



# Mail Order Brides in Australia

by Kathleen Maltzahn  
and Chat Garcia

"Pssst, Wanna get yourself a Filipina bride? Soft-eyed, innocent and guaranteed to be a virgin?"<sup>1</sup>

Ken Morgan, 64, married three times and father of six, has done just that, and as an Australian newspaper describes below, is now helping other lonely men find their Third World virgin of virtue. "Virgins do not smoke, take drugs, gamble, or drink too much!" his book, *War of the Sexes* announces: "This book explains how to marry a female or male virgin from overseas - where to find them - how to meet them - how much it costs to bring them here - and how to overcome immigration delays.

Mr. Morgan was a 57 year old lonely guy when, on holiday to the Philippines in 1986, he met his present wife Cory, then a shy, 19 year old Filipina. "It was love at first sight," recalls Mr. Morgan proudly. "Because of the way they're brought up, they [Filipinas] expect to put more into a marriage than they'll get out of it". He's not big on feminism by the sounds of things.

It's not all easy sailing, however, so Mr. Morgan has a reminder for his readers: Let's not forget though that "personalities" are involved, so you



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will perhaps need to reform some of your bad habits.

Every facet of the search for a spouse is covered by the big question, "How much will it cost you!"

The book provides the clue: "You will need about A\$3,000 or maybe a bit more - mainly for air-fares. It's not a lot of money compared to what you earn in twelve months, only the cost of a lousy second-hand car, really."

*War of the Sexes* is of course extreme, but it builds upon an established practice of selling Asian women in Australia, where ever since Mail Order Bride agencies were banned in the Philippines, Australian shops sell catalogues that publish 1,000 inch-by-inch photographs of potential Philippine brides and their vital statistics: height, weight, complexion, hobbies and home loving qualities.

The phenomenon of Australian men seeking wives from Asia, mainly the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and some Pacific countries, is an undeniable trend. Currently there is an estimated 20,000 marriages between Filipino women and Australian men. In 1988-1989, females constituted 84% and 83% of spouse and fiancée arrivals from the Philippines and Thailand, respectively and women from Fiji, Indonesia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Malaysia registered from 65% to 69%.<sup>2</sup>

Introduction agencies, pen pal systems and sex tours initially served as the major means of introducing Australian men to Asian women, particularly in the Philippines. During the 80s, networks of marriages increased and now liaisons are being arranged through friends and relatives. However, introduction agencies still continue to advertise "Asian ladies seeking relationships or

marriages". Filipino women's groups have also reported the existence of introduction agencies specializing in Filipino women. Fees for services of these agencies vary widely. However, for as little as A\$20, one can avail of an agency's mailing list of 500 Filipino women.

With Thailand, there is a heavy emphasis on sex tours where men find partners through brothels, bars and massage parlors. A new source in Indonesia has emerged in the last three years - Kupang in West Timor. The operation of an oil rig in the area has made it a destination of men on leave. Bars and brothels have sprung up in Kupang. The women who work there are "poor village girls with little education."<sup>3</sup>







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The experience of migrant fiancés or spouses in Australia is often punctuated by violence. While Ken Morgan may suggest that his lonely men may have some “bad habits” needing to be worked on, it is overwhelmingly the women who are expected to adjust, adopt, give way. Asian and Pacific women are perceived as poor and docile, and men seeking to marry them consider that they are “doing them a favor” by saving them from poverty. Consequently, failure to conform to the expectations of passivity and weakness meets a violent response. Asian and Pacific women who leave their husbands are said to be using the man to get a passport, or to scheme away his money. This hostility is an extension of the man’s sexism towards Australian women, but has the added layer of racism. Welfare workers for migrant women are overloaded with cases of women who become victims of domestic violence. Women’s refuges consistently cope with a large number of Asian women leaving their Australian partners and seeking temporary accommodations. There are documented cases of women, especially from Thailand, who have been forced into prostitution by their spouses.

A practice that has stemmed from these interracial marriages is serial sponsorship, where Australian men sponsor a succession of women as fiancées or spouses. Current Australian immigration policies do not put a limit on the number of fiancée or spouse sponsorship permissible for an Australian citizen or resident. Welfare workers have documented cases of men sponsoring women as fiancées or

spouses, sexually abusing them and then abandoning or divorcing them before going on to sponsor another woman and repeating the cycle.

Women who are abandoned before legally being married to their sponsors either have to leave voluntarily or are forced to become illegal migrants to avoid being deported. Australian immigration regulations require all fiancée visa holders to marry within three months of their stay in Australia. Overstayers become illegal migrants and can be deported. The immigration department has deported women who were victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse despite intervention by women’s groups and workers. According to social workers, some men have sponsored up to eight women, while it is not uncommon for men to have sponsored three. Exact figures are however difficult to obtain as the Department of Immigration refused to provide information.

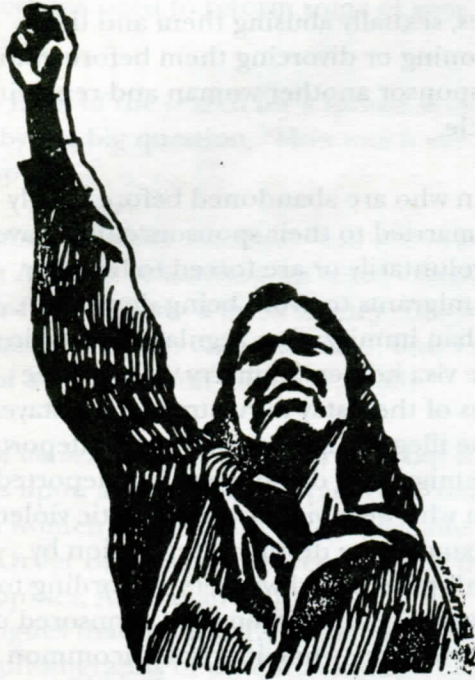
Serious concern has mounted regarding the prevalence of serial sponsorship because of the accompanying sexual abuse and other forms of violence. In a study by the Australian Immigration Department on serial sponsorship, 80 out of 110 cases involved domestic violence.<sup>4</sup>

Internationally, Asian women, and increasingly Pacific women too, are being seen more and more as brides, domestic helpers and prostitutes. For example, the public stereotype of Filipino women as “brides” has perpetuated



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an image of “modesty, timidity, docility, devotion to family and domestic life, and at the same time sexual willingness”. In Australia, this stereotype has also been extended to other Asian women.

These perceptions have been fuelled by the increasingly racist attitudes in Australia surrounding Asian migration. At a time of severe economic recession, Asian migration, is seen as a major cause of Australia’s economic difficulties, despite clear evidence that migration in fact stimulates the economy.

Asian and Pacific women’s response to both the overt and subtle violence they experience, has been, however, far from passive. At this stage, it is generally Filipino and Thai women who have been able to make organized responses, reflecting their longer history in Australia as spouses and fiancées. Public campaigns, with considerable media coverage, have focused on the issues of violence, sexual abuse, media sensationalism and stereotyping of Asian women, sex tourism and the bride trade. Most recently, media has picked up the Filipino community’s high profile campaign to achieve a Government general inquiry into all

murders of Filipinas. With the support of the women’s movement, and in particular a Feminist Lawyers group, there is optimism that the campaign will be successful.

The most recent victory, however, involved Mr. Morgan himself. Filipino women in West Australia denounced *War of the Sexes* for its “brutal attacks on the values and integrity of Filipinos” and critiqued the Philippine consulate’s planned co-sponsoring of the book launching. Within days, Filipino women and their supporters had stopped the launching, forced the consulate to dissociate from promotion of the book, and prompted Philippine ambassador Rora Tolentino to protest that the book “disregards human respect and dignity, especially of women”. Mr. Morgan was unable to find another place to hold the launching of the book. But while the *War of the Sexes* is out of circulation, the battle of Asian and Pacific women against the daily realities of racism, sexism and violence goes on.

### Endnotes:

1. “Morgan’s Guide to Brides of Virtues”, *The West Australian*, (newspaper), 2.20.1993.
2. Kaminskas and Smith, “Brides or women? - Female Filipino Migration to Australia” paper presented at the Second National Conference of the Australian Women’s Studies Association, Melbourne, 25-27 September, 1990, p. 3.
3. Iredale, R.; Innes, J. & Castles, S. “Serial Sponsorship: Immigration Policy and Human Rights” *Center for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong*, p. 26.
4. Iredale, R. et al, p. 30.

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