

**INTERNATIONAL MARRIAGE BUSINESS IN UKRAINE:
ANTHROPOLOGICAL DIMENSION**

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Political Anthropology in Eastern and SEE

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Abstract

This thesis represents the analysis of international marriage business in Ukraine through anthropological lenses. The study clarifies previously unexplained patterns of international marriage business by revealing links between feminism and the work in international marriage agencies. Initial part of the work is the elaboration on main anthropological notions, such as patriarchy, feminism and gender studies in general. The anthropological fieldwork is presented by the interviewees conducted with three women who are involved in marriage business of Odessa. Additionally, various types of New Media are used in order to back up the findings and present the opportunity for cultural critique. Among them – marriage agency websites, documentary and fiction films, etc. The thesis is that the international marriage market is an indicator of global feminism. Thus, the given work concentrates on Ukrainian women reversing the patriarchal structures, masculinity issues and hegemony of western governmentality.

Introduction

International marriage business is one of the topical anthropological, social, economic and political issues in the modern world. Very few people never heard of the term “mail-order bride”. Moreover, people living in the Eastern Europe surely have at least one or two acquaintances who are involved in marriage business. The scope of the industry is tremendous, spreading across the globe. The phenomenon dates back to the end of the 19th – 20th century, when the notion of migrant brides started to shape. To date, Ukraine along with other countries of Eastern Europe represents the central hub of such industry. In brief, the key task of the given thesis is the analysis of marriage business in Ukraine through anthropological lenses. I incorporated gender studies, visual anthropology and fieldwork in order to study the topic. My central point in the given thesis is that the international marriage industry is an indicator of the development of global feminism.

Global feminism refers to the worldwide network of differing local feminisms, united by the recognition that women’s status in any single country can be linked to what is happening in other countries, as well as domestically, in political, social, economic, and cultural realms. Political indicators of the development of feminist consciousness include the extent to which a government has succeeded in accomplishing gender mainstreaming.

The topic of international marriage agencies tends to elicit stock responses from people I have met during the course of my research. Whether I mention it to someone, a common remark is that they have read about it in the articles, or seen some documentary. People respond with nods, winks, and smirks. Public opinion on this topic often amounts to a belief that marriages resulting from matchmaking are at best illicit, fraudulent forms of immigration, or at worst a form of legal prostitution or slavery. Before I began fieldwork, I believed such impressions were quite accurate. I intended to collect evidence of illegal sex

trade involving women to develop the idea that relationships resulting from the international marriage industry were a personal manifestation of America's global aggression. I assumed that American men who chose Ukrainian women as wives were neo-cold warriors. Through in-depth interviews with women from Odessa, Ukraine who had become part of international marriage business, I realized that my assumptions and intentions were misguided. I began to see a deeper fabric of feminist and anti-feminist struggles at personal, national, and global levels. Fieldwork was a chance to hear disparate voices and detect emerging patterns.

Literature Review

In this chapter, I consider major works on the topics, such as visual anthropology, gender studies, international matchmaking, written between 1980s and 2000s through a review and critique of the nature of international matchmaking. The literature on international marriage business is a small body of work. This chapter presents and evaluates studies conducted by scholars, journalists, women's advocates, and NGO researchers.

Considering the gender studies, the book by Frances Mascia-Lee & Nancy Johnson Black, "Anthropology and Gender" (1999), helped to grasp the history of such studies, follow the development of anthropological thought on women's role in the society. Kamala Visweswaran in her "Fictions of Feminist Ethnography" (1994) described the works of Elenore Smith Bowen and Hortense Powdermaker and their role in developing gender studies. The New York Times article by M.P. Dunleavy (January 27, 2007) and the data of Pew Research Center (Livingston, June 5, 2014) provided some peculiar data on the current financial position of women and redefinition of family structures.

Another crucial part of the work represents the elaboration on such notions as patriarchy and feminism. Here, I would like to highlight a book that helped to grasp the structure of these phenomena. "The Creation of Patriarchy" by Gerda Lerner (1987) was a great discovery for me. The book represents a radical reconceptualization of Western civilization that makes gender central to its analysis. Gerda Lerner argues that male dominance over women is not natural or biological, but the product of historical development. As patriarchy as a system of organizing society was established historically, she contends, it can also be ended by the historical process.

The implementation of cultural critique in my work would not be possible without a famous book by George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, "Anthropology as Cultural

Critique” (1986). Using cultural anthropology to analyze debates that reverberate throughout the human sciences, the authors look closely at cultural anthropology's past accomplishments, its current predicaments, its future direction, and the insights it has to offer other fields of study. In the book, the authors present two main ways how anthropologists could pursue the cultural critique: the defamiliarization by epistemological critique, which means that new case studies should put into doubt central assumptions of one's culture. The second method concerns the defamiliarization by cross-cultural juxtaposition, meaning that specific areas of Western life should be compared with the different way these areas exist in other cultures. The result is a provocative work that is important for scholars interested in a critical approach to anthropology.

Several studies of Donna Hughes were highly helpful in writing about marriage agencies as the worldwide phenomenon. In her works, the author also analyzes the spread of marriage industry in Ukraine, while providing the reasoning and qualitative data on the regions. Another important mentioning is Marian Rubchak's "Mapping difference. The many faces of women in contemporary Ukraine" (2011). The edited volume approaches the position of women in modern Ukraine through anthropological lens and stresses out some really important points that reader may find in the according chapter of the given thesis.

Additionally, it is important to mention the New Media used in the given work. I have applied cultural critique in the analysis of two marriage agency websites, as well as some visual media content. Last but not the least, the core of this work is presented by the analysis of interviews that I conducted with three women involved in the marriage business in Odessa, Ukraine. The reader may find the transcripts of the interviews in Appendices of the given work, which represents the main source of anthropological fieldwork.

Anthropology of Gender

In this chapter, I would like to elaborate on the theory of Anthropology of Gender, as it is closely connected with the topic of international matchmaking. It is crucial to understand how this sub discipline of anthropology appeared and developed, so that the given thesis could be written on the platform of various gender studies.

The history of gender studies had a vibrant and transformational character through the last century. For instance, in the early twentieth century, anthropologists presumed that the social and political differences or divisions between men and women were natural. The idea that differences in gender roles originate in differences in biology has found support in parts of the scientific community. 19th-century anthropology sometimes used descriptions of the imagined life of paleolithic hunter-gatherer societies for evolutionary explanations for gender differences. For example, those accounts maintain that the need to take care of offspring may have limited the females' freedom to hunt and assume positions of power (Mascia-Lee & Black, 1999). Only in the 1930s, the pioneering anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry, who did fieldwork among Australian Aborigines, depicted women as “active agents” (2004, p. 27). Women were generally subordinate relative to men in her opinion, despite the fact that her material reveals women not to be subservient. Margaret Mead, another famous anthropologist who also commenced fieldwork in the 1930s was not concerned that much with subordination. Yet, she managed to demonstrate that ideals of femininity and masculinity vary enormously between groups.

Later on, the Womens' Liberation Movement happened in the 1970s. As the result, a younger generation of women began to question the masculinist orthodoxies in social

anthropology, both in the traditions in fieldwork and the literature. The movement has also produced an important distinction that still prevails in the modern anthropology. Scholars started to distinguish sex as a biologically given and gender as culturally variable. In this way, it was argued that divisions of labour and different roles assigned on the basis of gender were no longer accepted as biologically inevitable. Sex at birth was relatively fixed. Yet, the meanings and behavior associated with physical, sexual differences became fluid and started to vary across cultures in the eyes of anthropologists. In the 1990s, the dichotomy is held to be less clear, but even in the 1970s it was always recognised that human biology could also be culturally transformed and manipulated (Mascia-Lee & Black, 1999).

From the mid-1970s, a number of important volumes by women anthropologists made women more visible. This raised key questions about gender and anthropological theory. Contrary to subsequent caricatures in later literature, this strategy never implied that women should be studied separate from men and gender. Additionally, the material did not suggest that women were universally the same. Yet, the vast cross-cultural range of the early volumes already displayed differences among women. Although masculinity is only recently being studied in detail, gender studies aim to explore the full ranges of gender categories, including androgyny, in different cultural contexts. The impact of gender studies is also apparent in relation to fieldwork. Early texts by women such as Elenore Smith Bowen and Hortense Powdermaker demonstrated the importance of personal experience, individual identity and social relationships in writing anthropology (Visweswaran, 1994). Once marginalised, these texts explored the ideas, which are now central to the discipline.

During the 1980s, the idea that gender was unrelated to sex gained ground because of the influence of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist works and Michel Foucault's reflections on sexuality, especially in sociology and cultural anthropology. This view has asserted that the relationship between gender and sex (presence of genitals/gonads) is not causally determinate.

In other words, one may have the genitals of one sex while having the gender of another (Connell, 1987).

Based on this statement, one may assume that the change in gender roles can rapidly transform the societies. The 21st century has seen a shift in gender roles due to multiple factors such as new family structures, education, media, and several others. A 2003 survey by the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that about 1/3 of wives earn more than their husbands (Dunleavy, 27 January 2007). Additionally, women have begun furthering their education with the access of college degrees (for example, online education) and with the importance of education emphasized nationwide. Family structures are changing, and the number of single-mother or single-father households is increasing.

At the same time, fathers are also becoming more involved with raising their children, instead of the responsibility resting solely with the mother. According to the Pew Research Center, the number of stay-at-home fathers in the US nearly doubled in the period from 1989 to 2012, from 1.1 million to 2.0 million (Livingston, June 5, 2014). This trend appears to be mirrored in a number of countries including the UK, Canada and Sweden. However, Pew also found that, at least in the US, public opinion appears to show a substantial bias toward favoring a mother as a care-taker versus a father, regardless of any shift in actual roles each plays. All of the above mentioned points, such as feminist evolution, the issue of paternal figure, have the direct impact on the main topic discussed, which will be explained and discussed further.

Patriarchy vs Feminism

Patriarchy is another term I will often use in the analysis of marriage business in Ukraine. How is it connected with the given topic? In the upcoming chapters, the reader will get to know such notions as orthodox culture, vodka masculinity, patriarchal societies, and the role they play in the popularity of marriage agencies in Ukraine. Yet, in this chapter, I would like to focus on the origins of patriarchy and the battle of feminism against the former.

Patriarchy literally means “the rule of the father” and comes from the Greek πατριάρχης, (father of a race), which is a compound of “πατριά” (lineage, descent) and “ἄρχω” (I rule) (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.). Thus, patriarchy can be defined as a social system in which males hold primary power, predominate in roles of moral authority, political leadership, control of property, and social privilege. In the scope of the household, fathers or father-figures hold authority over women and children. Many patriarchal societies are also patrilineal. It means that property and title are inherited by the male lineage (Lerner, 1987).

Historically, patriarchy has manifested itself in the social, legal, political, and economic organization of a range of different cultures. Despite that historically the term patriarchy was used to refer to autocratic rule by the male head of a family, in modern times, it more generally refers to social systems in which power is primarily held by adult men. Anthropological evidence suggests that most prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies were relatively egalitarian, and that patriarchal social structures did not develop until many years after the end of the Pleistocene era, following social and technological innovations such as agriculture and domestication. According to Robert M. Strozier, historical research has not yet found a specific “initiating event” (2002, p. 46). Some scholars point to about six

thousand years ago, when the concept of fatherhood took root, as the beginning of the spread of patriarchy. In Ancient Greece, the works of Aristotle portrayed women as morally, intellectually, and physically inferior to men. He saw women as the property of men and claimed that women's role in society was to reproduce and serve men in the household (Lerner, 1987). Thus, male domination of women was seen as natural and virtuous. In medieval Europe, patriarchy was not absolute, as female Empresses, such as Theodora, and Matriarchs, such as Helena, the mother of Constantine, enjoyed privilege, political rule, and societal honor.

In the recent past, various women began to question the commonly accepted patriarchal interpretation of Christian scripture. One of the foremost of these was Sarah Grimké, who voiced skepticism about the ability of men to translate and interpret passages relating to the roles of the sexes without bias. She proposed alternative translations and interpretations of passages relating to women, and she applied historical and cultural criticism to a number of verses, arguing that their admonitions applied to specific historical situations, and were not to be viewed as universal commands (Grimke, 1998). Elizabeth Cady Stanton used Grimké's criticism of biblical sources to establish a basis for feminist thought. She published *The Woman's Bible*, which proposed a feminist reading of the Old and New Testament. This tendency was enlarged by feminist theory, which denounced the patriarchal Judeo-Christian tradition (Lerner, 1987).

As a common standard of differentiation between genders, advocates for a patriarchal society like to focus on the influences that hormones have over biological systems. Playing a critical role in the development of the brain and behavior, testosterone and estrogen have been labeled the "male-hormone" and "female-hormone" respectively, as a result of the impact they have when masculinizing or feminizing an individual. Anthropologists reject predominantly biological explanations of patriarchy and contend that social and cultural conditioning are

primarily responsible for establishing male and female gender roles (Lerner, 1987). According to anthropological theory, patriarchy is the result of sociological constructions that are passed down from generation to generation. These constructions are most pronounced in societies with traditional cultures and less economic development. Even in modern, developed societies, however, gender messages conveyed by family, mass media, and other institutions largely favor males having a dominant status.

Some opponents of feminism have argued that patriarchy has its origin in biological factors. This is called biological determinism, which looks at humanity from a strictly biological point of view. The male testosterone hormone is, for instance, known to greatly enhance risk taking behaviour; which can generate increased status in groups if successful. A hypothetical patriarchal culture based primarily on a hormonally-driven increased rate of male successes, thus require a certain critical level of societal evolution before it could evolve. Other proponents of this theory posit that because of a woman's biology, she is more fit to perform roles such as anonymous child-rearing at home, rather than high-profile decision-making roles, such as leaders in battles. Hence, the rise of patriarchy is recognized through this apparent sexual division (Lewontin, 1984).

In his book, "Not in Our Genes", Lewontin reflects feminist concerns for the future of patriarchy and how to rid society of it by uprooting the source (1984). Lewontin and others argue that such biological determinism unjustly limits women. In his study, he states women behave a certain way not because they are biologically inclined to, but rather because they are judged by "how well they conform to the stereotypical local image of femininity" (Lewontin, 1984, p. 137). Feminists believe that people have gendered biases, which are perpetuated and enforced across generations by those who benefit from them. For instance, it has historically been claimed that women cannot make rational decisions during their menopausal periods. This claim cloaks the fact that men also have periods of time where they can be aggressive

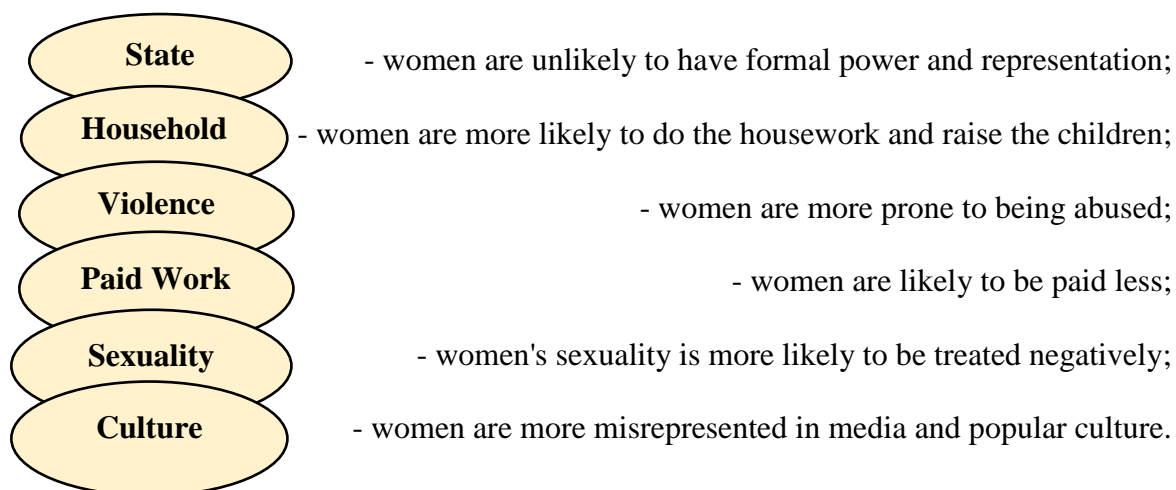
and irrational. Furthermore, unrelated effects of aging and similar medical problems are often blamed on menopause, amplifying its reputation. These biological traits and others specific to women, such as their ability to get pregnant, are often used against them as an attribute of weakness.

Claims made about the traits and their effects are often incorrect. For instance, it has been considered for over a century that women are not as intellectually competent as men, because they have slightly smaller brains on average. However, no substantiated significant difference in average intelligence has been found between the sexes. Feminists assert that although women may excel in certain areas and men in others, women are just as competent as men. Therefore, through the growing power of the patriarchal system, a gender bias is created in the work force, leading to a situation in which “men are more likely to be cabinet ministers or parliamentarians, business executives or tycoons, Nobel Prize-winning scientists or fellows of academies, doctors or airline pilots. As for women they are more likely to be secretaries, laboratory technicians, office cleaners, nurses, airline stewardesses, primary school teachers, or social workers” (Lewontin, 1984, p. 132).

Within the structure of a patriarchal society, patriarchal biases and values are more likely to be promoted in the educational system. Particularly in mathematical and scientific fields, boys are presumed to have more keen spatial abilities than girls, whereas girls are supposed to assume better linguistic skills. These stereotypical manifestations within educational institutions contract with the notions of differently gendered brains and a "relationship between intelligence and brain size" (Lewontin, 1984, p. 143) However, there is "no correlation between skull capacity and hence brain weight and 'intellectual power'" (Lewontin, 1984, p. 143), yet there is still a constant struggle of gender bias in science.

The patriarchal society tends to suppress women in various areas of social, economic, and political life. In her book, “Theorizing Patriarchy” (1997), Sylvia Walby has composed

six overlapping structures that define patriarchy and that take different forms in different cultures and different times:



In conclusion, patriarchy is defined as a social system in which males hold primary power. Anthropological evidence suggests that most prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies were relatively egalitarian, and that patriarchal social structures did not develop until many years later. According to anthropological theory, patriarchy is the result of sociological constructions that are passed down from generation to generation. In the recent past, various women began to question the commonly accepted patriarchal structures. In this context, I regard women enrolled in international marriage business as the ones who oppose the patriarchy in the peculiar way. I will discuss this issue in details later in the given thesis.

Visual Anthropology as Cultural Critique

Visual Anthropology is the discipline that always attracted my attention. It provides a more creative angle to the analysis of any topic. Through documentaries, films and other media an anthropologist may grasp the given phenomenon, while applying cultural critique towards the others and himself. In this chapter, I will elaborate on the definition of visual anthropology, what media can be included in this sub discipline. Additionally, I will discuss the method of cultural critique and how it can be applied not only to various documentaries, but to fiction films as well.

Thus, Visual Anthropology is a sub-discipline within anthropology that is concerned with the study and production of ethnographic photography, film and, since the mid-1990s, new media. To put it more broadly, it involves the study of visual systems and material culture. Different authors provide various definitions of visual anthropology. According to Morphy and Banks, visual anthropology should be understood as the study of the properties of visual systems; of how things are seen and how what is seen is understood (1997, p. 21). Visual anthropology also includes “the production and analysis of still photos, the study of art and material culture, and the investigation of gestures, facial expressions and spatial aspects of behavior and interaction” (Jacknins, 1994, p. 33).

The above-mentioned definitions look at visual anthropology from the point of view of its methods, such as film and photography, and its scope, e.g. the analysis of material culture, gestures, etc. However, visual anthropology is more than just a method for collecting and analyzing visual data, as “visual anthropology is concerned with the whole process of

anthropology, from the recording of data, through its analysis to the dissemination of the results of research” (MacDougall, 1997, p. 278). This sub-discipline is central to anthropology because of its reflexive nature. In other words, it helps to appreciate the positioning of all actors, such as informants, media people, and anthropologists.

Based on the foregoing, visual anthropology collects two kinds of data: visual recordings and material culture. This may include photography, film, performances, painting, sculpture, body modifications, sign and body language, rituals aesthetics, maps, wrapping, landscape, murals, objects and artifacts, written language, and architecture. Visual anthropology raises important issues about accuracy, objectivity, ethical issues, and how one portrays other cultures, produces ethnographic texts, and interprets other cultures.

Undoubtedly, ethnographic film is one of the most important tools in visual anthropology. The classic understanding of such film is - a non-fiction film, usually dealing with non-Western people, and often associated with anthropology. Yet, post-modern understanding implies that it could be “...any video footage that is of ethnographic interest or is used to represent ethnographic knowledge and used as such” (Heider, 2007, p. 436). Mainly, the embracement of fiction films is connected to the radical shift in anthropology, as discipline, that happened during the 1980s.

This notable development represented a revision of techniques used in all of the fields of anthropology. Young anthropologists started to doubt the writings they had valued and imitated for so long. Moreover, they realized that putting under question the classical techniques is proving to be a means of developing new approaches. In this regard, it is crucial to mention a famous book by Michael Fischer and George Marcus, “Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences.” It treated the origin, the development, and the prospects of the focus on ethnography. The authors traced the state of affairs in anthropology, which brought them to the conclusion that the discipline was

experiencing the crisis of representation. According to them, a crisis of representation, is a crisis that "...arises from uncertainty about adequate means of describing social realities" (Fischer & Marcus, 1986, p. 8). They argued that paradigms and unifying ideas of the past were being challenged in virtually all disciplines, partly because of broad changes in social conditions including the declining power of America and the West.

This challenge had an unexpected advantage, inspiring a lot of new work in many fields. It forced scholars to try out composite approaches, incorporate methods from formerly separate fields and open new paths in their own fields. Considering anthropology, it meant a transition from closed models offered by structuralism, functionalism, and linguistics to more flexible strategies taken from various academic disciplines and intellectual sources, such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, semiotics, critical theory of Frankfurt School, and works of Max Webber and Talcott Parsons.

Another crucial part of the book describes the prospects of the ethnographic movement as a whole. The authors argued that the works of anthropologists had to be redirected to a general reassessment of the society, in particular, "the bourgeois middle-class life of mass liberal society which industrial capitalism produced" (Fischer & Marcus, 1986, p. 111). Thus, crisis of representation could be solved by cultural critique. The main aim of such critique would be "...the empirical explanation of the historical and cultural conditions for the articulation and implementation of different values" (Fischer & Marcus, 1986, p. 167). There were two reasons why anthropology had to shift to cultural critique, making it the explicit and primary task of the whole discipline. Firstly, such notions as "primitive" and "exotic" started to lose their appeal among general readership. In turn, cultural critique would attract the scholars from other disciplines. Secondly, the authors saw cultural criticism as a vital means to achieve greater choice about how to live. They claimed that there was always multiple choices and possibilities in any situation that accommodated or resisted to dominant cultural

interpretations or trends. Thus, ethnography as cultural criticism was able to locate “...alternatives by unearthing these multiple possibilities as they exist in reality” (Fischer & Marcus, 1986, p. 116).

Furthermore, the authors presented two main ways how anthropologists could pursue the cultural critique. The first method was the defamiliarization by epistemological critique. It meant that new case studies should put into doubt central assumptions of one’s culture. The second method concerned the defamiliarization by cross-cultural juxtaposition. The essence lies in its name: specific areas of Western life should be compared with the different way these areas exist in other cultures.

Based on the above stated, a logical question may arise. How can cultural critique be applied to visual anthropology and, in particular, to the new media? The answer is undeniably simple: in the same way as cultural critique is applied to ethnography. For instance, considering the analysis of a given new media, the main aim would be to examine the foundations of culture, presented in the work, while expanding social analysis to include larger contexts of history, politics, and economics. Judgement, in turn, would be the ability to form an opinion based on careful consideration. The advantage point of cultural critique is that even the restatement of something that already presents a universal truth, is not damaging to the analysis. Mainly, because the post-modern approach implies the self-reflection as the means of transcending mere opinion.

In conclusion, visual anthropology should be understood as a sub-discipline within anthropology that is concerned with the study and production of ethnographic photography and film. In the beginning, it mainly involved non-fiction ethnographic films shot on the field. However, due to the crisis of representation in all of the fields of anthropology, the new method, called cultural critique, has evolved. It promoted the transition from classical and conservative theories of research to new modern techniques. Thus, in the given thesis, I will

apply cultural critique to various types of new media, such as fiction film, video advertisement, news report, and several marriage agency websites.

International Marriage Agency: Definition, History, Analysis

This chapter concentrates on the phenomenon of international marriage agency, its history, evolution and practical application. Thus, it is crucial to start from the definition of such agencies.

An international marriage agency can be defined as a business that endeavors to introduce men and women of different countries for the purpose of marriage, dating or correspondence. Many of these marriage agencies are based near women in developing countries, such as Ukraine, Russia, Colombia, Brazil, China, Thailand and the Philippines. International marriage agencies encourage women to register for their services, and facilitate communication and meetings with men from developed regions of North America, Western Europe, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. This network of smaller international marriage agencies is often affiliated with web-based international dating sites that are able to market their services on a larger scale, in compliance with regulations such as the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act (Hughes, 2004). Experian, a market research firm, reports that the top 10 international dating sites attracted 12 million visitors in March 2013, up 29% from March 2012 (VanderMey, April 9, 2013). Additionally, international marriage agencies are frequently referred to as "mail-order bride" agencies. However, many consider the term "mail-order bride" derogatory and feel it demeans foreign women by comparing them to commodities.

Services offered by marriage agencies typically include:

1. Introductions
2. Translation of correspondence between clients not speaking a common language

3. Excursions, in which a man is introduced to several women interested in marriage

Considering the history of the marriage agencies, there are at least two historical roots of the mail-order bride industry. Both emerged in the 1800s. One of them could be Asian workers in the frontier regions, and the others, American men who had headed west across the United States to work out on the frontier. North American men found financial success in the migration West, but the one thing that was missing was the company of a wife. Very few women lived there at this time, so it was hard for these men to settle down and start a family. They attempted to attract women living back East. The men wrote letters to churches and published personal advertisements in magazines and newspapers. In return, the women would write to the men and send them photographs of themselves. Courtship was conducted by letter until a woman agreed to marry a man she had never met (Hughes, 2001). Many women wanted to escape their present way of living, gain financial security and see what life on the frontier could offer them. Most of these women were single, but some were widows, divorcées or runaways.

Asian men also worked through mail-order agencies to find wives as they worked overseas in the 1800s. Demographics, cultural perceptions, legal policies, and technology were key variables determining the relationship between migration and marriage. Imbalances between the number of available women and the number of men desiring partners created a demand for immigrant women. As a result of this imbalance, a new system of “picture brides” developed in predominantly male settlements. The Japanese-American Passport Agreement of 1907 allowed Japan to grant passports to the wives of immigrants to America (Hughes, 2001). As immigration of unmarried Japanese women to America was effectively barred, the use of “picture brides” provided a mechanism for willing women to obtain a passport to America, while Japanese workers in America could gain a female helpmate of their own nationality.

The modern history of international marriage agencies starts in the second half of the 20th century. In the 1980's, the mail-order-bride industry was small and brokers had to use printed catalogues or advertisements in the back of magazines to reach male customers. At that time, most of the women were recruited from Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines and Thailand. In the early 1990s, two historical developments coincided to turn the mail-order bride market into a profitable, global business: the first was the collapse of the Soviet Union with the opening up of the borders for people, particularly women, to migrate, and the second was the digital information revolution of the Internet. The marriage brokers quickly moved to the Internet, which enabled them to expand and update their catalogue offerings and reach a global market of men quicker, easier, and less expensively (Simons, 2001).

In conclusion, the phenomenon of mail-order bride dates well abck into the 19th century, while the modern understanding of the marriage industry is shaped in the 1980s. Two main historic roots are connected with Asian workers and American men who were populating the New World. The modern boom of marriage business is primarily connected with the collapse of the Soviet Union and opening the borders of Eastern European countries.

The Position of Women in Modern Ukraine

Ukraine and women share a number of characteristics. They were both understudied in conventional scholarship. Yet, both are aware of their intrinsic, some claim even unique, value. Ukraine and its women are still in the process of assertively defining their roles. They are the subjects of increasing scholarly analysis as well as agents of their own definition. Due to lack of knowledge about Ukraine, disproportionate focus is placed on its alleged “nationalism,” when the issue is often merely one of self-awareness. Thus, women’s movements in Ukraine, which in Germany, Russia, or the United States are studied as social or intellectual movements, in the Ukrainian variant come to be seen as aspects of nationalism.

That makes the study of gender even more challenging in a country. It also complicates the awareness of the interconnectivity of social and ideological movements, while promoting reliance on simplistic self-definitions and hampering the growth of a mature society. These factors contribute to keeping women’s studies in Ukraine in the shadow in that country as well as abroad.

In this section, it is crucial to mention the edited volume of anthropologist, Marian Rubchak, “Mapping difference. The many faces of women in contemporary Ukraine” (2011). The book provides a much-awaited cross-disciplinary debate on issues of gender, gender politics, feminism and women's social mobility in post-soviet Ukraine. It poses questions otherwise hardly articulated for contemporary Ukraine. The questions such as “why did

democratization and liberalization of a formerly totalitarian state result in unprecedented curtailing of gender equality?” Three major themes run as a thread throughout the volume: the post-socialist gender legacy, feminism and nationalism.

Despite the diversity of the approaches the authors of the articles take, all contributions scream the considerable loss of women's ground in public positions and paid employment since 1991. Indeed, the emancipation process of new socialist woman through work in the 20th century was a process to exercise control over women and make men's role meaningless. Yet, later on, the Soviet ideal of a woman-worker was replaced by the neotraditionalist mythological figure of Berehynia, “representing a nurturing woman, guardian of non-symbolic domestic hearth and embodiment of moral principles”, whose task is “to help men in the realization of their ideal of national sovereignty” (Rubchak, 2011, p. 112). The debate in the volume takes a fascinating turn as most scholars note that women eagerly embrace the traditional model of separate spheres, “all too comfortable with this accommodation, they simply collude in their own subordination” (Rubchak, 2011, p. 3). Ukrainian nationalism thus constitutes a powerful mechanism that generates solid gender-specific roles, replacing:



In such way, it represents “all maternal functions as natural women's duties” (Rubchak, 2011, pp. 112–13) and ignores the diversity of women's experiences. The powerful grip that this state-building discourse has on women's imagination effectively alienates many from feminist ideologies and language, leaving most heroines of the volume to pronounce themselves as nonfeminists.

In conclusion, there seems to be the ever-increasing disparity between women in Ukraine. Every case that aims to illustrate women's successful rise to visible influential positions often fails to recognise their initially privileged position. In simple words, on every Yulia Tymoshenko, there is a 40-year-old divorcee single mother with no visible gender equality in the society. Thus, the rapidly widening gap in Ukrainian society is breaking women's solidarities.

Yet, despite the assumed conformity of women, there is an evidence of everyday practiced resistance. In some case, these are migrant women abandoning their local domestic roles in order to earn money in foreign households, in other, a minority of feminists varying from FEMEN who shocked the world with their bare-breasted protests, to established scholars who initiated gender studies programmes throughout Ukraine. Surprisingly, marriage agencies in this discourse present dubious phenomenon. In terms of practical functionality and materialistical influence, they appear to be the consequence of gender inequality, patriarchy, and post-soviet governmentality. Yet, in their essence, once you dig deeper, they present a partisan-like feminist movement that is yet to be studied and analyzed.

The Spread of International Marriage Business over Ukraine

Ukraine is a cherry on top of the cake of international marriage business. If Ukraine is known for its basket case economy, the dating market appears to be thriving, eased in part by far easier visa rules than to Russia, and a number of other former states in the fallen USSR. It is a successful developing business that involves many women from various cities of Ukraine.

Donna Hughes conducted quantitative study on the recruitment of women by marriage agencies in the countries of the former Soviet Union. The search found almost 500 marriage agency sites with women from former Soviet republics. The 219 marriage agencies had a total of 119,649 women on their sites. Although there are large differences in the size and populations of the post-soviet countries, there are still noticeable differences in the recruitment of women by marriage agencies in these countries. The Top-3 countries with the largest numbers of women were the Russian Federation with over 62,000 women, followed by Ukraine with almost 32,000, and Belarus with almost 13,000 (Hughes, July 13, 2004).

Considering Ukraine, the crucial fact appeared to be that there were sizeable differences in the number of women recruited by oblast (territorial unit e.g. region) in Ukraine. In Ukraine, there are a few distinct patterns for the recruitment of women by marriage agencies. The Crimea, the most southern oblast in the Black Sea, has the largest

number of women recruited (5,515). Other notable recruitment centers are Kyiv (3401), Odessa (3225), and Dnipropetrovsk (2742) which are large cities, thus, they attract most of the foreigners. What is curious, the regions with the lowest numbers of recruited women are in the western Ukraine. Seven of the nine regions where there were less than 50 recruited women appeared to be in western Ukraine (Hughes, July 13, 2004). Thus, one may trace a trend that the farther east, towards Russia, one moves, the more women are recruited by marriage agencies. Also, the southern regions on the Black Sea have fairly high numbers of women recruited from them.

The explanation of such a divide in numbers of women hired can be explained by assessing the issue with anthropological approach. In Ukraine, generally speaking, there are cultural differences between western and eastern Ukraine. Western Ukraine is more “European” and Ukrainian nationalist. This part of the country has been connected to various western empires during the centuries. Thus, this region was heavily influenced by cultural codes and governmentality of those countries. At the same time, Eastern Ukraine is more identified with Russian culture. For centuries, it was a part of Russian Empire with all the political and social consequences. The constructions of femininity and masculinity in that region has always been rather strict and inviolable. Women’s role in the society was regarded as the “keeper of the hearth” and a tool of reproduction. The social position of women was submissive, while patriarchy was at its peak.

Despite the unmaking and the remaking of patriarchy in the frame of communist ideology that happened in the 20th century, the basics of gender roles prevailed. Though the macho culture production and other recent trends in post-soviet states have a significant impact on the interrelation of “bride” – “client” in the scope of marriage agency, the numerical geographical distribution of the women recruited remains under the influence of more old anthropological trends described above.

Marriage Agency Websites of Ukraine

The involvement of women in Ukraine into the marriage business is primarily connected with work at the marriage agency websites. All of the subjects with whom I conducted interviews, are enrolled in different marriage agencies as translators, brides, or administrators. I cannot point out the precise place of their work due to the anonymity issues and the fact that they are currently working in those agencies. Yet, I would like to incorporate in my work the website analysis of the biggest marriage agency in Ukraine, AnastaciaDate, and the website Ukraine Women. Such analysis is crucial in anthropological research of the given topic, as the websites carry a lot of peculiar anthropological data.

Marriage agency sites illustrate how the modern world centers around a neoliberal governmentality that produces money economy. Individuals are in essence able to buy love. Although some sites offer free trials and/or profiles, most memberships can cost much money. It happens because many individuals buy into the promise that these websites advertise: that they will find love that cannot be attained out in the real world. Thus, the main premise of online dating sites is to find one's "perfect match"—the person whom one will inevitably fall in love with and thus, spend the rest of his life with. In order to find this person, they use various questions, scales and polls to find someone who they deem to be compatible with you.

Online dating sites have taken advantage of the modern individual's desire to save time in their hectic life in order to successfully commercialize their product in the capital-based society.

AnastasiaDate is one of these websites. It is an international online dating service website that primarily connects men from North America to women from Eastern Europe. It was founded in 1993 by a Russian-American couple, Elena and David Besuden. David met Elena in 1992 through an introduction service and the couple married that same year. The brand AnastasiaDate was named after the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna of Russia, who was seen as role model for young Russian women (Walker, Shaun, April 6, 2014). In the early nineties, when the company first launched, it used catalogs to introduce men to Russian women. The company launched its first website in January 1997 and expanded its business in more cities throughout Russia and the Ukraine. Following the growth of AnastasiaDate, the company spun off three websites during 2007, each connecting western men with women from different areas of the world: AmoLatina, AsianBeauties, and AfricaBeauties. Considering the money side, Fortune reported that the company earned \$110 million in 2012, while the website's traffic also grew by 220% in 2012 (VanderMey, April 9, 2013).

Accessing the main home page of AnastaciaWeb, I was immediately redirected to some sort of pre-page of the website. This page gives the brief description of the company, its history and other data. The announcement of the changeover of the domain immediately attracted my attention. The difference appeared to be in the implementation of the new program "Date a Lady" (Anastasiaweb.com, 2015). The website states that such program would guarantee the bride's show-up on the date after having accepted the invitation from the customer. This appears to be a highly important innovation as there are numerous cases of women not showing up on dates, which I have learned from both the documentaries and interviews I conducted. In spite of this fact, I highly doubt that such program would diminish

the fraud schemes created by women using the websites. They would merely be more meticulous in accepting the invitation of the customer.

Later on, there is a description of the company's history. The text looks like a clumsy copywriting from some cheap romance novel. The first romance tour ever, organized by the agency, describes the first customers being "...with their hearts in their throats and a fistful of rubles" (AnastaciaWeb.com, 2015). At the same time, in the very beginning of the text, the objectification of women appears in its full power, as the spokesperson of AnastaciaDate is described as "...the tall stunning blonde" and "...strikingly beautiful spokesperson" in the very same paragraph. (AnastaciaWeb.com, 2015). Furthermore, the customer who decides to proceed with the romance tour is promised to "...have his cake and eat it as well" (AnastaciaWeb.com, 2015). The future brides are described as "...the most delicious creatures to strut the former Eastern Block" and "the cream of the proverbial femme crop" (AnastaciaWeb.com, 2015). The purpose of such blatant description of women and the whole style of the text remains to be criticized further.

What struck me the most is a historical brief on the Women's Day celebrated on March 8 in post-soviet countries. The writer tends to reverse all the historical facts into the statement that through revolutionary feminist events, women found another way how to please their men and distract the political opposition. Currently, women fight "...no longer for political reform, but to prompt men to understand and admire the feminine attitude and form all the better" (AnastaciaWeb.com, 2015). Such a statement would raise the eyebrows of not only an anthropologist, but also any political scientist. In the same way, the text goes on with St. Valentine's Day, while announcing their annual Miss Valentine Competition. All of this anthropological macabre finishes with the proposal of redirecting the home page of the website, which finally gives some insight on the work of the website.

Despite the fact that most of the content on the website is hidden due to the prior need in registration, the main services the marriage agency provides can be highlighted immediately. Among them are live chat, CamShare (chat with a web cam), live games, instant calls, collect calls, and even virtual gifts. Every service costs a certain amount of credits. In turn, customers of the website can buy credits on raw dollars. The credits' total does not equal the total in real money, thus, making more difficult for customers to calculate how much money they would spend on one or another service. Such system plays beneficially to the girls' income, as I learnt through the interviewing process. For, instance, on average, a woman earns \$3-4 per customer per hour through the webcam chat (Appendix B). Thus, if a woman manages to talk with five customers at the same time, the amount skyrockets to \$20 per hour. For the reader's consideration, the average monthly wage in Ukraine as of August 2015 constituted approximately \$170 (Ukraine Average Monthly Wages, 2015).

Such discrepancy represents another argument in favor of the fact that marriage agencies are merely tools of earning money and supporting families for the women in Ukraine. Overall, excluding some minor gender bias, which is expected in such sphere as marriage business, I found the website to be coherent, modern, and diplomatic as possible. I would say that design and style wise, it represents a better example of online dating websites among others.

For the purpose of contrast reasoning, I decided to search for another online marriage agency of a smaller scale to understand if the gender stereotypes can be traced in a more direct way than on the previously discussed website. This is how I stumbled upon the marriage agency "Ukraine Singles". It is a minor agency that operates in several cities of Ukraine. The website of the agency looks like an average porn site. The first thing that catches the eye are women represented in promiscuous poses ironically on the background of the Ukrainian flag. The bald letters state that the website contains 80 000 active profiles of

women who “are ready to become brides” (Ukrainesingles.com, 2015). Yet, this figure is highly doubtful.

Things get more complicated as you start browsing profiles of women. Each profile has a detailed description of woman including her weight, height, eye color, and zodiac. I presume that such inclination to details is connected with the fact that the consumer has a right to be aware of all the characteristics of the proposed product, while such right is being protected by various conventions and treaties.

On a less ironical note, many profiles appear to have a consimilar description that is supposedly written by the bride herself. The cross analysis of the texts allows to identify a precise pattern of verbal constructions, such as “true, devoted relationship”, “hospitable environment”, “family is the most important thing in life”, “good housewife”, “my home is always clean and cozy”, etc. (Ukrainesingles.com, 2015). Thus, it is either women of Ukraine do represent “heaven on earth” for men from Western hemisphere who strive to redefine their masculinity and place in social superstructures, or most of the previously mentioned descriptions are merely written by the same person. Except of these points, the website presents the traditional services, such as chats, calls, web cams, romance tours, etc. The romance tours are a separate topic of discussion and the reader would be able to find their description and analysis later in the given work.

Visual Media on Marriage Business in Ukraine

Anthropological research would not be full without examination of visual media connected with international marriage business. As it has been mentioned in the previous chapter, cultural critique can be applied to any type of visual data, like documentaries and films. Such medium provides additional insight to the topic, helps to redefine the understanding of marriage agency, and provides the ability of cultural critique towards the creators of such media themselves. Thus, I have chosen the most relevant visual materials connected with this topic and will attempt to implement them in the main discourse. Among them are news report, documentary, advertisement of the marriage agency, and a fiction film.

News Report

Having searched the TV channel websites on the reports about marriage agencies, I stumbled upon one peculiar news report from an American TV channel ABC. Their reporter,

Bill Weir, went to Odessa in order to document one of the romance tours provided by marriage agencies. This tour included twenty-one men who were customers of the loveme.com website, one of the branches of the company “Foreign Affair”.

The main character of the video is a 65-year-old Bob Ray, a former college professor from Pennsylvania. He spent \$4000 in order to go to the romance trip showcased in the video. He is a single father with two kids, which nicely aligns with my own research, interviews and conclusion that many of the elder customers of online dating websites are single fathers with children. In the interview, Bob states “I like being married. Dating is fun, but it gets boring after a certain age” (ABC Report). Thus, in the video, he is portrayed as a positive character who wants to find a loving wife. Another character is 47-year-old Danny who went on tour in order to meet his pen pal Svetlana, who is 23 years old. After a 4-hour date with her, he decides to buy an engagement ring to her in order to present it on the next meeting. Both characters seem to be completely unaware of the destiny that awaits them, as obviously none of them returns home with a new wife. Svetlana simply does not show up on the next date, while Bob never goes beyond dancing and flirting with women during the romance tour.

Such an “unexpected” ending is something that should not shock anybody, as all three women I interviewed stated that especially young girls are completely negligible to the motives of the customers and are merely earning money on the romance tours by going to expensive stores, restaurants and receiving gifts from the men. Yet, what surprises is that how little of attention the reporter gives to establishing the reasons why such events occurred.

Despite being a news report, the video looks more like an advertisement of one of the marriage agencies. It displays attractive women all along the video, while showing happy and excited men being around them. The report does mention some real facts, such as the constant presence of interpreters and the fees they take; yet, it does not go deep into analyzing the structure and work of the romance tours. Additionally, being from Odessa, I can assure that

the city does not look like some post-soviet village with the Balkan music playing in the background. This is an example of a false representation by American news reporter. In turn, it raises questions how much bias and stereotypes the authors of the video had to “the others”, women living in Odessa.

Advertisement

Another video I would like to mention is the advertisement of the “Ukraine Singles” marriage agency that I already discussed in the previous chapter. The advertisement documents a romance tour to Poltava, a city in Ukraine. It is as stereotypical as one could imagine. The 9-minute long video portrays women dancing in the club with the clients of the agency. On the background, a combination of romantic songs and 80’s dance music is being played. Additionally, the clients tell their opinions on the tour and how things are organized. All men state that they have never seen so many beautiful women.

The argument is backed by the showcasing of women in the age of 20-40 years old in short dresses constantly smiling and dancing. One of the clients admits, “I will never date American woman after this tour” (Ukraine Singles Website, 2015). No wonder, as these romance tours remind the old days of public houses in their light version. And what about regrets? “The only regret I have is I should have come to such a tour 10 years ago”, states another client (Ukraine Singles Website, 2015). The only truth to the advertisement can be traced in left and right angles throughout the video - women mysteriously smiling to each other, addressing non-verbal signs of solidarity and comprehension why they are there in the first place. Otherwise, it is a blatant attempt to showcase Ukraine as the country of smiling and dancing women waiting for their western husbands.

Documentary

A great deal of anthropological data can be retrieved from the documentary “Odessa Girls”. As one may guess from the title, the video portrays yet another romance tour to Odessa as well as some other minor cities of the region. The city is described as home of the world’s most beautiful women, while economic prospects are poor and alcoholism wide spread. Men are said to have paid around \$3,500 for the tour, which connects with the data of the ABC news report and the interviews I conducted. Coming from the above written, I would like to concentrate on issues that the documentary fails to grasp and project, while, later, moving on to its achievements.

Firstly, Odessa is again described as economically poor ex-soviet territory with many women that are so desperate that they are ready to marry the very first foreigner they meet. It is yet another failed representation of the others, and inability to approach the issue in a more sophisticated way. Secondly, another fail documentary produces is showing the website search on Russian brides, while, in the background, talking about women of Odessa. It is hard to guess whether the director of the film is not aware that Odessa is a part of Ukraine or it is a pure ignorance from the side of the creator. Yet, such misalignment reminds of reverse stereotypes that prevail in Eastern Europe about Americans who cannot distinguish Austria from Australia. Thirdly, the documentary allows the further stereotypization of the geographic region by calling the city-satellite of Odessa, Nikolaev, to be a city of brides. In the same way, Odessa locals tend to comment Nikolaev as being a city of drug addicts. So, is it a city of brides or drug addicts? The topic is originally enough complex and controversial to put on it layers of such primitive mistakes and stereotypizations.

Yet, the documentary by chance succeeds in underlining the issue of masculinity, which is an ongoing subtopic through all the film. I would like to concentrate on this matter and discuss it further. All the Ukrainian women in the documentary state that they choose to search for a man abroad as the local men are constantly drinking, fighting and beating their

wives. For anthropologists, such a phenomenon is known as vodka masculinity. It takes roots from the Soviet Union and the policies implemented on societies from above, especially considering the family institutions. The emancipation process of new socialist woman through work in the 20th century made men's role meaningless. Men were not holding responsibilities towards their families in the eyes of the state. This is precisely when the figure of lost father appears in social structures.

The pattern continued after the collapse of Soviet Union, while the rules of economic and social games have changed. The issue of lost father can be seen through one woman, Julia, in the documentary. She has divorced her husband after he had beaten her because she wanted to leave the house to go to the university. She has been left with a 5-year-old daughter, and admits how hard it is to find a husband, while already having a child. Later on, Julia states that she searches older foreign men, because they are more family-oriented, tend to want comfort and safe family environment, while "men in Ukraine are not interested in this" (Odessa Girls, 2012). Thus, the Soviet policy applied from above on men's family role can be traced in the form of consequence decades later in the words of Julia.

On top of that, the understanding of male figure (e.g. "The man") in post-soviet societies is still viewed in a very classical definition of macho gender role. The man is a person who does not cry, or show emotions; he is the one who can prove his masculinity only by producing and showing external aggression and dominance. I would not say that such gender differentiation is predominant all over Ukraine. It is quite a matter of the past in big cities. Yet, more agricultural regions of the country remain to regard gender roles in a more conservative way. This is where all the complaints of women from small cities, such as Nikolaev and Kherson, come from in this documentary.

The best part on masculinity in this film comes in the clash of the reasoning of Ukrainian women and American men. The former run from the vodka masculinity into the

arms of “gentle and kind foreigners” (Odessa Girls), while the latter fly to Ukraine in order to restore and redefine their lost masculinity. There is a great piece of footage, where one of the clients is being interviewed in the bus. A man appears to be completely drunk, singing famous American songs. When he is asked about his state, he admits that he never drinks at home, but in Ukraine, “In Rome, do as the Romans do” (Odessa Girls, 2012). Additionally, the man admits that he lies to every new girl he meets on a tour that his family has recently died in a car accident. Such revelation makes women to be more sympathetic towards him, and “...lead(s) them directly to bed” (Odessa Girls, 2012). Thus, one can see how “the man from the West” behaves in the same pattern as the ones whom Ukrainian women are escaping from, e.g. drinking and abusing Ukrainian women, while obviously enjoying the type of stereotypical masculine behavior that he would not allow himself back in the United States.

Another peculiar issue I managed to retrieve from the documentary is the stereotypical mindset of the clients and their understanding of the others. During one of the socials (e.g. meetings of men with a bunch of Ukrainian women in the club), the client tells the interpreter that she has to be careful in Dubai as they kidnap women and children and turn them into prostitution. The man bases this opinion after having visited the city. The comedy part of this episode lies in the reaction of an interpreter who most probably have never been in Dubai, yet, realizes how ignorant and stereotypical this opinion is. In the other part of the film, one man is saying, “South Africa is like America – westernized” (Odessa Girls). He admits having a girlfriend from South Africa who talked with him only through a lawyer while they were breaking up. To a certain degree, it can also be viewed as the consequence of the dominance and influence of neoliberal governmentality in that part of the world.

The hegemony of neoliberal governmentality and consumer society play another crucial role in the motives of the clients portrayed in the documentary. As soon as men arrive to Odessa, they gather in hotel with organizers of the tour in order to browse catalogues with

women and pick up dates for the upcoming days. The subjects treat the catalogues as if they are choosing a furniture in IKEA. One girl is too short, the other is too old, and so on. While viewing the profile of a random woman, a man comments, “She is a nurse, which is very good. She can have job in the US. I know a nurse who earns \$100,000 per year” (Odessa Girls, 2012). Another client compares the women in catalogues to cars. He stresses that romance tours are important as any car buyer “...needs a test drive” (Odessa Girls, 2012). The behavior of men does not stay unnoticed by the “brides”, as one of them points out “We are like goods on the market. Everybody asks me where I work, if I do housework, cooking, cleaning. Yet, no one has ever asked me what I want from life, what I dream about” (Odessa Girls, 2012).

Thus, the issue of redefining masculinity clashes with the superstructures of neoliberal governmentality. The question that arose in my mind; Do men go to these romance tours in order to feel “manly” again, or they review this trip as merely another shopping spree? One of the women in the documentary points out that men “...came here not for wife, but for sex tourism” (Odessa Girls, 2012). This thought aligns with the conclusion of the Independent article on marriage agencies. The author of the article states that there are no victims in this process, but “only two opposing cons, both trying to get as much as they can out of each other” (Independent). Such case represents the consequence of cultural and social clash of American men with Ukrainian women.

While the clients return their lost masculinity on various socials held in Odessa, they comment that Ukrainian girls are shy, old-fashioned and wait the man to come up to them first. Such a state of affairs visibly pleases the participants. At the same time, men describe American women as the ones who do not appreciate them, take many things for granted, and so on. However, does the reality correspond to men’s beliefs? When a local man living in Nikolaev is asked his opinion on Ukrainian women, he says that it is very difficult to find a

wife in the modern world. He states that Ukrainian women "...are not how they used to be. They want everything, while at the same time, give nothing in return" (Odessa Girls, 2012).

Thus, having heard both sides of the argument, one may conclude that Ukrainian and American women are not that different after all. They share common features, according to men interviewed. The women do not appreciate men enough, take things for granted, etc. This is where we come to the reason why marriage agencies are not that successful in actual matchmaking. American men go to Ukraine in order to find a submissive housewife, while Ukrainian women run from vodka masculinity issues of their men. At the same time, both American men and Ukrainian women are no longer whom they have been. Women continue to possess certain oriental external characteristics that still attract men from the West. Yet, their motivations and behaviors are already predefined by neoliberal governmentality that spread after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In turn, American men appear to have controversial motives towards Ukrainian women; definitely not the ones the latter would expect. Such conflict provokes cultural misunderstandings, while making everybody victims and non-victims at the same time.

Fiction Film

For many people, anthropology and fiction films go together as bread and gasoline. However, they have a substantial amount to offer one another. It is through fiction films one produces the cultural critique, withdraws a needed ethnographic data, and implements it in the field of visual anthropology. Cinema helps not only to study "the others", but also to self-reflect on one's own visual system.

The fiction film I would like to discuss in this chapter is called "Birthday Girl". This movie is a 2001 British-American tragicomedy directed by Jez Butterworth. The film features Nicole Kidman, Ben Chaplin, Mathieu Kassovitz, and Vincent Cassel. The main events

happen right after the matchmaking process discussed in the given thesis. The movie helps to fantasize what happens when the mail-order bride finally leaves home to the country of her husband. It is a pure fiction that contains all possible stereotypes on Russian culture, men and women, when they clash with the Western culture. Yet, it gives enough interesting anthropological data and helps to get into the head of the creators, their expectations and fears.

The plot focuses on John Buckingham (Ben Chaplin). He is a cashier in a St Albans bank, United Kingdom. His life is lonely and predictable. Like any good suburban boy, he has a collection of porn, if not under the cocktail cabinet, then under his bed. In desperation, he orders a bride over the internet using a service called From Russia with Love. The bride is played by Nikole Kidman. Later on, a man she introduces as her cousin Yuri (Mathieu Kassovitz) and his friend Alexei (Vincent Cassel) turn up to celebrate her birthday. From there, the movie turns into a thriller, while saving its comedic elements.

The comedy here is gentle, formed of linguistic misunderstandings and cultural clashes and Chaplin's constant efforts to be polite are rather charming. For instance, after failing to establish a proper conversation, John asks Nadia if she is a giraffe and receives a short yes (*Birthday Girl*, 2001). This is how the main character learns that Nadia does not speak English. He unsuccessfully tries to reach the marriage agency, which seems to have disappeared in a thin air. Later on, he understands that the other person wrote letters from Nadia. This episode aligns with my own research that in most cases, the correspondence between the bride and client is being held by third parties. Other comedic elements can be traced in heroes' attempts to learn each other. They do this through revision of each other's personal belongings. Nadia finds BDSM magazines, while John finds a gun in her suitcase, which appears to be a lighter. The comedy of unease increases when Kidman's Russian

friends arrive. Their lively, lithe, foreign masculinity petrifies Chaplin, challenging his Barratt-home Britishness.

Analyzing the characters, John is a classical British man of middle class. He is well organized, delivers high performance in the local bank from year to year. Chaplin's world is one of bank managers and morris dancers in the precinct, of Steps stickers and advertisements for Lenny Henry gigs. These signifiers of Britain, from cereal boxes to those bits of carpet around the lavatory, creep into every shot. When Chaplin takes Kidman to a police station, they sit beneath a hand-made flier crying "Lost Tortoise"; a motel room brochure Welcomes you to the Heart of England; a waitress dithers in front of Kidman, because "We only do a croissant with the continental breakfast" (*Birthday Girl*, 2001).

In the contrast, Kidman's Russian bride represents a pure exoticism, encapsulated by her peasant-chic wardrobe. She is constantly smoking. The very first night upon her arrival she starts to knit as any other stereotypical Russian woman would do. When John tries to get rid of her, she saves her accommodation situation through sex. What I loved the most is that all the stereotypes and fears about Russian women are presented in such an ironical way that it is impossible to remain unimpressed. Through stereotypization, the director manages to reach the truth. This truth taps into current fears of Britain's cozy countryside, where hundreds of asylum seekers are about to be plonked. Additionally, on Nadia's complaints that there is no work for women in Russia, John gives out the most hilarious line, stating "Oh, don't start this: It's so hard in Russia in winter that we have to eat each other. That's why we have to go to England to shag people off, so we can get warmer." (*Birthday Girl*, 2001). Two major stereotypes (weather and criminal activity) diminished in one small sentence.

I would like to stress out the behavioral patterns of Russian people expressed in this film. Nadia's friends present the classical vodka masculinity type of men. There is a lot of vodka involved from their very first appearance up until the end. The masculinity of Nadia's

friends, their constant fighting terrify John. He perceives them as some cave men. At the same time, the actors managed to portray Russians and their language as more emotional, raw and in a good way, tribal, in contrast to the conservative coldness of John. Other episodes include the kissing in the cheek, which is acceptable between brothers or close friends in Russia. There was also one minor scene that I found to be surprisingly true to the reality. Nadia and her friends went to the woods for a Russian type of “picnic”. Later on, joined by John, they went swimming in the lake. They started playing games by drowning each other, which was completely unacceptable for John. Yet, I found this type of behavior in the water very authentic, while it reminded me of my own childhood; how we were playing with friends by the sea.

What about the father figure that is so important in gender studies of Russian culture? There are couple of hints in the movie as well. First one is a binocular that Nadia takes anywhere she goes. Supposedly, it is a gift of her father who advised her to look at people through it, and learn who is good or bad. After that, father went to war and never returned. Another moment when the topic of the fatherhood comes up is when Nadia tells her friend that she is pregnant. The news confuse a future father and instead of cheering her up, he ties Nadia in the hotel room and runs away.

Overall, it is a decent film that battles the stereotypes towards Russian culture, raises important questions considering the marriage industry, and makes some remarks on Western and Eastern governmentalities. Interesting casting emphasises the point. Cassel, Kassovitz and Kidman are beautifully graceful against the conservative British environment and deliver welcoming performances. Though completely fictional and at times ridiculous plot wise, the film presents an exciting mix of cultures, language misunderstandings and masculinity-femininity struggle.

Interview Analysis of Women Involved in Marriage Business of Odessa

The analysis of the notion of marriage agency as social, economic, and cultural phenomenon could not be possible without anthropological fieldwork. In the previous chapter, I implemented cultural critique in order to understand how this phenomenon is portrayed in various documentaries, fiction films and other media. At the same time, picture would not be full without the attempt to give the voice to the women that work in marriage agencies in Ukraine. Thus, I would like to commit this chapter to the analysis of the interviews I conducted with women involved in the marriage industry.

I myself was born in the beautiful city situated on the Black Sea, Odessa. Luckily, it is a cornerstone of the topic discussed in the given thesis. Currently, Odessa appears to be the

international hub in terms of not only geopolitics, maritime trade and transportation, but also in connection to the marriage industry. According to Donna M. Hughes, Odessa takes the 3rd place in Ukraine in the quantity of women involved in online dating agencies, approximately 3200 women registered on the websites (Hughes, 2004). Historically, Odessa has always been a diverse multicultural and multiethnic city. Yet, most of its history it has been ideologically, and in some periods geographically, attached to Russian orbit. The patriarchal system of Russian people was nurtured and adopted through several generations living in Odessa. Despite the fact that Odessa was a part of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic during most of the 20th century, and later, was incorporated in the newly independent Ukraine, it inherited all the Russian orthodox schemata and Soviet legacy. In this sense, we are mainly interested in the figure of the father in Ukrainian society, and the role of women. I have already touched upon some of the aspects of the mentioned issues in previous parts of the work, yet, I would like to stress out some role models that are still predominant in modern population of Odessa.

Firstly, it is important to mention the figure of the lost father. Men were not considered to have the equal responsibility for a child during most of the period of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the state, this issue only strengthened its positions. Unleashed capitalism and liberization of the market created the chaos in the societal structures. Fathers now had a reasonable excuse not to be involved in family matters as they were fighting for properties that appeared to belong to no one after the Soviet collectivist system ceased to exist. Secondly, the role of the woman in Ukrainian society is still predominantly submissive. Even now, the woman who does not marry or have a child until she is 27-30, is considered to be an old maid. This puts a heavy burden on women both at home and at working space, where women of the age of 20-30, are often denied a job position purely on the assumption that they would get married and have children in the near future. Thirdly, women faced a situation when being a working mother, as in the Soviet Union, was not enough anymore. The

rules of the working environment changed, either as the ways of gaining wealth. Women started to execute both female and male gender functions predominantly in family structures. In the scope of the state, despite of western ideologies and approaches to social structures of the society that started to spread in Ukraine, women remain to be predominantly submissive and do not share equal position with men in the society. I already discussed this paradox in the previous chapters.

At the same time, in family and commune practices, women started to play even more significant role. The “lost father” and the changed rules of economic and social games created an interesting phenomenon of family units composed only by women. One can see many examples of current young generations of Ukrainians being raised by purely women. In such families, the combination of “mother + grandmother”, or “mother + aunt” is reproducing the classical family of “husband + wife”. How does this affect little girls raised in such families? The anthropological answer would be – it depends. Coming from my general knowledge, most of women raising girls still tend to input the respect and appreciation of men according to their orthodoxical and patriarchal practices, yet, one can observe the shift in understanding of gender roles in young generations. Young women of Ukraine are still playing by the rules of patriarchy and comprehend that one day they are expected to have children and family. Yet, they are taking economic matters of their families in their hands. This is how we get to the true understanding of the marriage business in Ukraine.

I conducted interviews with three women involved in the marriage business in Odessa. Two of them are interpreters and “brides” on occasion, while the third one is an administrator in one of the agencies. Thus, it helped to analyze the issue from various angles and establish a general understanding of this phenomenon. From now on, I will use the word “bride” in quotation as it is merely the term associated with the main goal of the marriage agencies – transform women into brides and, consequently, wives. The reality in this case, is completely

different. Most of women, though having a hypothetical idea of finding a husband in the back of their mind, do not consider marriage agencies as the tool of establishing their private life. Moreover, they view marriage agencies as the means of getting income and, in some cases, establishing their own small business venture. This thought can be traced through all of the given work and discussion, as it is considered to be predominant in the current state of affairs.

Prior to the start of the interview analysis, I would like to suggest the reader to turn to the transcripts of the interviews first, which can be found in appendices at the end of the given thesis. I tried to compose and transcript the interviews from Russian into English in such a way that all the thoughts, sayings and verbal techniques of interviewed women would remain in their pure form. I believe that this is the only way of making this anthropological research eligible, as it is well-known that authors themselves might have the predisposed and biased opinions on the topic, which is one of the reasons of cultural critique becoming so popular in anthropology. Thus, the reader would be able to form his/ her own opinion on the matter coming from the interviews, in the case if he/ she disagrees on certain matters of analysis that I will provide. My goal here is to put some questions, touch upon the topic and provide several suggestions, while leaving the judgment to the reader.

Having researched the issues of the topic, I eventually came up with the set of 13 questions (Appendix A). All of them were asked to the interviewees. The main goal was to implement a cross-analysis of the answers and find common traits, reasoning in answers, as well as establish the differences. The questions are broad and all encompassing, starting from how women heard of such job, what they think of it, how much they earn, their opinions on customers of online dating websites, and, in the very end, their own conclusions and thoughts on this topic.

Interviewed women appeared to be very eager to help in the research. Their answers were detailed, conflicting, and liberating, depending on the side of the argument one takes.

For private reasons and the fact that these women are still working in marriage industry, I have changed their names and surnames under their request. The names are purely fictional and do not relate to any existing living person in Odessa. Except of that, all the answers, details, and the private correspondence one of the women provided, are unedited and translated as close to the original as possible. Thus, I would like to introduce you with my interviewees: they are Nastya Petrova, Masha Vasileva, and Sveta Koroleva.

The first woman, Nastya, is a 27-year-old single mother who raises a small daughter. The interview with her appeared to be the most detailed, as she was very eager to share her experiences. I suppose that her openness is primarily connected with the lawsuit she is facing now. Nastya has been involved in marriage business for already 9 years. During the span of this time, she maintained an alternative private life, having a relationship that resulted in the child and escape of the father. In the interview, she appeared to be stressed and tired with marriage business. What seemed like a side job at first, resulted in various foreign men trying to approach her and get involved in her real private life, which was meticulously guarded.

The most astonishing revelation I got from her during the interview is the fake romance with one of the clients. After meeting a man through website and his several visits on Socials, Nastya managed to establish long-lasting relationships that did not involve sex. For years, she has been talking to David, seeing him on various occasions, introducing him to her friends and relatives. To be more precisely, friends who played “relatives”. Such a pragmatic and bald way of dealing with people shows that there are no moral or psychological boundaries in the heads of many young women, who pretend to be brides in marriage agencies. At the same time, the complete inability of the client to uncover the fraud scheme makes one wonder about his psychological state and deductive abilities.

The private correspondence that Nastya shared with me helps to understand the situation. Both parties are merely blaming each other for the things they did or did not do,

calling names, and positioning themselves as victims. I call it the classical clash of governmentalities. David, the byproduct of the liberal market economy, is convinced that he is able to buy his happiness with money. While Nastya is offended by his behavior, she herself treats the man as a money wallet. I personally do not see any love relationships going on there. It looks like an argument between the companies who forgot to sign the trade agreement in the process. The realization of the situation in which she put herself comes in the very end of the interview. Nastya admits that "...it is always necessary to know when to give up the easy money and press the "stop" button" (Appendix B).

The second interview I conducted was with a 25-year-old Masha Vasilieva. During the interview, she appeared to be more laid back and chill about the work she is doing. Mainly, she performs as the interpreter and on rare occasion acts in the bride role. The work in marriage agency for her is also purely business. She was precise and quick in her answers trying not to get emotionally involved in the discussion. I presume that this is the psychological technique, which she uses during her work as well. Being asked about moral and psychological aspects of the job, Masha clearly gave me the point that she is not here to be a moralist; that every woman decides herself upon the ways of earning money (Appendix C).

The last interviewee was a 24-year-old Sveta Koroleva. I felt especially lucky to get and organize the interview with her, as she does not only work as an interpreter, but recently she has been promoted to the administrator of one of the agencies. I was searching for the woman who would hold a managerial position in this business, so I could get a glimpse of the industry from the above. Sveta provided me with some qualitative data on the average client of the agency and different types of women registering on the websites. Her position at work helped to comprehend the situation in broader and larger scope. Considering her persona, I would say that she appeared to be the most constructive and emotionally non-involved. As I

got to know, she has recently married a Ukrainian man, and feels fulfilled in her private life. Thus, being an administrator in the marriage agency in her case, does not differ from any other job a woman in Ukraine could have, be it manager in the tourist agency, clerk in the municipality, owner of some business, etc.

Having touched upon some issues and general characteristics of the interviewees, I would like to proceed with my own analysis of anthropological data considering the specificity of marriage business in Ukraine. The elaborations are presented as the list of points, so the reader may get a cohesive understanding of the phenomenon.

1. Work in the marriage agency as a common job.

All three women perceive the work in marriage agencies as a somewhat peculiar, yet, a very typical type of the job. All of them have been in the business for years, and, except of some cases, do not regret much about participating in such activities. They view the job as a possibility to master fluent English, while working flexible hours. Additionally, none of them complained on the wage, which is strongly higher than the average salary in Ukraine now. The moral side of the phenomenon should not confuse the reader, as, in my opinion, these women simply managed to adapt to the hegemony of new governmentalities and act in their own benefit.

2. The payment system of marriage agencies.

This issue presents a unique social and anthropological phenomenon. All of the women admitted that marriage agencies pay for practically any activity from the side of interpreters and brides. The interpreters' income consists of chatting on the website (on average, \$3.5/hour/client), writing love letters (changing price that depends on the amount of text), live translation during dates with brides (\$20-25/hour), and so on. The social phenomenon consists in schemes that women create in order to earn money. The interviewees admitted that money are often shared equally between the bride and interpreter after the dates

with clients. Moreover, there are many restaurants, clubs and cafes in Odessa that give out “special” menus for the clients of marriage agencies. The difference with real prices can amount up to 40% that are later given to the interpreter/ bride, or the representative of the agency. The so-called Socials also have a price tag. Interpreters and brides are paid \$5 per hour spent with the clients in the clubs and other venues. There are also alternative ways of income, such as gifts and money that clients give directly to the brides. The items vary from clothes to iPhones and money that women ask for language courses, hospital fees of the relatives; money that, in reality, are not always needed for the previously mentioned occasions. I also learnt that taxi companies often cooperate with interpreters and brides as well by increasing the prices for the clients. Thus, the marriage business represents a phenomenon that incorporates various social structures and demands a heavy networking among the locals.

3. The awareness of society.

In accordance with the answers of interviewees, friends, relatives and acquaintances are aware of the women’s work in marriage agencies. The reactions vary from neutral to positive. Yet, I have not witnessed any real opposition from the society. In some cases, friends of the brides agree to play their roles at meetings with the client in order to obtain more money from the latter. Thus, the relatives view the work in the marriage agency as a quite fair income and do not actively oppose it.

4. The psychological pressure of working in the marriage agencies.

The opinions varied among the interviewees. Most of them admit that such work could be psychologically stressful and difficult at times. In many cases, it depends on the client they are dealing with. For instance, some of the clients treat women as products they are about to buy, others are psychologically unstable. Thus, it is logical to move on to the next point of the analysis.

5. Average portrait of the client of marriage agency.

All three interviewees commented that the majority of the clients are psychologically unstable. The men are described as “rotten, greedy and notorious psycho(es)”, “angry at the world”, “assert themselves at the expense of us (women)”, having “...psychological disorders and a bunch of complexes” and “perverse inclinations” (Appendices B, C). The average client of the marriage agency is in his 40’s, often divorced or a single father with children. These points align with my previous elaborations on the place of men in western governmentality and the strive to return their masculinity. Other complaints are connected with the consumerist approach of men against Ukrainian women. Men consider that they can buy a woman with their money and gifts, while being ignorant to woman’s desires, needs and dreams. It is the same point that can be traced in the documentaries and various anthropological articles I analyzed in the given thesis. At the same time, the decent clients are the ones who do not spend too much time chatting or picking too many girls on romance tours. They are more precise with their desires and tend to limit their search of a future wife to 3-4 women (Appendix D).

6. The popularity of marriage agencies in Eastern Europe.

The main reason of the spread of marriage business in this region lies in the branding of Eastern European women. They are stereotypically known in the world as feminine, kind-hearted, and externally beautiful. They are great housewives, mothers and wives. At least, according to the imagination of the Western men. All of the interviewees presented such reasoning as well. There is a certain amount of truth in this, as women of the “Oriental” world have not been experiencing the influence of western governmentalities until the collapse of the Soviet Union in opposition to women living in Western countries. The liberation and feminism certainly damaged the patriarchal structures in those countries and changed the disposition of gender roles. This is where all the clients’ complaints on their women come

from. Men believe that their women "...are cold emancipated careerists who mainly think of themselves and their own development, rather than procreation" (Appendix C). This quote gives a complete explanation of the consequences of shifts in gender roles and redefinition of masculinity in the Western world. At the same time, Ukrainian women also adapt and change through the influence of various superstructures; they are not whom they are perceived to be. Here, I would like to point out that I do not attempt to create stereotypical generalizations. The task is to merely underline the main trends and suggest the reasons.

7. Marriage agencies as the tool of finding true love.

Though my interviewees clearly stated that the work in marriage agencies for them is not connected with finding a future husband, there are definitely alternative examples. For instance, the women who are in their 40's and 50's register in marriage agencies with real purpose of finding a partner in most of the cases. They are not interested in earning money from this industry. In some cases, they already have children. Their main goal is to establish a stable private life with a foreign man. Be it escaping from vodka masculinity or dreams of "ideal prince from far faraway", these women invest their time in searching a right partner, and are ready to personify the "perfect housewife" for their men. This point can be backed up with the fact that all the interviewees witnessed marriage proposals and happy-endings through their work as interpreters and administrators. In those rare yet real cases, marriage agencies present a great tool of matching people from different worlds and cultures. These are occasions where different governmentalities and superstructures do not contradict each other.

In conclusion, the conducted interviews gave a better and clearer understanding of the marriage business in Ukraine as cultural, economic, and anthropological phenomenon. The testimonies of women present a peculiar and rich data for further research and analysis. Their answers helped in understanding some precise facts that could not be found in the existing literature. The analysis of interviews and their transcript is an attempt to give the voice to

Ukrainian women who work in marriage business, while providing the reader with access to a direct source of information. Lastly, the cooperation of these three women allowed me to better approach the topic through anthropological lenses.

Conclusion

International marriage industry appeared to be a highly exciting topic. It helped me to incorporate various sub disciplines of anthropology in order to grasp the issue discussed. I began this research in order to reveal gender bias in social processes. My preconceived notions, shaped by the media and women's advocacy community, were wrong. The research did end up revealing gender bias. However, nothing in the data was as I had expected. The

gender bias I found was located more in the camp of feminist research than in the practice of matchmaking as I had assumed I was going to find.

This thesis has revealed links between feminism and international marriage industry that emerged from fieldwork data. Feminist theorizing on this topic has assumed that women are largely the victims of this international enterprise. My findings call into question the assumptions behind this conclusion. Many works on the marriage business has assumed that women are exploited by international marriage agencies. One theme in this feminist attack on international marriage has been the notion that it represents a setback for international feminism, that the women involved are somehow undermining the progress of gender relations over the past several decades.

My findings point to a contrary interpretation. International marriage can be seen in some ways as an indicator of successes in international feminism. The interviewees appeared to be independent strong women who adopt their social behavior to influences of foreign governmentalities. They mainly view the work in marriage agency as a peculiar way of earning money. Furthermore, they successfully oppose the consumerist patterns of Western men, the strive to redefine their masculinity, and, eventually, reverse these trends in their benefit. I cannot predict if the feminist tendency would remain the same in the future of this industry, yet, I am quite certain that the marriage business in Ukraine represents a great topic for further anthropological research.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. How did you learn about the opportunity to work in a marriage agency?
2. What reasons prompted you to a positive decision to start working at the agency?
3. How long have you been working as an interpreter / bride?
4. Can you describe the payment system?

5. How do you view this work in moral, psychological manner? (Your opinion on such method of earnings)
6. Have you considered finding true love and marrying, or have you considered online agency only in the context of the working income?
7. In your opinion, why are the marriage agencies so popular in Eastern Europe?
8. Describe the average client of online marriage agency. What features of character, attitudes, moods prevail among men who use the services of marriage agency?
9. Describe the most stressful episode/ positive experience that occurred at work.
10. Are your parents, friends, acquaintances aware about your work? What is their opinion on such method of earnings?
11. Can you describe real cases of “Happy End”? (e.g. the woman finds future husband via marriage agency)
12. Are male clients aware of “the dark side of the business” e.g. fraud schemes?
13. What is the most important thing that you learned from this work? (e.g. knowledge about life, current world, men)

Appendix B

Interview with Nastya Petrova

How did you learn about the opportunity to work in a marriage agency?

I first heard about marriage agency in 2006 from a friend, who was one of the first to open its own in Odessa. Initially, I was invited as a "bride", but the scheme of “meetings and

gifts” seemed to me troubled and I refused. Two years later, another friend of mine offered me the job of an interpreter in one of these agencies, and I agreed. It turned out to be easy money, which is difficult to refuse up until today, despite the fact that the income is constantly decreasing.

What reasons prompted you to a positive decision to start working at the agency?

One of the main reasons was the possibility to earn “easy money”, while studying at the university at the same time. Moreover, I was studying at the Department of Roman-Germanic Languages as the interpreter. Such a job nicely developed the practice of communication, vocabulary, and all aspects of the English language in general. Additionally, dating agencies offer a good amount of money per hour for the work as an interpreter. Thus, it was impossible to refuse. As of now, I speak fluent English.

How long have you been working as an interpreter / bride?

I have worked as an interpreter in different marriage agencies of Odessa since 2008. I am still working in some of them. Somewhere in 2013, I was offered to try the role of the “bride”, which I eventually regretted...

Can you describe the payment system?

The payment system... If by this you mean the price list, then: an hour of webcam chat on the agency’s website costs \$3.6 per hour per client. Thus, if you hang out at the same time with five clients, the amount is multiplied by 5, respectively. The webcam is turned on all the time, so that any foreigner can see you, connecting to the conversation in the chat. With regard to personal meetings, I earn \$25 per hour as an interpreter. Many restaurants in Odessa create special menus for the marriage agencies, where prices are inflated by 40 percent. At the end of “the date”, after payment of the invoice, any restaurant returns 40% to the administrator of the agency or any other trustee.

How do you view this work in moral, psychological manner? (Your opinion on such method of earnings)

Such an income creates a terrible psychological pressure, both for an interpreter, translating the conversations of the client and the girl, and for the bride being on meetings with the client as well. The stuff they write in web chats is a solid dirt, as 80% of them are mentally broken perverts. What they write is worse than forbidden websites with children pornography. The difficult part is that the interpreter has to keep the conversation going in the same vein. It is also hard for the bride to pretend to be the "bride" at the meetings, as clients are trying unsuccessfully for hours to achieve some sort of intimacy.

Have you considered finding true love and marrying, or have you considered online agency only in the context of the working income?

In all honesty, I had the idea to find a young and promising man on such website, but, as practice showed, there were none. Even if the guy looks young, handsome and promising, on the inside, he is rotten, greedy and notorious psycho who is constantly jealous, makes scenes, and finally, threatens you, or what is even worse, blackmails you.

I witnessed how some young girls did marry the rare good guys with the help of marriage agencies, but I am not aware of the future of their families. Among the young girls, "brachka" (street slang for "marriage agency") is popular, both because of the earnings, and because of the possibility, a very rare one, to find husband or father for the child, if the girl already has one. Additionally, there is a category of single women of Balzac's age (very popular expression used in order to describe women in their 30's and 40's in reference to one of the literature characters of Honoré de Balzac), who really count on the long-awaited marriage.

In your opinion, why are the marriage agencies so popular in Eastern Europe?

Marriage agencies are popular because men like the image of the ideal woman created in their mind. They believe that Ukrainian women are like candies, the combination of a beautiful wrap and the sweetness inside. They think that our girls are gratuitous, housewifely and externally perfect. All of them. This is why they think that if things do not work out with one girl, there are many other beautiful ones.

Describe the average client of online marriage agency. What features of character, attitudes, moods prevail among men who use the services of marriage agency?

Very often, the clients call themselves the victims of the terrible bride scammers, though they in fact can make a victim out of anyone. They do not care about the girl, how she looks and her moral principles. They believe that with their money and gifts, they can "buy" our girls. In the end, if they do not get the desired, they require all of their "heartfelt" gifts and generosity back, threatening with the courts and manipulating with different inadequate actions, and, eventually, threatening to family and friends. Every one of them hates his life and blames women in all of their failures and misfortunes. They are angry at the world and want to assert themselves at the expense of us, women.

Describe the most stressful episode/ positive experience that occurred at work.

The most stressful episode is connected with the lawsuit from one client I am about to face right now. We started chatting two years ago, and he came to visit me in Odessa couple of times. For me it was just business, but his intentions became pretty serious in the course of our meetings. He was aware that I had a daughter, and got to know my family. Well, so called "family". I was inviting different friends of mine on dates with him, and presented them as sister, mother, aunt, etc. He had no idea we were faking all of this. As long as he supported me and my daughter, I was fine with that state of affairs. To cut the long story short, he began to suspect that he is being played. Recently, I received these emails from him (the subject

kindly agreed to share her private correspondence, which I quote with names changed, but without any other editing):

Email #1

“Hello Nastya,

I write you against what I am being told. But I can't blind side you. After much consideration and thought. After much talking to people. I can see that our time together past the first meeting was for the purpose only of gifts and money from every angle. There was no progressive movement on your part and therefore my lawyer I talked to in Ukraine and I will fill for the return of all money and gifts value. I hope you are well and I will continue to think this over and find a accurate total.”

Email #2

“Nastya, I am sorry. This decision has been in my mind for about a month. To be honest I don't want to make it. But after all the talks with everyone and thinking it over for the month, I can see now that there was no love for me on your side. No projection of any feelings. Every decision was made without me and for me. I only want answer in reality. But I am not afraid now to stand up for me. How far this goes is up to you. The lawyer I talked to was very sure it be easy on me. I know now it is at least 32,000. There are a few more things I will look at. I much rather take a different road but for me it is about the truth.

Closure. I want to meet in person how I want to and where I want to and talk to you alone and get what I never had from you and talk it over in person. The truths nothing or no one to interfere.

I like to add that if you choose to come and talk to me. Which I will need to know soon, but please think on it. I promise all will be done after it how you need it, and if you never want to hear from me again, I will do as you please.”

Online Chat

David: Meet me and give me what I need or I take it through court.

Nastya: at first i said that i am not scared of any court. at second i asked you what you need and i didnt get reply. if you need something that explain clearly what you want

David: I said I want to talk at first and get the real truth of things that match what I know to be true. Face to face. I want the emotions that as your man I should have got to begin with. I need my closure.

Nastya: i dont understand which emotions your are talking about

David: Ok. What whould you show a man you dated and love. That is what I want to see.

Nastya: are you my man that i must show something? you are asking me of being prostitute?

David: You never showed me that when we dated.

Nastya: i show only what i really feel.

David: You just admitted you show your man more then you did with me. Must be I was never really your man.

Nastya: it is my choice, what to show and how to show my feelings

David: More proff I was right. To a point you are right. After as long as we "dated" if we were not doing things then we were never dating. It is kind of that easy. At a point it goes from dating to using. Guess where we were.

Nastya: yes ,it is proof of the fact, that you soiled everything and you know when you did it and how. it was given you million of chances to change, but you maden everything only worse. so finally it had sense to stop wasting each other time and get chance to start new lives. there were no sense to continue relashionships which took only to scandals, fights,etc and nowhere.

Nastya: yes. it was using of my time and my daughter to make you happy. and you got it. so stop using me finally Michael and live your life. you stolen my life and my daughter's life to enjoy yourself. you used us very well.

David: Wow. You think you are the victim dont you. Like I was not hurt by you. Please. I did everything and got nothing. Stop acting as if you did everything right and I was a bad person. Even Dima (the interpreter) doesn't see it that Way.

Nastya: yes, because i am victim here. only me. and what you did "everything"? you talking about money only. which you was begging to give, because you are American and this is your way to act. this is what you say. i said before that i will not have chance to give it you back, if you will ask one day. you agreed. Even Dima heard this talk. so when you say, that you did EVERYTHING, you mean MONEY only. which proofs that you wanted to buy me and get what you need by your money. So dont tell me shit about love and hight feelings. stop this empty talk finally. i am repeating last time. if i will get chance to meet you, i will let you know. so dont write me anything anymre. bye

David: That ia your opinion that I was buying you. I didnt mean money. I meant everything as in my time away from here, my love, and my support and time even here. Dont worry about it. You will never come. So I will just file paperwork in the usa and you can go there for court. Dont want to talk face to face and come to a conclusion. Then we will make it about what you want.”

I still have no idea how to react on such threats. I am deciding if I agree to meet him or not. At the end of the day, he cannot prove anything, because there were no papers signed between me and him considering the financial transactions and set conditions of how money should be spent.

Are your parents, friends, acquaintances aware about your work? What is their opinion on such method of earnings?

My friends and acquaintances are aware that I work in the marriage agency. They see and know how much stress it brings, and therefore, the job does not cause their delight or approval.

Can you describe real cases of “Happy End”? (e.g. the woman finds future husband via marriage agency)

There are real cases of “Happy End”. Once, I was an interpreter at the meeting, which ended with a proposal of marriage, the ring on the finger, and after some time, with the stamp in the passport. Later, the girl stopped to use the services of the agency and removed her profile from the database. Such cases are rare, but they happen.

Are male clients aware of “the dark side of the business” e.g. fraud schemes?

I am pretty sure you can come to your own conclusions after talking to me.

What is the most important thing that you learned from this work? (e.g. knowledge about life, current world, men)

I can say that when it comes to earnings, it is always necessary to know when to give up the easy money and press the "stop" button, as it is more than likely that, later, life will ask you to the full monty. Regarding the institution of marriage, it is better to look for a soul mate in the real world, not virtual, because you can never predict Who is texting you from the other side of the wire.

Appendix C

Interview with Masha Vasilieva

How did you learn about the opportunity to work in a marriage agency?

I learned about the job back in 2008 from a friend. She presented me the job as the opportunity to earn some extra money and practice my English.

What reasons prompted you to a positive decision to start working at the agency?

My Top-3 reasons: pleasant salary, flexible hours and practice of the English language.

How long have you been working as an interpreter / bride?

I have been working as an interpreter since 2008, while I have met clients as “the bride” on occasion since 2013.

Can you describe the payment system?

Chat without webcam costs \$3/ hour, with webcam - \$6/ hour. The interpreter earns \$20/ hour of the meeting. Later, the total sum is split even between the interpreter and “the bride”.

How do you view this work in moral, psychological manner? (Your opinion on such method of earnings)

In the role of the interpreter, I believe that this is a normal way of earning money, as any other paid job. In the role of the bride, some girls are sincerely looking for true love, which they cannot find in their own country for one reason or another; others are looking for easy money, "trading" themselves on social networks. If one asks about moral principles, I believe it is not my business to evaluate the other girls' decisions and actions. Some girls simply see no other possibilities of earning money, thus, they do things they do.

Have you considered finding true love and marrying, or have you considered online agency only in the context of the working income?

Mainly, elderly men register in the marriage agencies, so I have never considered them as possible partners for life. So yeah, I have always viewed the agency as just a peculiar way of earning money.

In your opinion, why are the marriage agencies so popular in Eastern Europe?

I will answer with the words of men I have had a chance to meet while working in the agency. They say that women in their countries are cold emancipated careerists who mainly think of themselves and their own development, rather than procreation, etc. In contrast, these men perceive our girls as warm, heartfelt, kind and loving future housewives. Thus, marriage agencies are so popular precisely in Ukraine and neighboring countries.

Describe the average client of online marriage agency. What features of character, attitudes, moods prevail among men who use the services of marriage agency?

I would describe the average client as a man in his 40's, in most cases, divorced or single, with psychological disorders and a bunch of complexes, who still hopes to find his destiny. Other common type could be a man with perverse inclinations, who is looking for easy prey.

Describe the most stressful episode/ positive experience that occurred at work.

In my experience, the most stressful episode is connected with my job as the interpreter. One day after having dinner, the bride, the client and I had a walk towards the hotel he was staying. When we reached the hotel, the client asked the bride to stay with him and told me that he no longer requires the services of an interpreter. The other girl was scared to death, as there was no agreement on her going to the hotel room with the client and performing any kind of activities. He was very insistent. Thus, we agreed to meet with the bride in half an hour. Yet, after the time had passed, she did not pick up the phone. I was lost, imagining the craziest scenarios in my head. Eventually, she went out of the hotel, said that everything is fine. After that episode, I never worked with her again. Additionally, there were

couple of episodes when men did not want to pay for the services of an interpreter. Yet, every time we were able to persuade them to pay. The positive experience of work as an interpreter lies in becoming friends with the foreigner. As soon as you do that, he connects you with his friends from his country. Therefore, the interpreter also can have a chance of finding a nice guy. While working as the bride, the main bonuses are obviously the gifts that clients present to them. Once, one client came to Odessa to meet me. During the couple of days, we went shopping several times; he bought me the new fresh iPhone, some jewelry, and tons of other cool stuff. At a normal job, I would save for a year and still would not be able to buy all those things.

Are your parents, friends, acquaintances aware about your work? What is their opinion on such method of earnings?

Yes, all of my friends and relatives are aware of my job. Most of them do not mind at all, as, at difficult times, any earning is good. Preferably, by fair means.

Can you describe real cases of “Happy End”? (e.g. the woman finds future husband via marriage agency)

Yes, I heard a story of the woman who registered in the marriage agency to find a soul mate, and eventually found. Now, they live in the United States and they are happy.

Are male clients aware of “the dark side of the business” e.g. fraud schemes?

It is difficult to answer this question. Some of them are completely aware that they are being played, and obey the rules of the game. Some of them come to Odessa for business, and they just want a cute girl to be around, while they are having dinners in the restaurants and walking around the city. Others are pure psychomaniacs who see the marriage agencies as means of the embodiment of their dirty desires. Lastly, there are those who want to find true love and feel offended and insulted when they realize that everything was a fraud. As for the

last group of men, I can say it is their fault. They make fool of themselves by being so naïve and ignorant.

What is the most important thing that you learned from this work? (e.g. knowledge about life, current world, men)

I learned from this job that our mentality is very different to European/ American mentality. The rules of morality differ too, as what is a norm for them, it is not always a norm of behavior for the Ukrainian person. Additionally, most of men who are using these dating agencies have some kind of psychological disorders. It is still a mystery for me why they do not like their women so much, and what makes them look for brides abroad. How hopeless should be the situation? Also, for me it is not clear what guides the men who seek young girls who are the age of their daughters?!

Appendix D

Interview with Sveta Koroleva

How did you learn about the opportunity to work in a marriage agency?

I learned about the marriage agency from the employee at work, who was herself the bride in one of the agencies.

What reasons prompted you to a positive decision to start working at the agency?

Mainly, the wages and the ability to work at home.

How long have you been working as an interpreter / bride?

My experience as the interpreter is more than 2 years. Additionally, I became the administrator in the agency a year ago.

Can you describe the payment system?

Chat with the client - 6 cents per minute, meetings with foreigners - \$20 per one hour.

How do you view this work in moral, psychological manner? (Your opinion on such method of earnings)

Initially, I wanted to quit many times. Yet, as it turned out, many men register on the website to get a psychological advice and help from the other side of the screen. Among them, there are married men having problems with their wives; there are those who would never visit Ukraine for sure. Additionally, it is the fact that generally speaking, girls are not averse to marry a foreigner. The only abnormal thing for me in this work is when somebody hires a guy to chat from the profile of another girl and pretend to be her.

Have you considered finding true love and marrying, or have you considered online agency only in the context of the working income?

I can safely say that the interpreters have even more chances to get married, because they have more time to learn the client as the person, while their chatting with him through the profile of “the bride”. Yet, there are obviously different situations.

In your opinion, why are the marriage agencies so popular in Eastern Europe?

I believe that marriage agencies are popular in our country because Ukrainian women are more beautiful than their local ones. Their women do not want and do not try to look better. Many clients say that the career is a lot more important for the women back there than their men. Especially, do not forget the average age of the clients. Most of them are in their 40’s. That says a lot.

Describe the average client of online marriage agency. What features of character, attitudes, moods prevail among men who use the services of marriage agency?

The vast majority of clients are pure perverts. Yet, if it is a serious and honest man, he is usually very modest and not very rich. Most likely, he is right after the divorce, and tries to remain close to his children. Such a man communicates with a maximum of 3-4 girls and tries to come quickly to meet them. They are not interested in long conversations online, since it is big money for them.

Describe the most stressful episode/ positive experience that occurred at work.

The girl, for whom I was sitting and chatting, was registered on another website, in addition to the one on which I was writing for her. She had a meeting with a man from another website, which I had no clue about. A few days later, that man found her on the website I was working on, and wrote to her (=me). He wanted to “test the bride”. Of course, I was talking to him like it was for the first time. Later, when he realized the fraud scheme, he demanded to return all his money. And the other day, one man threatened to commit suicide. He had been talking with one girl for a while, but she did not like him as he had expected. I, as the interpreter, had to listen to all those scenes and everything was more than serious.

Regarding the most positive experience, I married one girl to a great guy by chatting with him from her profile. Eventually, everybody was happy. I was pleased when later she called me and thanked me for her happiness.

Are your parents, friends, acquaintances aware about your work? What is their opinion on such method of earnings?

Everybody knows everything and does not mind, especially after a few stories about the lack of seriousness of intentions of most men on the website.

Can you describe real cases of “Happy End”? (e.g. the woman finds future husband via marriage agency)

I already described the “Happy End” where I talked about my best experience at work.

Are male clients aware of “the dark side of the business” e.g. fraud schemes?

I would say that it highly depends on the precise man. Despite most of them being perverts, their intentions, desires, behaviors on the websites and in real life do differ.

What is the most important thing that you learned from this work? (e.g. knowledge about life, current world, men)

Of course, I have learnt much more things about men and now I understand them better. Plus, English is always in a good shape.

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