

Frontiers & Foreign Brides: Experiences of Marriage and Migration in Northern BC

Catherine Nolin,
Anisa Zehtab-Martin,
Greg Halseth, & Neil Hanlon

Metropolis Conference
March 2009
Calgary, Alberta



Outline

- Marriage 'industry'
- Purpose for the study – 2nd phase
- Field work 2008
- Preliminary results
- Discussion

Marriage 'industry'

- Online agencies

(Constable 2003; Langevin & Belleau 2000; Schaeffer-Gabrielle 2005)



- Global south vs. Global north

(Hughes 2004; Pehar 2003)

- Backlash to western feminist movement

(Hughes 2004; Langevin & Belleau 2000; Oxman-Martinez 2001)

- Contentious issue

(Philippine Women's Centre 2000; Constable 2003)



Meet
5000 Foreign Women
Now!

GREAT DATING
UNLIMITED COMMUNICATION

- ✓ **No.1** quality dating website
- ✓ Quick and easy to use
- ✓ Safe, secure and confidential
- ✓ It's free to join
- ✓ And It really **works!**



Frontier of Mail-order brides

- Little to no data exist on mail-order brides

(Philippine Women Center of BC 2000; Ami 2002; Constable 2003; Rossiter 2004; 2005; Maclean's 2002)

- Challenges of settlement in northern remote communities



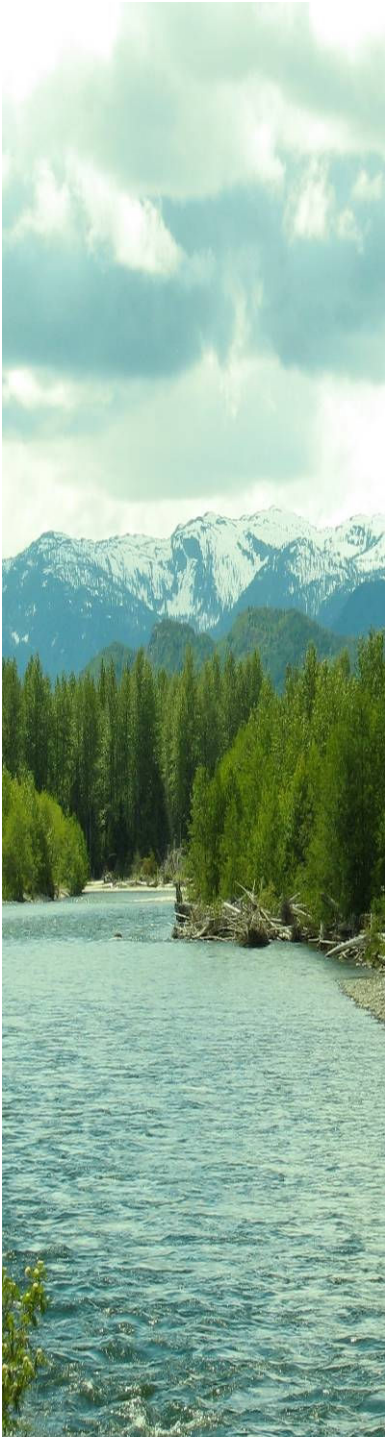
(Ami 2002)

Purpose for the study

- Second stage - *Warmth of Welcome Project*
- 'Non-traditional group of immigrants'
 - Foreign brides
 - Mail-order brides
- New frontier of marriage and migration

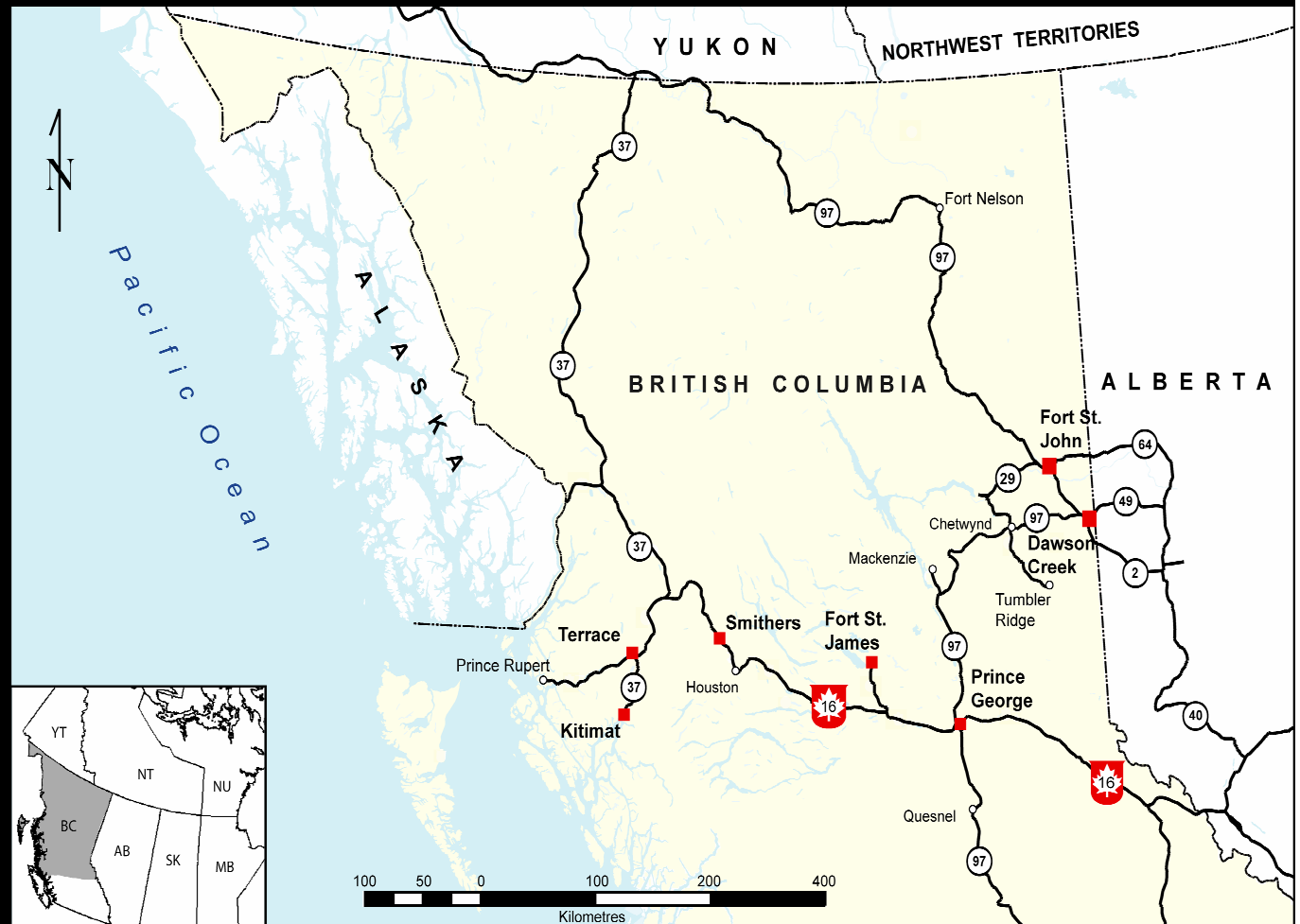


(Ami 2002)



Study area

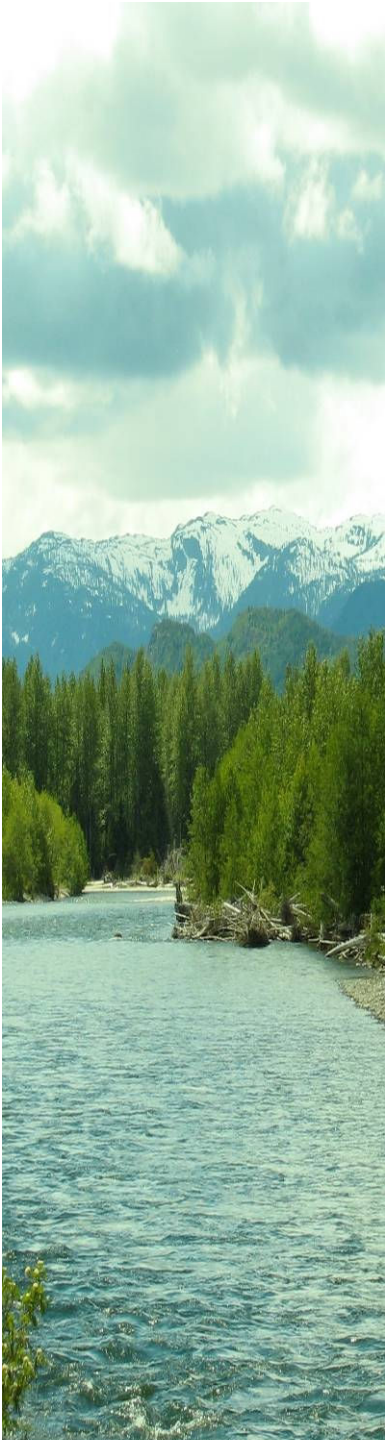
- 500 000 km²
- Communities:
 - Prince George
 - Fort St. John
 - Dawson Creek
 - Smithers
 - Terrace
 - Kitimat
 - Fort St. James



(Map by: Alex Martin 2009)

Field work summer 2008

- Collaboration with Immigrant and Multicultural Service Society (IMSS) in Prince George
- Terminology – mail-order vs. foreign bride
- Diverse group of women interviewed



Field work summer 2008

June 2008

- 1 roundtable
- 20 interviews
- Met with service providers



July 2008

- 8 interviews

September 2008

- 10 interviews
- 1 roundtable



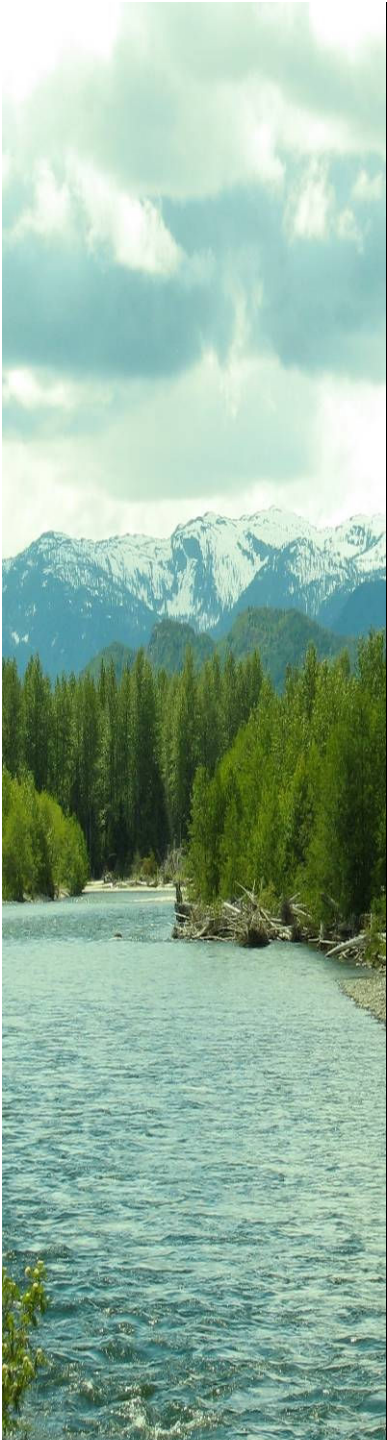
Permission from participants

Field work summer 2008

- Mail-order bride / correspondence / internet bride / marriage agency = 5 interviews

- Other (includes: illegal immigrant, arranged marriage, did not identify) = 18 interviews

- Foreign bride (includes: sponsorship, fiancé visa, visitor visa, met on-line, live-in caregiver program, correspondence agency) = 15 interviews





Preliminary themes

- Relationships with husbands
 - Love at first sight, opportunity
 - Violence, abuse, power, vulnerable
- Northern life
 - Opportunity, positive, friendly face
 - Remote, isolated, climate, challenges
- Immigration status & services
 - Lack of service provision, reception

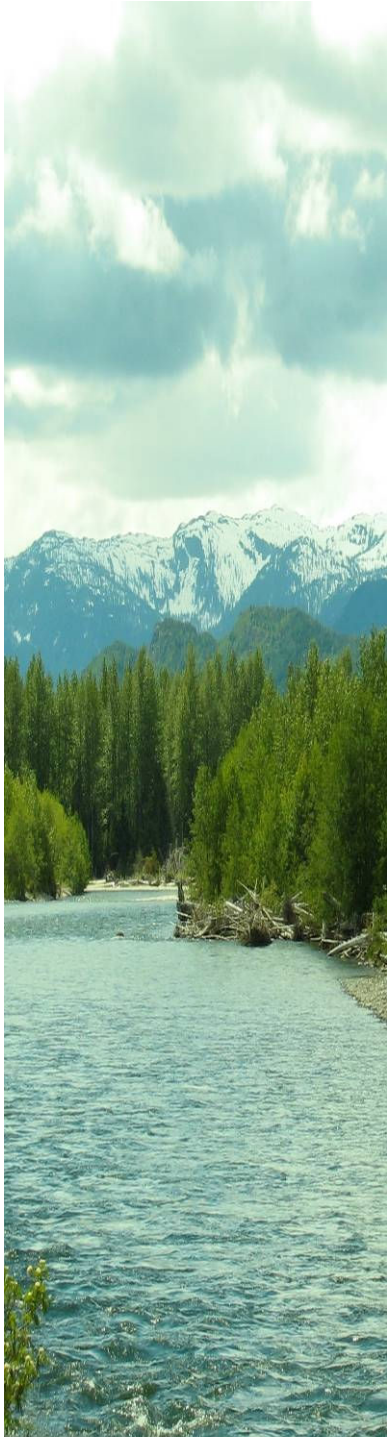
Relationships

- Love at first sight
- Pride in their role as a wife



“I am so happy being here, I couldn't ask for more...I have 2 children I am so happy [...] the term mail-order bride doesn't offend me. What is wrong with being mail-order bride, it is how I met my husband.” (Gene)

“[...] Filipinas are great because they look after the husband properly, and it is true, you know – that is our trait, to look after our husband.”
(Gene)



Relationships

- Better quality of life
- Knowledge of risks

“I want to be very honest, my ex-husband was a good man, he just had a drinking problem [...] he helped my son and I to come here and I [will] always grateful for that.” (Feliza)

“The situation is common sense – you know what you are getting into [...] there are always consequences with the choices you make [...] no one forced me to come here, I chose. Financial motivation to leave the Philippines is generally the primary reason.” (Feliza)



Relationships

- Violence
- Vulnerability



“A woman comes over [...] gets pregnant and then there is violence within the relationship. She can't speak the language [...] and does not know how to leave the home, [access] transportation, employment and things like that. She doesn't have the support system.” (Priya)

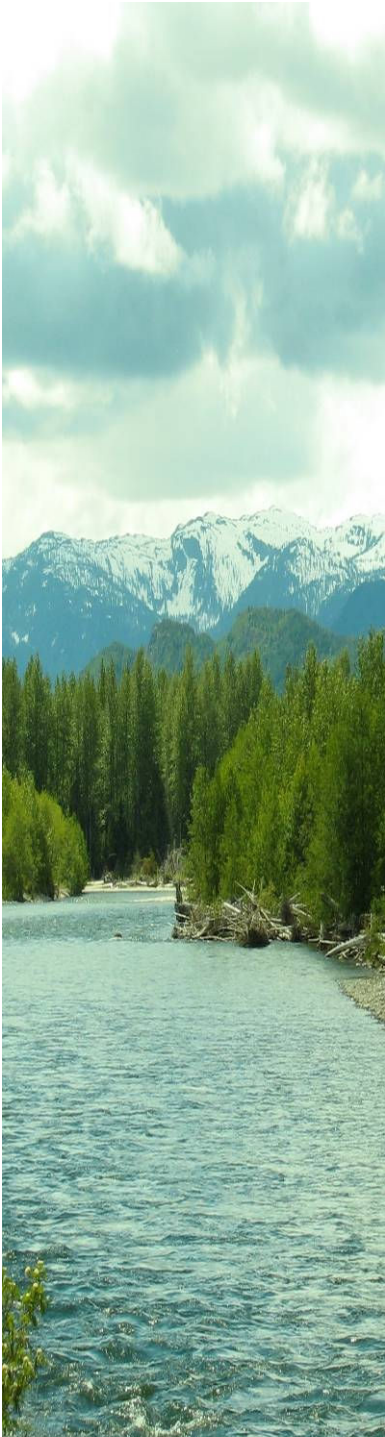
“[...] He told me ‘you have nothing, I have everything you'll do whatever I tell you, you are good for nothing.’” (Svetlana)

Relationships

- Power
- Abuse

“These [guys] are looking for someone that they can abuse, control, and who don't speak English. I don't know what they want? Just a sex slave, that's what they're looking for. They feel better about themselves when they get a young woman and totally have control over her.” (Svetlana)

“He would treat me like a prostitute not like a wife or bride...he would say ‘why is it so hard for you to spread your legs?’, and I said ‘because I actually want love [...] One time my son got a hole in his shoe and Chris told me “show me love in bed and then we will talk about new shoes for your little boy!” (Svetlana)





Northern life

- Opportunity
- Positive experiences
- Sense of community



“Everyone was so helpful here [...] it is a small community, it is very nice. It is easy to get around, when I didn’t have a car I could bike [...].” (Svetlana)

“The community in Fort St. John is pretty warm, and the Filipino community is also very strong and warm. [...] Fort St. John is small welcoming community.” (Filipino Group)



Northern life

- Isolation
- Challenges
- Remoteness



“My barriers are language; you must speak English very well to get around in the community [...] I do not know of any services because of my language.” (Shana)

“[...] It is scary to travel around on the roads in the north, especially in the winter time, but in order to access services in Prince George we must travel.” (Filipino Group)

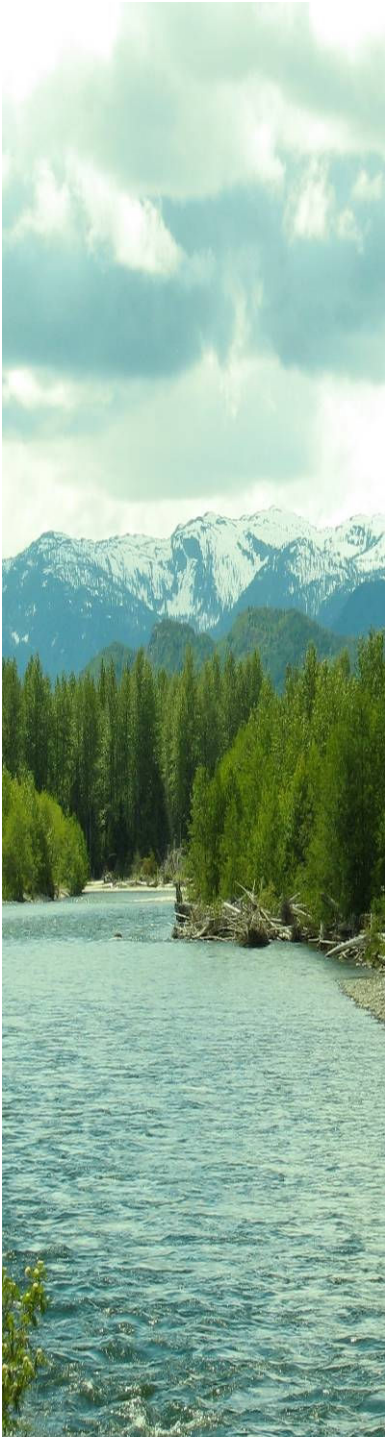
Immigration status

- Visitor Visa
- Sponsorship



“At this point I didn’t have permanent residency, he brought us on a visitor visa [...] Chris told me he would apply for us to get permanent residency when we were in Canada because it's faster and easier when [we are] here [...].” (Svetlana)

“Because we came on a visitor visa, my son couldn't go to school. Chris did that on purpose. I didn't know what we could or couldn't do [...].” (Svetlana)



Services

- Support services for women and children
- Awareness of services

“It would be a good idea if services can come and check how those women and there children are doing, when [our husbands] brought us over here.” (Svetlana)

“I would never have found [IMSS] by myself because I couldn't leave the house [...].” (Svetlana)

“Women in bad situations probably do not know their rights or about available services, it is especially hard if there are children involved.” (Tamara)





Discussion

- Rural and remote setting of northern BC
- More gender central research within hidden avenues of immigration
 - Mail-order brides
 - Foreign brides
 - Live-in caregivers
 - Temporary works
- Need for research and public policy to focus on rural and remote communities
- Need international dialogue
- Listen to the voices of those directly involved



Dr. Catherine Nolin
nolin@unbc.ca

Anisa Zehtab-Martin
zehtab@unbc.ca



www.unbc.ca/immigration