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Erotic Citizenship: Cyber-Marriage Migration across the Americas

In this paper, I explore the ways Latin American women who marry U.S. men via the cyber-marriage industry complicate their popular rendition as either manipulative “green card sharks” (and thus criminals of the state) or as having to prove their innocence as victims of heterosexual marriage, global patriarchy and/or the sex trafficking trade. Through interviews, immigration records, and recent films depicting female marriage migrants, I argue that Latinas mobilize what I call, “erotic citizenship,” to affectively construct themselves as exceptional and moral bodies of the U.S. nation through U.S. marriage. An emphasis on the erotic complicates binary constructions of victim/victimizer, commerce/romance, and good/bad woman. I uncover the myriad of uses and desires that accompany the ways women’s citizenship depends on the labor of their bodies. Feminist scholarship on the gendered contours of the global economy have uncovered the ways women’s labor – as sex workers, care givers, domestics, or brides – structures the way women migrate and work across the world (Chang 2000; Parreñas 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Constable 2003; Choy 2003). There has not been a discussion, however, about how women’s erotic labor functions as a tool for citizenship in both enabling and oppressive forms. Furthermore, while others have made important contributions in making visible the policing of sexualized, gendered, and racialized bodies that are deemed excessive (and thus threatening) to the (normative) state – such as in the case of lesbians, gays, sex workers and terrorists who attempt to migrate across borders, there has been no discussion about the opening of the erotic as central to migration and citizenship claims (Luibhéid 2002, 2005; Chapkis 2005). At the same time, this gendered and racialized form of mobility is continually in threat of violently structuring women’s erotic energies within neoliberal paradigms of merit, individualism and the heteronormative family. Marriage migrants turn to foreign marriage migration as a moral and safe avenue to move across borders in relation to the stigmatized bodies of others including the “hordes” of “illegal” working class migrants. I argue that women emphasize their erotic citizenship - their moral standing, family characteristics, superior reproductive qualities as well as their passion for social justice - to reconfigure their contribution and affiliation to the U.S. nation-state in ways that are both disruptive of, and that reinforce, the normative heterosexual family.