

Igor Ryabov
University of Texas-Pan American, U.S.A.

Russian Wives in America: A Sketchy Portrait

Abstract As more and more people around the globe join the transnational marriage market, marriage is becoming an increasingly global affair. Yet, transnational marriage migration has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. The present study is focused on post-migration experiences of twenty female marriage migrants from the former Soviet Union married to the U.S. nationals and lawful permanent residents. Through participant observation, the present study investigates the issues related to transnational partner choice and immigrant adjustment of these women. While the majority of informants identified the lack of local marriageable men as the major push factor, women tended to differ significantly with respect to the factors important for their choice of partner. While some stressed the importance of ethnicity and race of their spouse, others did not. The most important finding is that, in order to legitimize their marriage and resist gender oppression both in the domestic and public domains, women produced discourses shaped by the mainstream gender ideology that stigmatizes transnational marriage migrants.

Keywords Transnational Mixed Marriages; Russian-American Couples; Participant Observation

Igor Ryabov, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas-Pan American. Initially trained as a geographer, Dr. Ryabov pursued three postgraduate degrees, including a Ph.D. in Sociology, with specialization in Demography, from Bowling Green State University in 2005. His teaching and research interests include (im)migration, gender and ethnic relations, organizational and institutional change, education, health, and social theory.

email address: ryabovi@utpa.edu

On a global scale, East and South-East Asia lead in the number of transnational marriage immigrants and emigrants (Charsley and Shaw 2006; Hays 2011; Kim 2011). In South Korea, for example, transnational marriages account for more than 30% of all new marriages (Kim 2011). In the U.S. too, Asian women, particularly those from the Philippines, dominate bride immigration (Scholes 1999; Jones and Shen 2008; Lauser 2008). Existing work on transnational correspondence marriages, not surprisingly, has focused on Asian mail-order

brides and specifically on the Philippines as the major sending country (see, for example, Manderson and Jolly 1997; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Lauser 2008). However, the global marriage markets are becoming increasingly diversified (Constable 2003). Particularly, by the mid-1990s, women from the former Soviet Union became more visible among transnational marriage migrants in the U.S. (Scholes 1999; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Yet, very little evidence has been accumulated regarding the post-migration experiences of transnational marriage migrants from the former Soviet Union.

The present study aims to map unexplored terrain in the literature on Russian female marriage migrants in the U.S.¹ Using grounded theory, data were collected through participant observation, arguably the least intrusive method of sociological research (Matthews 2005). This research strategy enabled me to enter into the daily lives of Russian women and offered an intimate glimpse into the social life of their extended circle of friends and family. I developed close relationships with more than a dozen of the transnational couples whose marital relationships I was able to follow in over a 4-year period. They put me in contact with their countrywomen. Consequently, the data were collected through a snowball recruitment technique

¹ The use of the term "Russian" in this article should be understood as referring largely, but not exclusively, to Russians. Ethnicity is of course more fluid than categories such as those employed by the Census. My informants used the term "community" thus referring to the Russian-speaking community, an "imagined community" of people sharing an original homeland (for a detailed explanation of the concept see Anderson 1991). This sense of "imagined community" guides their social practices and informs their relationship to their country of residence in different ways. Additionally, "Russian" is how these women are referred to in common parlance, which is indifferent to peculiarities of the post-Soviet realities. As an insider to the community, however, I will use "Russia" as a geopolitical rather than a cultural term to refer to the Commonwealth of Independent States.

wherein existing participants are encouraged in turn to refer members of their social networks to the study. Evidence suggests snowball sampling is an efficient strategy increasingly used with hard to reach, ethnically diverse populations. As a result of snowball recruitment, the final sample size included twenty female adults born in the former Soviet Union who are, or have been, married to the U.S. nationals.

I first became aware of the mixed Russian-American families while enriching personal friendships with the Russian community on the U.S.-Mexico border. This "immersion" into the Russian community allowed me to observe how particular circumstances influenced self-representations and post-migration identities of my informants over time. Through personal contact, I obtained information about women's lives before marriage (e.g., prior educational and professional experiences), the process of finding a spouse, married life, family relations (including relationships with in-laws), community lives, and their perceptions of transnational marriage migration. This information is presented in the current paper with the hope that it will add to the literature on transnational migration, particularly as pertains to the questions of partner choice and post-migration adjustment. Data were analyzed inductively to identify the most prevalent thematic values, and then coded using NVivo – qualitative analysis software.

Literature Review

While the probability of people of different ethnic backgrounds to intermarry has been a widely discussed topic (especially in the assimilation research), the traditional focus of the literature on

interethnic marriages is on couples of the same nationality (Kalmijn 1998; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). In this respect, interethnic marriage has been traditionally analyzed as a benchmark for assessing the level of assimilation achieved by different ethnic groups (Waters and Jiménez 2005; Rodriguez-Garcia 2006). Nowadays, many interethnic marriages are also transnational marriages in the sense that they unite people of different national origins. Conversely, not all transnational marriages are interethnic marriages – some transnational marriages are ethnically endogamous. These marriages unite a migrant “importing” a marriage partner from his or her country of origin. This type of marriage is common in many Western European countries among religious minorities (Beck-Gernsheim 2007). Although intra-ethnic marriages constitute a significant share in all transnational (cross-country) marriages, they are the subject of a different discourse, not deemed relevant for the present exercise (for a discussion on the latter, see Beck-Gernsheim 2007).

It is generally agreed that globalization has been the primary reason for the proliferation of transnational marriage (Barbara 1989; Constable 2005; Charsley and Shaw 2006; Castles and Miller 2009). The age of globalization has precipitated the erosion of traditional norms, including those related to the centrality of nationhood. Many people abandon national identity in exchange for tangible and non-tangible benefits offered by globalization. A new class of people emerged – those who have ties to networks of people and places across the globe rather than to a specific geographic location. As global travel for leisure, education, and employment increases, so does the number of transnational marriages. The Internet and social networking

sites have enabled intimate relationships to develop over geographical distance. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the age of globalization an ever-growing number of people are increasingly marrying across national boundaries.

Although globalization may seem to offer an opportunity and equal ground for everyone to enter the global marriage market, it would be naïve to presuppose that transnational marriage flows are geographically gender-balanced, or that they are unaffected by the global migration flows driven by the tremendous power imbalance between rich and poor countries (and regions). Generally, transnational marriage is driven by the needs of certain groups of people to widen domestic marriage markets in terms of the number and the characteristics of potential partners (Taraban 2007; Jones and Shen 2008). According to Constable (2005), a pattern of “global hypergamy” emerges by which men from wealthier countries marry women from poorer countries. The term “hypergamy” is used by Constable in the sense that women utilize transnational marriage as “vehicle” to migrate to a more developed country, but this geographic mobility does not necessarily lead to their upward social or economic mobility. In fact, it is much more common to see middle-class women from a less affluent country or region marrying men from a wealthier country or region who are poorer, less educated, and/or resident in rural areas (Constable 2005). One of the arguments proposed to identify the major pull factor in the host country or region is the existence of a strong male demand, in one form or another, for “traditional” women in the face of modernity (Manderson and Jolly 1997; Suzuki 2005; Thai 2005; Taraban 2007). In the U.S., for example, like in many other Western countries, women are increas-

ingly refusing to take sole responsibility for nurturing and care-giving household tasks while men are not taking up their share of them. While many middle and upper class American women venture into formerly male-coded work, the domestic work still remains female-coded. This domestic work is now increasingly taken over by women from economically disadvantaged countries or communities. However, many American men seek not only for domestic servants to fulfill the aforementioned tasks but also women who would be willing to perform exclusively female “reproductive” labor – that of childbearing. The case of the U.S. may be unique in a sense that here, as nowhere else, there seemed to be a constant demand for *white* wives (Ekeh 1974; Rosenfeld 2005). Given the persistence of racial hierarchies in the U.S., it is not surprising that an affluent American man contents himself with hiring a female domestic worker of color while still willing to “import” a white wife from Russia. This is exactly what I observed in my study. These are, however, isolated cases. The number of men in the U.S. and elsewhere who could afford to have a paid domestic aid is limited.

Further, the majority of men would like to have a spouse who will perform domestic and cleaning duties under the conjugal contract in addition to being an unpaid reproductive worker. The accumulated evidence demonstrates that, in the search for a spouse, the majority of men look up to their mothers as role models (Levant 1996; Kay 1997; Freeman 2005). However, their mothers had been raised in times when gender norms were strictly obeyed and all women were expected to be caring mothers and good housekeepers. More generally, whether in America or Asia, men who are concerned that women in their country are too inde-

pendent, too assertive, or too “modern” may prefer to marry a more “traditional” woman from abroad who is often assumed to be more submissive (Constable 2003; Freeman 2005).

As stated above, East Asia is the leading region on the global market for “mail-order brides,” as well as “mail-order husbands.” Transnational marriage migration flows originate in and circulate within this region. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of literature on transnational marriage refers to and draws evidence from this region. While justifying my focus on “Russian-American” transnational marriages, I argue that generalizing about all transnational marriages from the literature on Asian “mail-order brides” is difficult, if not impossible. The experiences of Asian and Russian “mail-order brides” differ more than their regions (and countries) of origin and destinations differ from each other. Ultimately, the way how both Asian and Russian transnational female marriage migrants construct their identities in the U.S. largely depends on the context of reception, which Portes and Rumbaut (2001) define to include racial stratification, spatial segregation, and government policies.

Until now, there have been only a few studies of Russian-American marriages, the most known of which is, arguably, that of Visson (2001). Visson’s study delivers an insightful picture not only of intercultural family life but also of the cultural differences that can arise in relationships of that type. Despite its merits, that also include a large sample (more than 100 couples) and the depth of the qualitative work, too many of Visson’s interpretations disclose the author’s familiarity with the world of the now defunct Soviet Union rather than the

post-Soviet milieu. “Marxist ideology and historical materialism were so deeply etched into the minds of the population that even the most virulently anti-communist Russians were affected by the Soviet mindset” (Visson 2001:197). Much has changed in ten years that have passed since her book was published. A new generation of pragmatic, ambitious, and materialistic young people, oblivious of their recent historical past, has matured. Some of them, not only but mainly women, entered the transnational marriage market.

A more recent study by Johnson (2007) tracks only a few stories, some of them are fictional. As such, this study is a combination of memoir, fiction, and journalistic ethnography. It lacks in-text citations and has minimal endnotes. This study, however, makes an important observation that challenges a view of “mail-order brides” as *de facto* economic migrants (Manderson and Jolly 1997; Kojima 2001; Wang and Chang 2002). Johnson (2007) argues one of the most decisive factors for women to search for a partner abroad and thus, to emigrate from Russia is a catastrophic lack of “marriageable” men. Johnson’s informants (who had recently emigrated to the U.S. as “wives-to-be”) conveyed that there is a shrinking pool of Russian men who meet their expectations of what a man should be. For Johnson’s informants, the lack of marriageable men was primarily defined in terms of earning power and employment. Russian women in Johnson’s study would like to have financial security and live in material comfort. They would not entertain the prospect of marrying local men who would not be a good provider for the family. Unfortunately, the author does not elaborate this topic further, nor does she offer a more “macro-sociological” view of the “marriageable men” deficit.

Undoubtedly, the lack of marriageable men defined in terms of earning power and financial security alone does not imply that Russian women have unrealistically high standards for local men they would deign to marry. It is worth mentioning that, in addition to the aforementioned emphasis on low earning power, Johnson’s (2007) informants also point to Russian men’s extremely high alcohol consumption, high tobacco smoking, and risky sexual behaviors, features incompatible with the image of a good and caring husband. Consequently, premised on financial adequacy, “male marriageability” thesis is inadequate to address the problems of patriarchic norms guiding male and female expectations on the transnational marriage market and, as such, is too narrow to explain the “supply” of brides from the post-Soviet states. Seen more broadly from the perspective of a gender strain paradigm (e.g., Pleck 1995; Levant 1996; Levant et al. 2003), “male marriageability” crisis in Russia has parallels, without presuming a homogenizing effect, with many regional and local marriage markets, such as South-East Asia or African-American marriage market in the U.S. African-American men, for example, were very much in the public eye owing to their conformity to traditional masculinity behaviors and, as a consequence, high death rate and stagnated life expectancy (Wilson 1987; Lichter et al. 1992). Additionally, common to the aforementioned locales are the patterns of gender role conflict experienced by men (Wilson 1987; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Jones and Shen 2008). According to Levant and colleagues (2003), Russian men may be at risk for both dysfunction strain and discrepancy strain, which has been known to be a result of adherence to masculinity stereotypes. Russian men receive contradictory messages about their own roles within society. Following the me-

dia that promote healthy behavior, they are encouraged to abandon risky masculine behaviors. However, when they deviate from the established norms, they become the subject of public ridicule (Levant et al. 2003).

In light of Johnson’s (2007) study perhaps a cautionary note would be appropriate here. There is a demographic component of what appears to be a “deficit of men” in Russia. It should be mentioned that the pattern of marriage in the former U.S.S.R. is younger than in the U.S. (Perelli-Harris 2005; Hoem et al. 2009; Ryabov 2009). The majority of the former U.S.S.R., with the exception of Baltic states, is situated on the east of Hajnal’s line running roughly from Trieste (Italy) to St. Petersburg (Russian Federation) and attributable to the well-known study by Hajnal (1965). While examining historical change in marriage patterns, Hajnal (1965) noticed that in European societies lying on the west of Hajnal’s line marriage was relatively late and a significant portion of individuals never married. On the east of the line the norm was early and universal marriage and a relatively fast transition from marriage to the birth of the first child (Kohler, Billari, and Ortega 2002; Ryabov 2009). This divergence of marriage pattern along Hajnal’s line persists to the present day. Despite the economic and social upheaval that followed the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the spread of westernized modes of behavior, the young pattern of family formation is still in place in countries on the east of the line (Perelli-Harris 2005). The caveat is that after the age of 25 it becomes very difficult for an unmarried woman to find a suitable local partner. The divorce rate in Russia approximates the one in the U.S., but the remarriage rate among men is significantly higher than among women

(Hoem et al. 2009). Taking only demographic processes into account, one may notice that mate selection for women is highly constrained by the availability of potential partners within one’s group.

The present study was designed as a critical update of Visson’s (2001) study and an expansion of Johnson’s (2007) study, which deals with a limited number of cases. Like the two aforementioned studies, this research is based on qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews. Yet, it is markedly different from them not only in terms of time but also in terms of space and content. The main difference is that the mixed couples examined in this study were situated at the “(semi)periphery” as compared to the “core” of Russian-American unions investigated by Visson (2001) and Johnson (2007). Using the metaphor that alludes to world system theory (e.g., Wallerstein 2004), I attempt to highlight the fact that both Visson (2001) and Johnson (2007) worked with ethnically Russian women (primarily from big cities, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg) and white Anglo men. The ideas drawn from the analyses of these unions are not fully applicable to the explanations of cultural differences between the transnational couples analyzed hereto. In the current study, women, in their majority, were not ethnically Russian. Some of them were not even East-Slavic (Russian, Ukrainian, or Belarusian). Equally so, not all (ex)husbands of “Russian” wives were truly “American.” In fact, roughly one third of them were the third-country nationals who were granted permanent residency only recently. Moreover, with respect to ethnicity, in their majority the U.S.-born American husbands were Latino (the largest group), Black, Asian, or White ethnics. Consequently, some Russian-American unions examined in this study were not only interethnic but also interracial.

Theoretical Background

Although the amount of researches on transnational marriages in different cultural and geographical settings is growing, little studies have specifically looked at migration, culture, and gender through the lens of intersectionality (Nash 2008). Grounded in intersectional interrogations of power, privilege, and lived experience, intersectionality defies one-dimensional frameworks that prioritize gender, ethnicity, class, immigrant status, or other aspects of identity. These frameworks are deemed to be insufficient in grasping the complexity of transnational couples' lived experiences and identities (Crenshaw 1991; Yuval-Davis 2006). As a theoretical framework, intersectionality is open enough to highlight the simultaneous functioning of multiple categories that influence people's experiences, and the multiple identities that individuals themselves claim. It views constructs such as gender, ethnicity, and class as fluid and flexible, as being shaped at the intersections of various elements of social location which are continuously being negotiated within everyday relationships. It is on this basis that intersectionality contests the essentialist assumption that all women are the same or oppressed in the same way (McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006; Nash 2008).

The intersectionality approach is of use in the present study because Russian women's experiences are non-additive, unique, and cannot be predicted by simply combining the experiences of being a "woman," "immigrant," "mail-order bride," "Russian," etc. Because of certain life cycle events, such as migration in our case, certain social locations can become more salient in specific situations. A systematic analysis of Russian women's post-migration experiences within the intersec-

tional framework may add to our understanding of how the social location on power dimensions is shaped through interactions with the environment, in this case – American society. The recognition of power is necessary to work within the intersectionality framework because *multiple* social identities are involved (i.e., ethnicity, gender, social class) and therefore, multiple degrees of power differentials interact to create a unique social experience – especially for Russian women who embody a privileged race identity (white) while inhabiting marginalized gender and mobility categories (women and immigrants).

The intersectional framework can also provide a sensitizing tool enabling us to uncover stigmatizing and disciplinary practices in the host society. These stigmatizing practices imposed by the state can penetrate down into the level of family. Prior research revealed, for example, that the exercise of the state power is evident in imposing deviant sexual identities on "mail-order brides," as those trying to sabotage "normal" intra-ethnic male-female relationships (Nagel 2003). The status of a dependent of the husband – imposed by the state – makes "mail-order brides" vulnerable and isolated in family relationships. Being aware of their (self)imposed deviant identities, these women are reluctant to get outside help as they are embarrassed about their circumstances (Oum 2003; Arieli 2007). Therefore, they are forced to craft bargaining strategies in the family to raise their conjugal decision-making power.

Despite intersectionality's indisputable contribution to feminist studies (and the present study is intended as a contribution to this body of knowledge), utilizing the intersectional framework is methodologically problematic. I will make use of the ap-

proach introduced by McCall (2005) who identified intercategory and intracategory approaches to the study of intersectionality. Intracategory complexity seeks to highlight diversity within groups. It systematically compares social locations at the intersection of single dimensions of multiple variables. Intercategory complexity focuses on relations of inequality among already constituted groups. Whereas intracategory complexity analyzes the intersection of a subset of categories of multiple variables, intercategory analyses examine the full set of categories of multiple variables. McCall's (2005) typology significantly contributes to the structuring of the field and enhances comparability across studies. The actual qualitative studies, however, demonstrate that reality is often more complex and fluid than clear-cut typologies and thus, call for the use of both an intracategory and intercategory analysis (Yuval-Davis 2006).

Three different contexts surfaced as salient reference groups to whom my informants turn in order to continuously evaluate their relative ranks: Russian women compare themselves both with other Russian women (intracategory), as well as with American women, and Russian men (intracategory). In the first part of the presentation of results I mainly use an intersectional analysis to highlight the diversity within the group of women (intracategory). The second part of the results concentrates more on the power relations between constituted groups and how these relations change over time (intercategory).

Method of the Study

As stated above, the present study employed participant observation to study post-migration expe-

riences of Russian women, and the data were collected through snowball sampling. The main disadvantage of the participant observation method is that the data collection is time-consuming. Also, interpretation and, especially, generalizability of the data are difficult. In fact, the data collection period took four years while the snowball sample is not representative from the statistical point of view. However, it is only through this methodology that the researcher like me may gain access to social groups who would otherwise not consent to be studied. It is through this methodology that the researcher can experience and then portray social lives of marginalized groups, like "mail-order brides." Moreover, according to Matthews (2005), data collected through participant observation are ideal in qualitative research. This is because to understand fully the participants' lifeworld, the researcher must have an intimate familiarity with the social world in which informants act. Hence, the main goal of a participant-observer is to achieve rapport with informants. Only through rapport is the researcher able to provide the type of deep insight into the lives of informants from an insider's perspective.

It is also important that the present study used *covert* participant observation method wherein informants adjust to the community role of the investigator and are unaware of the fact that their behavior is being treated as information. The study has been approved by the local Institutional Review Board and it was decided that written, informed consent may not be necessary and may, in fact, negatively impact the quality of the research. The choice of covert observation is a contentious one, but it is a tried and tested one by the researchers studying marginalized populations (e.g., Luehrmann 2004;

Freeman 2005; Lyons and Ford 2008). The unique context of the lives of Russian women demands a redefinition of the conventional ethical barriers to uncover stories of their lives, so as to prevent a perpetuation of the stereotyping, stigmatization, and marginalization they face on a day-to-day basis. Further, covert observation avoids problems of *observer effect*, the conception that individuals' behavior may change if they know they are being studied.

I met some of my informants through random encounters at informal co-ethnic social gatherings and celebrations held together (birthday, engagement, Christmas), religious services, and community events. In time, social interaction was initiated by attending church, joining a club, returning visits of neighbors, and, later, spending social evenings with American-Russian families. Russian women who I already knew introduced me to other members of their network. The circle of my informants grew very rapidly and I was able to establish congenial rapport with them. As an insider/outsider, I was privy to intimate talk and thoughts shared by women. I visited people's homes, observing family interactions. Participating and observing daily routines of the informants allowed me to have an integral picture of the life of these women, their interactions with their husbands' kin, local community, and the American society as such.

Results

Pre-Migration Experience

The transnational marriages described in this study resulted not only from marital preferences but also from opportunity. A few Russian women

found their future partners in their immediate social world. Two Russian women met their future spouses while studying abroad, as part of educational exchange schemes. Yet, two other women met their partners in Russia where these men (one of whom was a Mexican citizen back then) worked or studied. However, the majority of transnational couples relied on the services of third party intermediaries, such as matchmaking agencies. One woman said she made a conscious effort to find a foreign partner via the Internet (and she did), but shunned away from marriage agencies, contact advertisements, or other intermediaries. In general, the majority of informants were looking for a "mail-order husband" through marriage agencies. All women who met their future husbands with the help of intermediaries corresponded with them via mail, telephone, and/or other electronic means prior to seeing them in person. Despite society's first-blanch judgment towards correspondence marriages as unstable (Constable 2003; Oum 2003), these marriages (sixteen out of twenty in this sample) turned out to be more stable than those marriages whose partners knew each other in real life before or instead of becoming "pen pals." All but one marriage whose partners met more "traditionally" (i.e., in person) lasted for less than 3 years. In contrast, the majority of correspondence marriages in the sample were still stable at the beginning of the research period. The average length of the correspondence marriages, although varied, was about 6 years at the outset of the study.

It should be noted here that finding a spouse abroad with the help of intermediaries is laden with numerous risks because of information scarcity about the prospective partner. In the absence of lengthy face-to-face interactions that character-

ize normal courtship, potential brides and grooms are wary of being conned. Grooms are aware of "sham marriages" that describe a criminal phenomenon of people marrying for the benefit of legal status for one and money for the other without planning a family life together. This finding is consistent with the existing literature on transnational brides originating from the former Soviet Union (Luehrmann 2004; Taraban 2007). Brides are aware of physical and emotional abuse that many "mail-order brides" may experience. Indeed, marriage as a migration strategy puts them into a vulnerable position – that of the dependent. This bad situation is arguably made worse by the exercise of state power – because most countries mandate a period of time in which a divorce leads to the foreign spouse losing her or his right of residency. In the U.S. this period is two years. Because of the risks involved in transnational correspondence marriages all but two women in the sample were visited by their future spouses in their respective countries prior to coming to the U.S. These visits lasted from a few weeks to several months. As respondents told their stories and shared their experiences, I found out that a few men came to the bride's country several times.

It was not uncommon for couples to get married in the bride's country of residency. In fact, fourteen women in the sample registered their marriages in their own countries before coming to the U.S. These women came to the U.S. as permanent residents because their husbands had petitioned on their behalf immediately after they married. The rest of women (six out of twenty) arrived in the U.S. on fiancée (K-1 nonimmigrant) visas and married their prospective husbands after arrival within a short period of time (1-2 years). Immedi-

ately after marriage, these women got permanent residency.

Transnational Partner Choice

When it comes to justifying a choice of a foreign spouse, a dearth of local marriageable men, who conform to the ideal gender role, is, possibly, the most identifiable theme in my informants' accounts. My informants universally point at a "lack of good husbands," thereby referring to the qualitative shortcomings of Russian men, such as alcoholism, adultery, and psychological problems because of the transition to market capitalism and work pressure. To the women, Russian men had not dealt well with the challenges of post-socialist marketization; they were too lazy and depressed, and were unlikely to provide the material and emotional support ideal husbands would provide. The caveat, though, is that given the harshness of the social and economic climate in Russia, traditional male roles are supported not only by men but also by women (Gal and Kligman 2000; Levant et al. 2003; Taraban 2007; Zabyelina 2009). As I have noticed, the identification of "traditional" masculinity with economic activity and "traditional" femininity with nurturing care was often considered the "natural" gender order by the majority of my informants.

Two groups of Russian women can be identified on the basis of their reflections on the basic question of the choice of a foreign partner. Being aware of the stigma attached to "mail-order brides," and specifically of the fact that they were generally assumed to marry for pragmatic and economic reasons, all Russian women universally stressed masculine identity features of their husbands and, certainly,

not financial reasons. Yet, the experience of being married to an American husband, being it a positive or negative one, had an effect on the women's perceptions of themselves and American men in general. Those whose marriage to American men was not a happy one (in their own judgment), and especially those who have been divorced, tended to emphasize the coincidence of their marriage with a foreigner. These women repeatedly told their acquaintances that they were not especially attracted by an American husband. Similarly, they denied the importance of their "Russian femaleness" in their American husbands' partner choice. According to them, their husbands' choice was motivated by more personal characteristics rather than by those of the broad category of "Russian women" with the stereotypes attached to it (for a more detailed discussion of "Russian femaleness" see Kay 1997). For women who were not satisfied with their past/present marital relations, the prestige, status, and assumed wealth associated with the U.S. residence were not the primary motives for marrying an American man. Quite the opposite, some informants stressed that the fact of his being a foreigner only complicated their marriage decision. They would be eager to marry "any man" who could provide a stable future. While embracing the notion that "all men are alike," these women did acknowledge, however, that the lack of partners in the local marriage market encouraged them marrying abroad. Yet, canons of patriarchy were consistently iterated to describe "the ideal husband." The stress was placed on such qualities of potential partner as financial security, healthy behaviors, and physical attractiveness. Also, noteworthy were numerous references to virility and chivalry as the characteristics of "the ideal husband."

Many of the women who constituted this group were previously divorced in their home countries, lonely, and had difficulty in meeting eligible men in their home country. Many of them hinted at the fact that they were not in a position to be "choosy" as local women. The testimonials of the third-party co-nationals also confirm that some women would be considered unmarriageable outcasts in their countries of origin, who end up orienting their conjugal prospect towards a foreign partner in the hope that marriage will establish their normative social position. They daydreamed of, fantasized about, discussed, spent long evenings wishfully planning, and aspired towards "settled, married life" with *local*, not foreign men.

The other group of women construct their preference for an American partner around the intersection of ethnicity/nationality, thereby contrasting local and American men. The important observation is that the way these women interpret their transnational partner choice is related to their spouses' choice for a foreign spouse. When reflecting on their decision to marry a foreigner, women compare themselves with men in their country of origin and with American women. They also frequently reflect on their husbands' choice of marrying a Russian woman, hereby contrasting themselves with American women. For these women, the dissatisfaction with and vilification of local men comes hand-in-hand with the idealization of foreign partners. Local men are described as bossy, stubborn, egoistic, and unable to provide material comfort whereas American men are perceived as liberal, cosmopolitan, and rich.

What I did not expect to find was that the motivation to marry outside of their culture and race

was explained not in terms of money, prestige, and status but sexual image. Many Russian women were attracted *sexually* to their partners in the first place because of their perceived sexual difference with Russian men who were commonly portrayed as "tasteless," "unsophisticated," and "sexually ignorant." This finding is tentatively consistent with the literature showing that selection of an ethnically different partner may amend, as it were, failures in erotic affairs with local partners (Barbara 1989; Manderson and Jolly 1997; Rodriguez-Garcia 2006). As it was the case of all interracial marriages I observed, the qualities Russian women admire in their Black and Latino mates speak volumes about the importance of sexuality in transnational partner choice. This issue that I raise here, however, is not just about sexuality but the sexuality of the dark-skinned "colonized other" (Spivak 1999). This kind of sexuality is rooted in visceral feelings about dark-skinned bodies fuelled by the myths commonly shared by all white people regardless of ethnic origin. This is not surprising as imaginal processes and erotic representations are known to play a crucial role in partner choice processes (Veevers 1988; Giddens 1992; Visson 2001; Lyons and Ford 2008). Yet, the sexual subjectivities of Russian women in interethnic, and especially interracial, marriages were masked by ambivalence which is constituted by the conjunction of two selves – the colonized and the colonizer herself being colonized. In the case of my informants, the ambivalence of the sexual subjectivity derives from the lack of a clear distinction between the identity of the colonizer and the identity of the colonized. The majority of Russian women did not perceive themselves as "the colonized other," yet, by pulling together repertoires from multiple cultures, they understood that their whiteness makes

them a desirable commodity and they can capitalize on it on the transnational marriage market. They also understood that they fitted neatly into the racial hierarchies of the U.S. and might be less readily recognized as "mail-order brides" when appearing with their husbands in public.

As long as the idealization of foreign partners was a common leitmotif, a few women acknowledged that they built up their marriage strategy by looking for foreign husbands. They also explicated their marriage as related to American men's preference for Russian women. While comparing themselves with American women, they commented that American women lost a sense of femininity desired by American men. In Russian women's opinion, the American side of the transnational marriage market exhibit a dynamic, somewhat reminiscent, picture of Russia. In American cases, however, the "marriageability" crisis refers to the crisis of womanhood. Disillusionment with the emancipation of American women stimulates American men to search for a partner abroad. American women are portrayed by Russian women as unreasonably demanding of men's money and indulgence and unwilling to reciprocate with their time or attention as a "true woman" should. Hence, American men are forced to look for partners whose feminine quality allows them to achieve their masculinity.

In legitimizing their marriage and migration decisions, Russian women picture themselves as a potential answer to the "care deficit" problem. They present themselves as having specific characteristics that American men are longing for and that American women appear to have lost. While representing themselves as more feminine, beautiful, home loving, respectful towards men, and

less demanding, they rationalize their husbands' choice of a Russian wife. These stereotypical images and characteristics attached to them fit well within the prevailing post-Soviet gender ideology, with a strong emphasis on motherhood and a revival of the "male breadwinner" family model (Gal and Kligman 2000; Luehrmann 2004). Equally important is that Russian women motivate transnational partner choice by presenting a rather stereotypical image of themselves and foreign husbands that strikingly resembles their representation on matching websites (for more information on matching agencies see Kay 1997; Johnson 2007; Zabyelina 2009). The traditional self-representation of Russian women, discursively constructed in comparison with native women, perpetuates the stereotypes of matchmaking industry. This finding points to a familiar pattern, one that is by no means exclusive to the Russian-American marriages, of utilizing matchmaking industry discourse by transnational spouses to rationalize and negotiate their marginalized existence (Wang and Chang 2002; Constable 2003; Piper and Roces 2003; Suzuki 2005). In part, these representations derive from the images the society as a whole has towards "mail-order brides" and the transnational marriages, images that were constructed by the media, popular literature, various state policies, academic scholarship, and the very actors of transnational marriage market. The paradox is that, while adopting gender transnational matchmaking discourse, Russian women seem to be unaware that this discourse can be used against them. Yet, many of them reported that the stigma of "mail-order bride" haunted many relationships. The term was used by Russian women's spouses against them in the context of deportation threats. The term, as used casually by friends, neighbors, or colleagues, unfairly ostracized

American men and their "imported" spouses and had led many of them to provide fictitious stories of how they met their partners rather than engage in repeated defensive conversations about the transnational marriages.

Socio-Cultural Adaptation

The prior part of the analysis demonstrated that apparent variations and inconsistencies in women's explanations of the transnational partner's choice can be understood through the relationships in which women placed themselves (i.e., sometimes in comparison with American women, Russian men, other Russian women) and the stigmatizing context through which they are constructed. When explaining why they married, my informants stressed both their more traditional orientation than American women and the lack of marriageable men in their home country. These representations of self and other stood at the intersection of ethnicity and gender and revealed that women were caught in a predicament – at times they describe themselves as longing for more equal gender relations, while at other times – they stress their more "feminine" characteristics and search for an ideal husband who fits into a traditional male image.

In comparison with the motivations for their choice of an American husband, the intersection of gender and ethnicity takes on a distinct meaning when describing experienced post-migration identities in the U.S. The post-migration identities of women I encountered were formed, for the most part, under the influence of two milieus – domestic and communal. In some way, these milieus provided different paths to cultural citizenship in the host society, with some being short and speedy, while

others are tortuous and lengthy. At times, in these two milieus, my informants performed as natives and at times – as immigrants.

For most of the time, the domestic milieu Russian women inhabited assumed the cultural characteristics of the host country. The domestic milieu and the ties to husband and his family embedded in it provided Russian women with relatively rapid and direct access to open social networks (*bridging social capital*, in Granovetter's terms [1983]), where access would have normally taken years, decades, and even generations to negotiate. As it was frequently mentioned by the informants, their husbands' friends did not always react positively to the Russian spouse, but the presence of a partner's kin and kith networks were central in opening up the social networks of the American nation.

However, the interactions with husband's kin were not always positive. Family tensions were common. The main source of these tensions was Russian women's commitments to natal kin. For example, some Russian women wanted to invite their parents to visit them in the U.S. and/or to send them gifts. This caused family conflicts in some cases because husband's relatives felt that the Russian woman's family draws resources away from the nuclear family. Some Russian women pressured their husbands to live as far as possible from in-laws as a means of staying away from unwanted family obligations and evading conflicts with in-laws. The relationship most prone to conflict was that between the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. Many mother-in-laws just did not accept their Russian daughter-in-law's for the sheer reason of her daughter-in-law foreignness. For those Russian women who divorced their American husbands,

conflicts with in-laws were cited as one of the most common reasons of divorce.

As immigration researchers agree (Berry 1992; Ataca and Berry 2002; Aroian, Norris, and Chiang 2003), marital satisfaction is one of the expressions of socio-cultural adjustment that is acquiring fluency in the English language and developing an identity corresponding to the mainstream culture. Across different themes, which the informants' stories juxtaposed, the connection between marital satisfaction and socio-cultural adjustment turned out to be a salient one. Indeed, those Russian women who experienced happiness and fulfillment in their marital relationships enjoyed overall better socio-cultural adjustment, including better communicative skills and, as a consequence, a larger circle of American friends, than those who were dissatisfied with their marriage. I recognize here, however, that the apparent association between marital satisfaction and socio-cultural adjustment can be, at least, partially explained by the selection of more "adaptable" persons into marriage and migration.

Further, women's ability to integrate into local community was influenced by the time spent in the U.S. Those who came earlier were able to acquire a larger circle of friends than more recent arrivals. Similarly, those with better communication skills had been more successful in establishing social networks. Certainly, English proficiency upon arrival was helpful in lifting communicative barriers and an important contributing factor to the assimilation process overall. With respect to the baseline level of English language skills, there was a degree of difference among women that I came into contact with. On one extreme, there was one

woman who came with virtually no skills at all. At the time I met her, she was still angered by her husband who promised to study Russian, but he did not. On the other, there was an informant who spoke five languages and assisted her husband – who himself was an immigrant from Mexico – with getting better knowledge of English.

In general, informants assigned great importance to the role of the husband in facilitating overall socio-cultural adjustment, mastering the language and “explaining” local culture. Without spousal support Russian women could not order their environment, and consequently – find American folkways intolerably difficult to understand and manage. A few women indicated that the intimate relations with their husbands were the main means whereby they could improve their social conditions in a family. Here, the relations with the husband were instrumental rather than affectionate. Consequently, many women often had to skillfully steer themselves through normative and emotive demands.

The inequality between the spouses in the domestic milieu and Russian women’s vulnerability in comparison with their husbands could be clearly identified as specific conditions of my informants’ marital lives. Although the majority of women would not identify the relationships with their husbands as unequal, third party accounts of female co-nationals clearly pointed out the significant inequality between the partners. In this context, some authors refer to the paradox of transnational marriages (Constable 2005). While transnational marriages are often a strategy that many women embrace in hope to deal with unsatisfactory gender relations in their home countries, they, on the contrary, seem to

reinforce the unequal relations the women want to escape from. Although migration obstacles are common to all migrants, marriage migration practices seem to introduce a specific element of inequality, namely, inequality between marriage partners. The power imbalance found in transnational marriages lies not only on gender/income/status dimension but also is reinforced by the “imported” partner’s unfamiliarity with local culture.

The discourse on inequality between Russian women and American men was especially constructed around an intersection with class – it is the high educational level of Russian women and their proclaimed equality to men’s labor market participation in the home country that determined their feelings of “de-emancipation.” According to some respondents, women’s relatively high level of decision-making autonomy in the former Soviet Union makes the decrease in social status in the U.S. even more painful for Russian women than for female marriage migrants from countries with less gender equity. For some women, negotiating with the host family the right to obtain some decision-making autonomy appeared to be a pivotal element in the search of social status or even of personal balance. If marital relations between the transnational partners in the U.S. were more equal, more women whom I met would be less acrimonious in negotiating gender relations and might find marriage and family to be more stable. Some of my informants who divorced a husband, or have found themselves in a difficult marriage situation, explained that their dependent status has made their marriage weak.

While at the beginning of the study Russian women referred to the equality which existed between the

partners, this perceived equality had decreased as their stay in American society continues. They gradually encountered a variety of integration obstacles, like finding a job, obtaining official recognition of their diploma(s), learning a new language, and building up a social network. As some of my informants pointed out, they fell in love with an image, but an image often not corresponding to reality and generating disillusion afterwards. It was easy to notice that, unlike those who came ten or more years ago, the newly arrived Russian women were very much under the influence of the grapevine stories of “stability” abroad, which were contrasted with the “hard life” in Russia. Bitter disappointment awaited those who came with unrealistic expectations. Their lack of competence in and knowledge about the new culture exacerbated the perceived loss of identity. Wrought by unexpected hardship (e.g., bad marital relationship, health issues, social isolation, etc.), many women acknowledged living through the psychological crisis which arose from the clash between lived realities and imaginations, ultimately irreducible to the simple “culture shock.” The conflict between the idealized images before migration and just after arrival, on the one hand, and the reality of mixed couple life, on the other, is a recurrent finding in research on transnational marriages (Manderson and Jolly 1997; Constable 2003; Freeman 2005).

As Table 1 shows (see Appendix), about one half of the Russian-American marriages that my informants ended up in were not successful. Although these data are not generalizable, approximately half of all marriages ended in divorce in the main bride-sending countries represented in the sample (e.g., Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus), which is also quite true about the host country (the

U.S.A.). The major source of marital instability in Russian-American families, as the communication with my informants revealed, is the conflict of expectations about domestic roles. The majority of Russian women were eager to find more equality in the domestic milieu while their transnational husbands expected them to assume the roles of traditional wives. Domestic roles were not so much rejected by my informants as deemed insufficient – they were not enough to provide financial and intellectual satisfaction. It should be noted here that all Russian women, at least for some time in the U.S., were stay-at-home housewives, none of them were initially active in the professional domain. Nevertheless, all informants, with no exception, had accumulated years of working experience back home. There was a range of the previous occupational statuses in the group, from the vaunted position of medical doctor to the more “pink-color” one of a salesperson or a secretary. There were even those who were quite successful in the business world. One woman (now self-employed) used to be an owner of a matchmaking agency in Russia. The majority of Russian women I spoke with had college degrees and were yearning to mobilize college education as a crucial class identity marker independent of income. Without recognition of their foreign credentials, nevertheless, it was very difficult for them to find employment. Despite attempts to gain jobs only a few succeeded.

The majority of Russian women were not prepared to experience downward social mobility, particularly the fact that their professional and other societal-level qualities were devalued. A few women, nevertheless, were seemingly satisfied with their housewife status and even despised those women who worked. They also commented on the fact that

finding a job in their home country was a painful and, at times, humiliating experience. They despised the low salaries paid by most employers and segregative recruitment practices, like nepotism and women “sleeping” their way into jobs. While realizing the traditional model of marriage, these women were married to, arguably, the most affluent people in the local community. In this particular instance, their affluence was used as a status marker.

A note would be appropriate here. For Soviet women the “right to work” came naturally, it was not a fruit of century-long feminist struggle. It was more of a responsibility imposed by the state than an expression of personal agency in defying sex-role limitations. In fact, Soviet working women were faced with an enormous double burden because the state tacitly endorsed the necessity of women to do domestic chores, but provided very few resources to assist them (Gal and Kligman 2000; Luehrmann 2004; Johnson 2007). This explains why my informants endeavored to search for employment opportunities and establish themselves in the professional domain only after being exposed to the fact that they have to resist subordination, prove their worth, and enhance their decision-making autonomy in the family.

In contrast to the domestic milieu, which was for many, but for a few a site of struggle, the community milieu was where Russian women gained a sense of agency that allowed them to reject the stereotypes of their country of origin and encouraged their continuing allegiance and sense of identification with their natal country. The most palpable evidence of Russian immigrant women’s agency is their intense desire, as new members of American society, to

contribute to the community through participation in events, clubs, circles, shows, religious organizations, volunteer work, and civic activities. While taking intense pride in their own culture and language, Russian women participated in every community activity that could promote their heritage. By saying that Russian women express agency I do not wish to ignore the structural and ideological factors that constrain their choices. Yet, given their circumstances, Russian women made choices and negotiated their relationships with the husband and his kin in the domestic milieu. In the community milieu, Russian women were able to connect with each other and develop a social network of their own. Here, their agency became manifest primarily through the sense of belonging to an imagined community where they felt free of constraints imposed on them by the host society and their husband’s family (similar findings have been reported by Constable 2003; Charsley and Shaw 2006; Arieli 2007). Even though not been encouraged by their husbands to be out and participate in networking, my informants figured out some strategies to escape from their “private space” (domestic milieu) and find their real “public space” (community milieu). Given the fact that the majority of Russian women, as stated above, were not active in the professional domain, the ethnic community became the core of their public space. Because many women felt that the social resources they possessed in their country of origin had been lost in the move to America, the ethnic community was essential to recuperate the perceived loss of identity. Ultimately, the ethnic community was the site of social capital formation. Having acquired linguistic and cultural skills over many years, women who left Russia a long time ago were a great resource for newcomers. Time in the U.S. matters because those individuals who had

not been in the U.S. for long were generally content, at least initially, to bide their time and limit their sphere of action to domestic sites. By maintaining dense webs of communication, Russian women were able to overcome subjective and objective difficulties in forging their own informal support networks.

Furthermore, rather than only seeking out fellow nationals, some Russian women attempted to enlarge their network by socializing with other transnational marriage migrants of various national origins. In their search for new friends in America, Russian women usually sought out other women and thus, they wound up acquiring a whole new group of mixed-nationality friends. As a matter of fact, some Russian women were more ready to associate themselves with women from other ethnic groups rather than co-ethnics. The search for friends from outside of the community of Russian wives was primarily dictated by the growing tensions within this community. All communities have divisions within them and the decision to embrace someone as one of the group may be guided by established markers, such as commonality of religion, kinship, or class, but often comes down to personal issues and bonds of trust and friendship that make exceptions for some (Rodriguez-Garcia 2006; Lyons and Ford 2008). As social network theorists (Blau 1977; Blau and Schwartz 1984) point out, personal and intimate social networks are built around social structures which both unite and divide us. The choice of a friend, in general, is determined by the degree of propinquity, both in terms of physical distance and socially constructed social distance. These propinquitous characteristics simultaneously shape one’s friendship opportunities and preferences.

According to Blau’s theory of relative group size (Blau 1964; Blau 1977; Blau and Schwartz 1984), the larger the group, the more likely its members are to have a relationship between just themselves. The community of Russian women I came into contact with was united as long as it stayed small. However, as the number of newcomers rose, boundaries based on tastes, lifestyles, and cultural preferences became visible. Some women were able to form a group unto themselves, interacting less with others. For example, some women who were second-generation college graduates often looked down upon those less educated and who had low-status husbands. In this instance, education defined a social circle that is closed to outsiders (Bourdieu 1984). Further, I was surprised to see how quickly some Russian women internalized the racial prejudices that exist in American society and developed their own biases and stereotypes. Particularly, it was not uncommon for Russian women to form friendships with each other according to the race/ethnicity of their husbands. As a result, they reproduced the same racial boundaries among themselves that paralleled American society. It is also worthwhile to note my informants’ unspoken understanding that belonging to a nation had layered definitions and that citizenship and national identities could mean different things in different situations. With time, the community of Russian women developed ethnic boundaries, in addition to those mentioned above. Moreover, the community exhibited a pedigree with respect to political ideologies brought from abroad and acquired in the U.S. (primarily through the contact with their spouses). It was due to these political ideologies that the first signs of conflict arose. Tensions amounted and the onset of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War marked the final split of the community. Nationalistically-minded Ukrainians lead the revolt. Since the schism, one

group of women would not go to the places where the other group socialized and *vice versa*, and there was hardly any interaction between the two groups.

Conclusion

Inter-ethnic transnational marriages, sometimes known as “mixed marriages,” are becoming more and more common across the globe due to processes of globalization of local marriage markets, or “global hypergamy” as Constable (2005) called it. Using participant observation, the present study focuses on post-migration experiences of women from the former U.S.S.R. who married American men. The rationale was twofold – to let the women explain their choice of marriage partner and to look into their post-migration identities. An intersectional analysis revealed the diversity within the experienced identities and subject positions of Russian women married to American men. Depending on the specific barriers encountered in the receiving society, different aspects of post-migration identity came to the foreground. In order to motivate and legitimize their and their partners’ marriage decision, my informants shifted the discourse content according to the marital relationships in which they are placed. While facing stigmatization and integration barriers in American society and being aware that they belonged to a stigmatized group, Russian women generated discourses in order to maintain a positive self-image. All these images and discourses were, to a certain degree, a combination of the gender ideologies in sending and receiving societies, the available integration channels and attitudes towards them in the U.S. In both domestic and public spheres, for example, women were willing to capitalize on their whiteness and relatively high educational attainment.

In explaining their and their husbands’ choice of a foreign spouse, Russian women produced two sorts of narratives. A first group of respondents motivated transnational partner choice by putting forward a stereotypical image of Russian women and American husbands that strikingly resembles the presentation of both parties on international dating websites. For a few, different ethnic and racial backgrounds of a spouse was one of the decisive factors. They were attracted to an exotic sexual image that was integrated in the romantic love ideal vehemently aspired for. In contrast, women in the second group described their and their partners’ choices as not being guided by identity features of “Russian women” or “American men.” In their accounts, no specific reference is made to the ethnicity of their partner. For these Russian women, following a husband or father fits into their vision of appropriate gender roles. Although different in content, both groups of women attempted to legitimize transnational partner choices and to defend the romantic love ideal. In other words, they chose to migrate in order to marry and not *vice versa*.

The combination of the intra- and intercategorical approaches allowed me to understand apparent inconsistencies in Russian marriage migrants’ presented identities, and their integration trajectories and senses of belonging in American society. The first inconsistency that I found is a conflict between women’s expectations about their gender roles and family life in the U.S. and their partners’ expectations about their prospective wives’ roles. Second, there are conflicting images of the “ideal man.” On the one hand, Russian women complain about the excess of patriarchy in Russia, and, on the other, they reproduce the same stereotypes by picturing their “ideal man” as the breadwinner et

cetera. Third, there are conflicting images of their lives immediately after arrival in the U.S. and some time hereafter. Russian women encountered a number of obstacles in the domestic and public domains, including, but not limited to, stigmatization and integration barriers that were not envisioned upon arrival. Not surprisingly, the majority of my informants were confined to the domestic sphere and made only timid attempts to get themselves established professionally. Many Russian women expressed an ambivalent sense of belonging in American society – on the one hand, they felt alienated because of experienced stigmatization and significant barriers to labor market participation, and on the other hand, they did not want to go back to their home countries and strived for a full incorporation into American society.

References

- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.
- Arieli, Daniella. 2007. “The Task of Being Content: Expatriate Wives in Beijing, Emotional Work and Patriarchal Bargain.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 8(4):18-31.
- Aroian, Karen, Ann E. Norris, and Lenny Chiang. 2003. “Gender Differences in Psychological Distress among Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union.” *Journal of Sex Role Research* 48(1/2):39-51.
- Ataca, Bilge and John W. Berry. 2002. “Psychological, Sociocultural, and Marital Adaptation of Turkish Immigrant Couples in Canada.” *International Journal of Psychology* 37(1):13-26.
- Barbara, Augustin. 1989. *Marriage across Frontiers*. Clevendon, Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.
- Beck-Gernsheim, Elizabeth. 2007. “Transnational Lives, Transnational Marriages: A Review of the Evidence From Migrant Communities in Europe.” *Global Networks* 7(3):271-288.
- Berry, John W. 1992. “Acculturation and Adaptation in a New Society.” *International Migration* 30:69-86.
- Blau, Peter. 1964. *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York: Wiley.
- Blau, Peter. 1977. *Inequality and Heterogeneity: A Primitive Theory of Social Structure*. New York: Free Press.
- Blau, Peter and Joseph Schwartz. 1984. *Crosscutting Social Circles: Testing a Macrostructural Theory of Intergroup Relations*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Although the present analysis clearly demonstrates intersectionality’s added value for studying transnational mixed marriages, further research is required. The study is limited to participant observation and in-depth interviewing would be able to shed light on issues that were hidden to the eye of a participant-observer. Additionally, I approached Russian women as a singly group, but significant variations could be observed with more refined methodology. It would be of intellectual benefit to focus on social categories, such as gender, ethnicity, class, and marital status, which fundamentally shape marriage migrants’ identities and lived experiences. I did not intend, however, to generalize across the experiences – the limitation of “speaking for” dominated, marginalized, or subordinated social groups and their consciousness has been clearly pointed out (Spivak 1999).

- Castles, Stephen and Mark J. Miller. 2009. *Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 4th ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charsley, Katharine and Alison Shaw. 2006. "South Asian Transnational Marriages in Comparative Perspective." *Global Networks* 6(4):331-344.
- Constable, Nicole. 2003. *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and "Mail-Order" Marriages*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Constable, Nicole, (ed.). 2005. "Introduction." Pp. 1-16 in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé W. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43:1241-1279.
- Ekeh, Peter P. 1974. *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Freeman, Caren. 2005. "Marrying up and Marrying Down: The Paradoxes of Marital Mobility for Chosonjok Brides in South Korea." Pp. 80-100 in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, edited by Nicole Constable. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Gal, Susan and Gail Kligman. 2000. *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Granovetter, Mark. 1983. "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited." *Sociological Theory* 1:201-233.
- Hajnal, John. 1965. "European Marriage Pattern in Perspective." Pp. 101-143 in *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*, edited by David V. Glass and David E. C. Eversley. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Hays, Jeffrey. 2011. *Marriage in Japan: History, love, Arranged Marriages, International Marriages*. Retrieved January 16, 2011 (<http://factsanddetails.com/japan.php?itemid=619andcatid=18andsubcatid=117>).
- Hoem, Jan M. et al. 2009. "Traces of the Second Demographic Transition in Four Selected Countries in Central and Eastern Europe: Union Formation as a Demographic Manifestation." *European Journal of Population* 25(3):239-255.
- Johnson, Ericka. 2007. *Dreaming of a Mail-Order Husband: Russian-American Internet Romance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Jones, Gavin and Hsiu-hua Shen. 2008. "International Marriage in East and Southeast Asia: Trends and Research Emphases." *Citizenship Studies* 12(1):9-25.
- Kalmijn, Matthijs. 1998. "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:395-421.
- Kay, Rebecca. 1997. "Images of an Ideal Woman: Perceptions of Russian Womanhood through the Media, Education, and Women's Own Eyes." Pp. 77-98 in *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*, edited by Mary Buckley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kim, Doo-Sub. 2011. "Does Spousal Dissimilarity Matter? An Explanation of Marital Stability among Transnational Couples in Korea." Paper presented at IUSSP Seminar on *Global Perspectives on Marriage and International Migration*, Seoul, South Korea.
- Kohler, Hans-Peter, Francesco C. Billari, and José Antonio Ortega. 2002. "The Emergence of Lowest-Low Fertility in Europe During the 1990s." *Population and Development Review* 28(4):641-680.
- Kojima, Yu. 2001. "In the Business of Cultural Reproduction: Theoretical Implications of the Mail-Order Bride Phenomenon." *Women's Studies International Forum* 24(2):199-210.
- Lauser, Andrea. 2008. "Philippine Women on the Move: Marriage across Borders." *International Migration* 46(4):85-110.
- Levant, Ronald F. 1996. "The New Psychology of Men." *Professional Psychology* 27:259-265.
- Levant, Ronald F. et al. 2003. "Masculinity Ideology among Russian and U.S. Young Men and Women and Its Relationship to Unhealthy Lifestyle Habits Among Young Russian Men." *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* 4:26-36.
- Levitt, Peggy and Nadya B. Jaworsky. 2007. "Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33(1):129-156.
- Lichter, Daniel T. et al. 1992. "Race and the Retreat from Marriage: A Shortage of Marriageable Men?" *American Sociological Review* 57:781-799.
- Luehrmann, Sonja. 2004. "Mediated Marriage: Internet Matchmaking in Provincial Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 56(6):857-876.
- Lyons, Lenore and Michele Ford. 2008. "Love, Sex, and the Spaces In-between: Kepri Wives and Their Cross-Border Husbands." *Citizenship Studies* 12(1):55-72.
- Manderson, Lenore and Margaret Jolly, (eds.). 1997. *Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press.
- Mathews, Sarah. 2005. "Crafting Qualitative Research Articles on Marriages and Families." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67:799-808.
- McCall, Leslie. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs* 30(3):1771-1800.
- Nagel, Joane. 2003. *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nash, Jennifer C. 2008. "Re-thinking Intersectionality." *Feminist Review* 89(1):1-15.
- Oum, Young R. 2003. "Beyond a Strong State and Docile Women." *International Journal of Feminist Politics* 5(3):420-446.
- Perelli-Harris, Brienna. 2005. "The Path to Lowest-Low Fertility in Ukraine." *Population Studies* 59(1):55-70.
- Piper, Nicola and Mina Roces, (eds.). 2003. *Wife or Worker? Asian Women and Migration*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pleck, Joseph H. 1995. "The Gender Role Strain Paradigm: An Update." Pp. 11-32 in *A New Psychology of Men*, edited by Ronald F. Levant and William S. Pollack. New York: Basic Books.
- Portes, Alejandro and Rubén G. Rumbaut. 2001. *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. Berkeley, New York: University of California Press.
- Rodriguez-Garcia, Dan. 2006. "Mixed Marriages and Transnational Families in the Intercultural Context: A Case Study of African-Spanish Couples in Catalonia, Spain." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32(3):403-433.
- Rosenfeld, Michael J. 2005. "A Critique of Exchange Theory in Mate Selection." *American Journal of Sociology* 110(5):1284-1325.
- Ryabov, Igor. 2009. "Late-Twentieth-Century Fertility Decline in Moldova: Interplay of Female Autonomy, Wealth, and Education." *Journal of Family History* 35(2):164-179.
- Scholes, Robert J. 1999. "The 'Mail-Order Bride' Industry and Its Impact on U.S. Immigration." *A Report to the INS*. Retrieved October 20, 2008 (www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/aboutins/repstudies/mobappa.htm).
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1999. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Suzuki, Nobue. 2005. "Tripartite desires: Filipina-Japanese marriages and fantasies of transnational traversal." Pp.124-144 in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, edited by Nicole Constable. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Taraban, Svitlana. 2007. "Birthday Girls, Russian Dolls, and Others: Internet Bride as the Emerging Global Identity of Post-Soviet Women." Pp. 105-127 in *Living Gender after Communism*, edited by Janet Elise Johnson and Jean C. Robinson. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Thai, Hung Cam. 2005. "Clashing Dreams in the Vietnamese Diaspora: Highly Educated Overseas Brides and Low-Wage U.S. Husbands." Pp. 45-165 in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, edited by Nicole Constable. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Veevers, Jean E. 1988. "The 'Real' Marriage Squeeze: Mate Selection, Mortality, and the Mating Gradient." *Sociological Perspectives* 31:169-189.
- Visson, Lynn. 2001. *Wedded Strangers: The Challenges of Russian-American Marriages*. New York: Hippocrene Books.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel W. 2004. *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Wang, Hong-Zen and Shu-ming Chang. 2002. "The Commodification of International Marriages: Cross-Border Marriage Business in Taiwan and Vietnam." *International Migration* 40(6):93-116.

Waters, Mary C. and Tomás R. Jiménez. 2005. "Assessing Immigrant Assimilation: New Empirical and Theoretical Challenges." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31:105-125.

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Yuval-Davis, Nancy. 2006. "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13(3):193-209.

Zabyelina, Yuliya. 2009. "Mail-Order Brides: Content Analysis of Eastern European Internet Marriage Agencies." *Slovo* 21(2):86-101.

Appendix

Table 1. Sample description.

Years Abroad	Duration of Current Marriage (+), Divorce or Separation (-) [in years]	Country of Origin (Self)	Country of Birth (Spouse)	Ethnic Origin/Ancestry (Spouse)
1	1	Russia	U.S.A.	Mexican
2	2	Ukraine	U.S.A.	Latino (Multiple Ancestries)
3	-1	Russia	Mexico	Mexican
3	3	Ukraine	Peru	Peruvian
4	-2	Russia	Palestine (West Bank)	Palestinian
4	4	Ukraine	U.S.A.	Italian
4	3	Georgia	The Netherlands	Dutch
5	-3	Ukraine	Mexico	Multiple Ancestries/Mixed Race
5	-1	Russia	U.S.A.	Jewish
5	3	Russia	Ghana	Ghanaian
6	6	Belarus	U.S.A.	Mexican
6	6	Ukraine	U.S.A.	African
7	-2	Russia	Mexico	Mexican
7	7	Russia	Philippines	Philippino
8	8	Kazakhstan	U.S.A.	Jewish
8	6	Ukraine	U.S.A.	Latino (Multiple Ancestries)
9	10	Kazakhstan	U.S.A.	WASP
9	9	Russia	South Korea	Korean
10	10	Russia	U.S.A.	Irish
12	-9	Russia	U.S.A.	Unknown

Source: self-elaboration.

Ryabov, Igor. 2013. "Russian Wives in America: A Sketchy Portrait." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 9(4):44-66. Retrieved Month, Year (http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php).