ABSTRACT

CROSS CULTURAL MARRIAGES IN AUSTRIA

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This paper is dealing with cross-cultural marriages in Austria. One of the primary objectives of this research was to gain insights into a special form of marriage migration, namely the marriages between Austrian women or men and foreign partners, a topic which parallels previous research on the subject of mixed marriages. The term "mixed" or "cross-cultural" marriage is applied to marriages contracted between two people who do not share the same nationality, language, religion, ethnicity, or other cultural characteristics. In a mixed marriage, the concept of the “other”, which has played an important role in some feminist scholarly literature, is an especially useful analytical tool. To some degree, all relationships are characterized by a distinction between “self” and “other”. Everyone defines him or herself by reference to others. You are you because you are not someone else. In feminist literature, the definition of self is tied closely to gender. In heterosexual relationships, gender becomes a sort of cultural divide in and of itself. In a mixed marriage, this gender-based notion of “otherness” is then compounded by a whole range of additional cultural differences. By definition, people in mixed marriages have at their disposal a larger range of cultural possibilities in structuring their relationships than is typically the case for the parties to a more conventional marriage, whether it be regarding the division of household labor, methods of child-rearing, family traditions, language of communication, moral expectations, or even definitions of what it means to be male and female. Indeed, all mixed marriages are influenced to at least some degree by

1 This is not to say, however, that a couple may not have at least some of these characteristics in common, only that they differ in at least one of them. Breger and Hill, Cross-Cultural Marriages, p. 7.


3 Deborah Tannen, That’s not What I Meant (New York: Ballantine Press, 1986), get page number!
different culturally determined expectations of the two partners and their relatives regarding such matters. The very fact that the partner appears at least somewhat exotic may have, by turns, an attractive or repulsive effect on the partner, for example, depending on the circumstances.\footnote{Berger and Hill, “Introducing Mixed Marriages,” 1-2.}

The paper is based on interviews.