifeminism, ethnocentrism, and an orientalist discourse that separates the West/Western women from their opposite Other. In one website, WorldClassService.com, American women are particularly singled out for their unsuitability for marriage and for not wanting a “loving and understanding husband and father”:

Western women do not appreciate men. They do not value traditional family life. A recent study of Americans found that most married men are much happier than unmarried men ... but the opposite is true for women. The goals of modern women are not sufficiently met by marriage. Marriage is not the right thing for them to do. It is not good for them. Men must learn not to try to make these women do what they do not like. I am helping Modern Western Women to avoid what they despise... There seems to be a near-perfect match between the Western men, who are unappreciated and get no respect in their own countries, and the Filipinas, who would be happy to find someone who simply does his job and hopes to come home to a pleasant family life after work. Most Western women do not want such a boring husband.

The websites examined emphasize the distinctive essentialist qualities of Asian culture. Intermarriage websites convince their male viewers that although Thai/Filipino culture and Thai/Filipina women are different from Western culture and Western women, Western men can learn to understand them by following the guides provided or sold on the websites. The websites suggest that it does not take much for Western men to learn Asian culture, and after studying some basics the men will enjoy a happy relationship with Asian women. Almost all of the websites provide culture and travel guides for Western male

customers to follow when they arrive in Thailand or the Philippines and meet the women introduced by the agency. Packed with “do’s and don’ts” in Thailand and the Philippines, the guides underscore differences between Thai/Filipino and Western culture.

Thai-the-knot.com has a section for “Thai etiquette” in which basic knowledge about Thai culture is told in a very deductive way. Western-Thai intermarriage websites assume Thai culture as a Buddhist culture and Thai people as naturally friendly. The websites stress that Thai women are inherently family oriented, compassionate, sexually reserved, and fun to be with, thus constructing Thai women, and their culture, as homogeneous and essentialized knowable objects. In the section “Meet the Women of Thailand,” ThaiLadies.com provides the following tips for Western men when they are in Thailand with Thai women.

Thai ladies are more conservative than women in many other countries and observe different customs. You will gain a lot of respect and avoid embarrassment in Thailand if you follow Thai social rules and customs. Be careful not to embarrass your lady. Holding hands, hugging or kissing in public, for example, are not permitted. Never lose your temper or speak out of line in Thailand. Always show respect for Buddhist monks, temples and statues of Buddha. Never touch a child’s head and never point at anything with your foot. Just a few simple rules to remember. Thailand is called the land of smiles so smile a lot and enjoy the wonderfully positive atmosphere around you.

Both thailadies.com and filipinaladies.com advertise book catalogues, including e-books, that instruct men on how to build a relationship with Asian women. Thai-the-knot.com teaches the following to Western male viewers on how to attract Thai women:

Thai ladies are attracted to men with a calm and placid nature, and who act like a gentleman at all times, they also like a man who can make them laugh, and they love you to sing them a song from time to time.

The representation of Asian women on intermarriage websites is “violent” in cultural and symbolic terms as it involves the power to mark and “clarify” them in certain ways. Despite the argument contending that cyberspace, with its non-gender-salient context, is promising in weakening fixed gender identities (Youngs 1999; Sussman and Tyson 2000), the representation of women, particularly Third World women, in cyberspace proves the opposite. The representation of Asian women on intermarriage websites supports less optimistic

view of the cybertechnologies' role in dislodging racial and gender stereotypes.

“AT YOUR FINGERTIPS”: DIGITAL MEDIA, POWER, AND VIRTUAL VIOLENCE IN REPRESENTATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF WOMEN

Digital media intensify male power and agency when the mail-order bride business uses cybertechnologies as the new tool to disseminate their services. For more than a decade, feminist, communication, and cultural studies researchers have focused on the “digital divide” and gendered access to ICTs, a valuable information resource or even a source of wealth and power, which is currently unevenly divided along gender, race, and class lines (Spender 1995; Eisenstein 1998; Shade 2002). Cyberspace has been constructed as a male territory and new information and communication technologies as men's toys. As computer science and software engineering are constructed as masculine fields (Spender 1995), computer magazines are also designed to address male readers, most of them written by male writers (Borsook 1996). Men are said to dominate the virtual world, like the actual world, reinforced by the fact that there are more male than female users of the Internet. Studies on male domination on Internet newsgroups as well as e-mail-mediated communication support the contention of male domination in the virtual world and the use of this space in objectifying women (Green and Adam 2001; Harcourt 1999; Spender 1995; Sussman and Tyson 2000).

Hence questions arise on how representations of women and men, in particular the combined gender and racial/ethnic identities of Third World women, challenge or reinforce conventional gender identities in cyberspace. One argument is that cyberspace, with its non-gender-salient context, is promising insofar as it could weaken fixed gender identities (Youngs 1999; Sussman and Tyson 2000). However, the representation Third World women in cyberspace appears to prove the opposite. The introduction of this powerful new technology has intensified and expanded the harm and system of oppression and exploitation of women, children, and women's bodies (Hughes 1999, 2000). The representation of women in electronic media thus seems to reify conventional gender identities as well as perpetuate unequal power relations on the basis of race, class, and gender (Bui 2000; Green and Adam 2001; Ridenhour-Levitt 1999; Sullivan 1997).

We agree with Gossett and Byrne (2002) in their content analysis of pornography websites that digital media worsen imbalanced power relations between the male spectator and the female objects of representation. Pornography, both in its conventional form and the on-line version, is a form of male violence that serves the male gaze and male voyeurism. Internet pornography is even more violent than its print version as digital media provide an interactive experience in which male viewers are encouraged to see through the eyes of male rapists. In these interactive rape scenes, the voyeur-rapist-consumer may identify the age and race of the women as well as scenes of sexual violence they want to view. They can manipulate and control the flow and types of images with the click of a button, enhancing their sense of power over sexual images of women (Gossett and Byrne 2002, 705).

We argue that the interactive nature of digital media likewise gives male customers of intermarriage websites as potential husbands more power in selecting their prospective brides as they interact with images, links, and hypertexts on the websites. By just clicking a button, Western male viewers can view, select, search, and order contact addresses of Thai and Filipino women on the websites. The exercise of male power and agency in the virtual world of cybertechnologies, combined with more violent forms of representation such as pornography and rape scenes on the web, creates the potential for men to act upon their fantasies and for the intensification of violence against women. The following searching and ordering instructions from ThaiLadies.com explicitly construct Western male viewers as actors and Thai women as passive objects.

Select the ladies you want to contact in our Search Option Box. Start your search by using either the Frame View or the HTML View, and choose the ladies you want to write to. After you have chosen the ladies that you want to write to, type their code in the text boxes below ... Note: You have to order at least two (2) ladies. (emphasis added)

But unlike pornography websites that feature representations of violence, the images of Asian women on intermarriage websites are not placed merely for male spectator's voyeuristic pleasure. The women on virtual catalogues are presented as commodities for the male viewer to check and inspect before deciding to purchase their contact addresses from the agency. The women are categorized by age groups, assigned code numbers, and presented as marketable objects. Digital technologies make the process easy and convenient for the potential (male) customers.

ThaiLadies.com and FilipinaLadies.com, for example, provide a special offer to their customers by doubling the number of the women they order. Customers who order contact addresses of two women will receive another two free. Each woman on these websites is featured with a colored photo, code, and personal profile with her name, country of birth, date of birth, age, height, weight, education, religion, and occupation listed. The websites present the woman's brief description about herself, her hobbies, and type of man she wishes for. If interested, a customer can click "add to cart" button to put her in his virtual shopping cart. Below the "add to cart" button, it says "you can always remove her later," in case the man changes his mind. Once the woman is "added to cart," the price will come up right next to her photo, informing the customer how many ladies he has in his cart and how much they cost.

Mail-order bride websites are clearly part of transnational interactions, bordercrossings, and global capital accumulation. Many of them claim to be run by transnational corporations with interlocking directorates tied to publishing, airline, travel, hotel, recreation, banks, money remittance agencies, and other e-commerce businesses. ThaiLadies.com advertises that "European, American, and Thai management provides a unique perspective in assisting clients from around the world," while Thai-the-knot.com claims that their office in Bangkok is run by an "English Manager Resident." Translation and visa services are major services provided by the websites. Inter marriage websites are explicitly addressed to male customers from the industrialized world, often referred to as "Western Gentlemen." At the bottom of Thai-the-knot.com's homepage are six national flags for the customer to "click on your country of residence for costs." The six flags represent the US, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the UK, Europe, and the World. A click on each flag takes the customer to the fee in each country's currency: US dollar, Canadian dollar, Australian and New Zealand dollars, UK pound, and Euro. Elsewhere, the website provides information on living expenses in Thailand for customers to plan their trip to Bangkok and meet the women. On ThaiLadies.com, the link to "fiancée visa information" takes customers to the US visa application kit. Thus, the websites encourage a form of transnational interaction that rests upon consumerism and sexism.

Inter marriage agencies get more profitable business by using new ICTs. They can update their websites, adding more women as often as

they want. They feature women in fascinating colorful multimedia to reach a wider audience at lower cost, providing search tools for customers to define and narrow down their preferences. On ThaiLadies.com and FilipinaLadies.com, customers can search potential partners based on education, region, age, height, and weight. They can search by the woman's code, choose to see "new ladies" only, see "ladies with e-mail" only, or view "ladies with phone" only. At his fingertips, a western male customer can define and then find the exact qualities he is looking for in a woman. He can have the search be as simple and as detailed as he likes (Pacific International, <http://www.pacificinter.com/ladies/cart/index>). This constructs the Western male customer as possessing power to act upon objectified and commodified Thai women.

Cybertechnologies are complicit in facilitating the global commodification of Third World women through mail-order bride websites. Unlike traditional mail-order bride methods that depend on print catalogues, on-line services of intermarriage agencies allow the men to purchase access to the women of their choice in the fastest and most convenient way. With the Internet, real-time communication through e-mail, phone, chat channels, and credit cards, buying access to Asian women on the virtual market is easy. Western male customers can shop for women anytime, anywhere, in the easiest and fastest way. They can just click to view the women and then click to choose and order. These are very easy steps, literally taken at the man's fingertips.

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND THE INTENSIFICATION OF POWER HIERARCHIES

The representation of Thai and Filipino women on intermarriage websites, however, cannot be separated from their social construction and experiences in the material world of migration. It is problematic and unproductive to divide the mediated world from the actual world. To start with, the representation of Asian brides on intermarriage websites is grounded on the mail-order bride business, which is embedded in world economic disparities, sexist ideologies, colonialism, and globalization. Mail-order bride websites do not provide fictional representations that should be studied only with semiotics, signs, and code. The women represented and advertised on the websites are, after all, women in flesh and blood. Advertising themselves on intermarriage websites leads to actual marriages and actual migration, which affect their very real lives. In this section, we further look at how violence in

the real world is partly shaped by the construction of Third World women on intermarriage websites, thus underscoring real consequences of intermarriage websites in the material world.

In the context of transnationalism, the mail-order bride migration nexus essentially marks the border crossing of female bodies from Third World developing countries to a First World country. As a form of female migration, intermarriage has been used as a strategy for Third World women to migrate to a First World country and seek upward mobility (Brennan 2001). The mail-order bride phenomenon is directly involved in the private and the domestic side of transnationalism, while embedded in the bigger picture of the world political economy and transnational gender relations. Mail-order brides from developing countries are constructed as the substitute for what First World men have lost in the emancipation of First World women: traditional, family-oriented, feminine (read: nonfeminist) wives. With the spread of on-line mail-order bride business, sexism permeates across national borders, rendering national laws to ban mail-order brides businesses ineffective.¹⁰ At the same time Western women are claiming women's rights and feminism, sexist ideologies find their way into the recruitment of brides from the Third World whom intermarriage agencies represent as fitting into sexist fantasies of ideal femininity.

The racialized and sexualized representations of women seeking foreign spouses on these websites foreground the bad treatment some brides receive at the hands of their foreign spouses. An official report for the US Citizenship and Immigration Services cited a 1988 research by David Jedlicka (cited in Glodava and Onizuka 1994), which suggests that American men who used the mail-order bride route to find a spouse "have control in mind more than a loving, enduring relationship" (Scholes and Phataralaoha n.d.). Although there is a dearth of studies on how Thai women's representation on intermarriage websites affects their lives, we draw from secondary studies on how and why Filipina mail-order brides experience domestic violence in some of the receiving countries. Popular films, magazines, newspapers, as well as scholarly research have documented the violence that Filipina brides have suffered in the hands of their foreign husbands, especially when they are settled in the places of domicile of the latter. Many of these scholarly studies point to the construction of Western societies' "moral panic" over the marriage of their male citizen-nationals to foreign women, as well as the overall intersection of sexism, racism, social exclusion, and

economic marginalization in the lives of Filipina brides, particularly in Australia (e.g., Robinson 1996; Saroca 2006).

For example, Cunneen and Stubbs (2000) argue that the representation of Filipino women on mail-order bride websites contributes to the disproportionately high rate of Filipino women in domestic violence and spousal homicide cases in Australia. They conclude that the depiction of Filipino women as “servile,” “submissive,” “traditional” yet “hyper-sexualized,” “masochistic,” and “desirous for male domination” leads to disproportionate domestic violence against them. They argue that while Filipino women have little chance to contest the colonial sexual and racial stereotypes, in real life, the women challenge their misrepresentation and do not follow the fixed, idealized femininity advertised on the on-line bride market. Cunneen and Stubbs (2000) contend that male violence is the result of the mismatch between men’s imagination and reality, and their attempt to maintain control and domination in a relationship.

Langevin and Belleau (2000) likewise note in their research on trafficking in women in Canada the tendency of First World husbands to be domineering and violent in relationships due to unrealistic expectations set by mail-order bride agencies. Remarking on the unrealistic representation of Third World women on the websites, they note that women who want to improve their life chances using mail-order bride agencies often exhibit courage and determination, and are unlikely to fit into the stereotypes of submissive, docile, and subordinate wives (Langevin and Belleau 2002, 108-9). They make it clear that the mail-order bride industry is part of women trafficking and, by extension, human smuggling, despite its camouflage as an adult consent-based introduction service. Like Constable (2003, 2004), their research demonstrates the awareness of multidimensional power relations between First World husbands and brides who arrive in Canada from Third World countries through bride trade agencies. Underscoring the different axes of power that place Third World brides in Canada in a vulnerable situation, they contend that gender, race, age, and citizenship are important factors that contribute to their subordination. Inequalities in international economy and antifeminist sentiments in North America are also key drivers in the growth of the mail-order bride industry. At the national level, the feminization of poverty and family responsibility push Third World women to seek intermarriages as a path for migration to the First World and prospects for upward social mobility.

CONCLUSION

We use the representation of Thai and Filipino women on intermarriage websites to explore a power hierarchy where gender, race, class, and nation intersect in the discursive representational world of cyberspace and the material sociological world of migration. The elements of gendered, racialized, and stereotypical representation are also grounded on actual social and historical contexts. The position of Thailand and the Philippines as popular destinations for sex tourism affects the representation of Filipina and Thai women on intermarriage websites. As in tourism advertisements, intermarriage websites conflate their bodies and attribute them to nature, the tropical landscape, and cultural attraction of these countries. The Philippines' and Thailand's infamous domestic sex-tourism industries, and the implication of their women in human trafficking for global entertainment/sex industries, make it imperative for intermarriage agencies and websites to emphasize the "decency" and the "good girl" quality of the women in their supply.

We argue that both violence in representation and violence in the real world play in the migration-mail-order bride nexus. We emphasize here the blurring of the division between the virtual and the real, theory and concrete reality, and the mediated world and the actual world, which intermarriage websites conflate as one.

We also raise the question of the role of new digital technologies and digital media in creating a marketplace where women from developing countries are put up as commodities, and where men from affluent countries are targeted as customers. From the perspective of transnationalism, these very tools that stimulate and accelerate transnational linkages are also used to perpetuate sexism and carry it across national borders. Despite the possibility of cyberspace promoting critical postmodern subjects, the discursive representation of Filipina and Thai women on intermarriage websites demonstrates that gender and racial identities are far from being dissolved. Rather, conventional racial and gender stereotypes are reinforced in advertising "traditional" Thai and Filipino women as "better marriage partners" for Western men who have been frustrated, jilted, abandoned, underappreciated, or divorced by "modern liberated Western women" swayed by feminism. Other than being presented as commodities, Thai and Filipino women are stereotyped, reduced, and lumped into an essentialized category.

Despite detachment and disembodiment in virtual reality, intermarriage websites represent the embodied part of cyberspace. The

women represented on these websites do not exist in the mediated world alone. The ways in which real women migrants, in the flesh, are represented by the digital media, shape their treatment and experiences in the real world. Nothing is more real or more embodied than the commodification of Third World women in an electronic bride market where the bodies of women are inscribed with gender, national, cultural, and racial stereotypes. Yet, these stereotypes often clash with the creative and sometimes defiant exercise of agency and resistance on the part of many brides who stake out their own space as immigrants in the countries of their spouses. How cyberspace and cybertechnologies contribute to the simultaneous disruption and reification of racial, national, and gender inequalities should be taken into account before proclaiming the premature celebration of freedom, equality, and liberation in the virtual world. ❀

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NOTES

1. These books are being sold at www.filipinaladies.com.
2. Thailand's Largest Personal Introduction Service, <http://www.thailadies.com/index.htm> (accessed December 8, 2003).
3. My Thai Bride, <http://www.mythaibrade.com> (accessed December 8, 2003).
4. Thai The Knot Introductions, <http://thai-the-knot-intro.com> (accessed December 10, 2003).
5. Even though Thailand has never officially been a colony, it has practically been "colonized" by foreign powers since Thailand became an important base for American troops during the Cold War.
6. A study of tourism "leakage" by the Production and Consumption Branch of the United Nations Environmental Programme, estimates that only about USD 5 of each USD 100 spent on a vacation tour by a tourist from a developed country actually stays in a developing-country destination's economy. About 70 percent of all money spent by tourists, for instance, ended up leaving Thailand via foreign-owned tour operators, airlines, hotels, imported drinks and food, etc. (UNEP n.d.).

7. See Bishop and Robinson (1998) for more insights into sex tourism and Thailand's culture and economy, as well as a critique on tourism and its neo-imperialist connotation.
8. We double-checked this quote from Truong (1990, 179), but one of our reviewers pointed out that the actual quote was "Smooth as Silk is a deliciously prepared meal served by a beautiful hostess."
9. On similar representation of Vietnamese women, see Bui (2000).
10. In 1989, for example, the Philippine government passed a law banning advertising for mail-order bride recruits. In 1990, it banned the local operations of sex tour and mail-order bride agencies, and in 1996, the Anti Mail-Order Bride Law further limited the agencies' recruitment methods. However, informal recruiting practices and the spread of online mail-order bride business have been able to circumvent the regulations. See Bunagan 2002.

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