

# The existence and common occurrence of xenophilia in migration

[Sociology](#), [Immigration](#)



Migration, Marriage and Sexuality – An exploration into the reasoning behind, and the contextualisation of Xenophilia.

Discourse surrounding migration tends to focus on the negatives of migration, a trend which is particularly prevalent in international media, foreign policies being enacted and discussed, as well as the wealth of academic space given over to the negative experience of migration for sending and receiving states. One only needs to turn to CNN, BBC News, ENC Africa to find these popular discussions and perceptions of migration, where the movement of people is inherently problematized. In terms of these negative experiences focussed on, there is a particular focus on that which is unjust for the sending and receiving states, as well as migrants and non-migrants impacted by migration.

These perceptions rest with the idea that xenophobia makes the lives of those migrating incredibly difficult as an inescapable consequence of being in a foreign space, and in the case of illegal or undocumented migrants, the problems faced with security and livelihood. The issues faced by the receiving states tend to be generalised to migrants attraction to the receiving state being out of greed, that the migrants want what they do not have in the home space, but hope to be able to have in the receiving space, which natives of the receiving space see as being a detriment to their own ability to access the resources of their homespace. This perception, which is sustained by popular discourse and discussion surrounding migration is thought of as being a manipulation of the receiving states systems in order to access resources that the migrants appear to want most. Commonly

assumed resources, such social welfare, citizenship or asylum are reported as being what migrants want to “ get out” of the receiving states. It is not often discussed what positive contributions migrants bring to states, the focus tends to train on the negative, leading to a belief that there is little to no possibility of positivity in migration.

A result of this popular impression of migration, a particular kind of ‘ othering’ has taken place. It should be noted that this ‘ othering’ takes place in specific circles of thought regarding particular kinds of migrants, particularly migrants who move from less developed states to more developed states. All too often in this rhetoric, the stories of migration blankets the experience and reasons behind crossing state borders. This intellectual ‘ othering’ of a particular kind of migrant and the negative framework cast by the studies and discussions of migration have resulted in what appears to be a general lack of interest in the notion of Xenophilia. This could be for several reasons, the fact that xenophilia being a love for the other is not something that is news worthy, as people showing kindness to each other simply does not warrant a newscast, and therefore does not form a part of the consciousness of those who are not in direct contact with xenophilia, but rather are fed perceptions through the media.

Xenophilia is not cast as a humanitarian crisis in the manner that migration or xenophobia is. One need only look to the current BBC focus on the “ Migrant Crisis” with the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea from Libya to Italy being declared an international humanitarian crisis in need of aid, or the focus of international media broadcasters on xenophobia influenced Pegida

marches in Dresden Germany or xenophobic attacks in the major South African cities to see the attitude taken regarding the negatives of migration. This extends to the perceived non-need to understand xenophilia, as it is not a humanitarian crisis, but rather humans acting with care and kindness, there is no real requirement for its explanation or rationalisation, as this behaviour does not tend to warrant questions regarding the reasoning behind it. This does apply to the wealth of data and discussion focussing on Mail Order Brides, however, as discussed further on, the phenomenon of migration through marriage can be motivated by factors other than a love or desire for that which is different.

Discussion, investigation and discourse surrounding xenophilia may be hampered by the fact that it is significantly harder to measure perceptions rather than count crimes, as quantitative evidence is given prestige over qualitative, impacting research questions as well as funding for research in the academic sphere.

These conceptualisations of xenophilia in migration studies show that there little space for the ' need' for studies into xenophilia, and certainly in compiling research into migration specialists explanations of xenophilia there is less focus on xenophilia than xenophobia. Xenophilia is often contextualised and explained in relation of xenophobia, as its lesser known counterpart. For this reason, it was consistently a matter of seeing xenophilia in relation to xenophobia, as in the two case examples of Sichone (2008) and Kawaguchi and Soohyung (2012) that lead to this understanding of the academic bias towards the matter of xenophilia versus xenophobia.

These two studies, one taking place in Cape Town South Africa (Sichone), and the other Eastern Asia (Kawaguchi and Soohyung), demonstrated that xenophilia can come as a result of needing particular roles to be fulfilled that is not played out by natives of the receiving state.

Sichone speaks of the need for work to be done, and services provided for the community that are not done by those in the receiving space, due to either an inability or unwillingness to. The necessity of these tasks being performed by migrants means that societal function can remain. Again, it is worth stating that the term migrants used by Sichone refers to a particular kind of person who has crossed state borders from less developed to more developed states, and the particular tasks being that of service delivery and manual labour.

Kawaguchi and Soohyung look to the need for particular kinds of socio-cultural roles to be played out in more traditionally minded spaces that are not fulfilled by those in the home space, and the subsequent need for those who would be willing and able to be sought from elsewhere. This work by Kawaguchi and Soohyung is a slightly different perspective of the migration through marriage, as being both an act of agency on the part of the women participating and the fulfilling of a need laid out men for brides who will provide means of social reproduction in manners that differ from that of native women of the receiving state. This will be discussed more further on.

Both Sichone and Kawaguchi and Soohyung contextualise and explain xenophilia as a reaction to a need for particular kinds of people in specific

places in the receiving states, with xenophilia radiating outwards from those who have the most to gain from the presence of migrants

. As discussed in Sichone's work, the ' Goodness of women' with regards to migrants relates directly to women who protect and facilitate the integration of migrants into society, by providing shelter, food and opportunities to form social and cultural networks. In contrast to the understanding of that which is xenophobic, these actions of care and concern tend to be regarded as being acts of xenophilia. Meaning that xenophilia in this context may simply mean treating people as human first, and as document bearers second, that any normal interaction between the ' native' and the ' foreigner' is an act of xenophilia merely on the basis it is not xenophobic. Which begs the question as to why the need to conceptualise of xenophilia, in the first place.

However, does this understanding relate to the most investigated and discussed form of xenophilia found in investigations into Mail Order Brides or migration through marriage? And what does xenophilia mean for the large body of sexual fetishes that stem from an intrigue into that which is different.

Xenophilia in the context of migration occurs primarily within the receiving state, and appears to radiate from those who have the most to gain from the presence of a migrant. In the case of migrants in Cape Town, Sichone suggests that it is those who interact positively within the environment and contribute to its success are most likely to be subject to xenophilia, as their

value to the environment is acknowledged and protected by those who have to most to gain from the success of the environment. This thought is supported by Kawaguchi and Soohyung, in the case of intra-continental migration through marriage in Asia, where the role played by the migrant women is in marrying into particular kinds of roles of social reproduction and social care. Due to shifts in the position of women in more developed Asian states, education attainment and the opening up of the labour market has resulted in a need to 'import' suitable wives for more traditionally-minded men and their families for the purpose of marriage and the roles of social reproduction.

In looking at the trends found in migration through marriage, a particular question arose regarding xenophilia and how it potentially relates to the sexual fetishes associated with Asian women and Western men. Popular culture identifies this pattern of attraction, the notion of the erotic exotic in references to Thai prostitutes, Japanese school girls and Geishas, the Indian Karma Sutra as examples of such. There appears to be a particular erotic fixation on that which is exotic, with particular interest had in Asian women. This is in no way an invention of the current era, but found throughout interactions between "the West and the Rest", with the erotic exotic forming a part of Edward Said's critique of the problematized notion of Orientalism.

In Lavani's 2009 work *Consuming the Exotic Other* – the sexual fetishes relating to the status of the 'other' is unpacked in the context of the cultural heritage relating to that which is 'Oriental'. Lavani suggests the reasons behind sexual fetishes aimed toward Asia relate directly to the history of

colonial attitudes towards the East, with a creation of the other that continues in present day articulations of difference between the western hegemony and that which is different. Lavani continues to suggest that these sexual fetishes relate to the imagined lack of a particular kind of sexual relationship in the home space, but which might be permissible away from the homespace. This particular notion is one of positional good or value, where one values what one doesn't have over what one does have. Lavani continues to suggest that the nature of sexual fetishes aimed towards Asian women has to do with the interplay between the power and knowledge in relation to the racial and the sexual, in that there is an assumption that due to the difference in cultural perspectives, the Asian women would be more likely to interact with the erotic differently, and with 'foreign' knowledge. However, is this erotic fascination with that which is exotic an expression of a form of xenophilia, or a different concept altogether?

Returning focus to migration through marriage, Kawaguchi and Soohyung looked to intra-continental marriage in Asia, with less developed Asian states often acting as sending states and more developed states as the receiving states. These cross border marriages take place as a result of a need to perform acts of social reproduction of marriage, child rearing and care for the elderly. This need is created by a void created in society of women marrying into particular, more traditionally minded, lifestyles. In more developed Asian states, moves towards gender equality in education and the labour market has meant that women in the more developed Asian states are entering the labour market and remaining unmarried longer than



previously. This has resulted in fewer native women marrying into the notion of traditional lifestyle and marriage, but rather marrying men of similar education and labour market standing.

As a result of this, more traditionally minded men and their families are willing to look beyond state borders to find a bride to fulfil the traditionally cast roles of women in the realm of the home. Interestingly, the focus of the search for wives beyond state borders in these cases is not in the difference, or exotic value, but rather in the similarity of the women to the traditional understanding of the bride and wife. An example of this is the farmer specifically looking for a Vietnamese wife, as he believes she would be best suited to the rural farming community, and will inherently understand the familial obligations and work to be done in the role of wife.

With the creation of new social and cultural norms, and in particular those surrounding the position of native women, does this form of migration of marriage act as a facet of xenophilia, as men are seeking wives in order to reassert an ideal no longer available in the environment? With these shifts taking place, it appears that these men are in fact searching for the familiar in the unfamiliar, as the familiar has become unfamiliar.