Gendered Terrain of Migration: Variations in the Gender Composition of International Migrants

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Introduction. Recent demographic trends in international migration indicate distinct and profound changes in the gender composition of migrant populations. While men have historically dominated in cross-border movements, the latest estimates suggest that women now constitute about half of the total foreign-born stock in a large number of countries, particularly in Europe, Asia and the Americas (United Nations 2006). This feminization of international migration calls for a closer examination of the gender breakdown of migrant populations to discern whether women are increasingly as migratory as men, and how this notion of feminization varies across time and space (Donato et al. 2011). Closer attention to the changing gender landscape of international migration is important because it has implications for sending and receiving countries.

Data. We use census data from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)-International (available at the University of Minnesota Population Center) to estimate the age-standardized gender composition of foreign-born populations in 56 nations for years ranging from 1960 to 2008. Table 1 (Appendix A) lists the nations that comprise the sample for the analysis. For each nation, there is at least one census year of data, but many have more than one census year. As a result, the total sample draws from 147 censuses.

Methods. The analysis involves two main phases. First, we calculate weighted age-standardized estimates of the gender composition of immigrant populations for the 56 nations for all available census years. Following Donato et al. (2011) and Alexander and Steidl (2012), we implement direct age standardization by, first, calculating the expected number of foreign-born men by multiplying the percentage of men who are foreign-born and the number of women in the destination population for each age for each destination country. Second, we divide the actual number of foreign-born women (numerator) by the sum of expected number of foreign-born men and actual number foreign-born women (denominator) to calculate of the gender composition of foreign-born stock. This procedure effectively controls for the differential age structures for men and women due to disparate mortality rates. We also calculate unstandardized estimates of the gender composition and compare differences between the two types of estimates.

Second, We examine how the gender ratios of foreign-born populations vary historically and spatially to distinguish nations or regions[1] that have received more women than men, and how that has changed over the years. We then identify regional destinations, i.e. countries with the largest immigrant population in each of the geographic regions, and estimate the gender composition of the three largest national origin immigrant groups residing in these regional destinations. We restrict this analysis to the most recent data available since 2000. Based on these observed patterns of male-female migrations, we then map gendered circuits of migration to describe how the major regional and global destinations for female migrants compare to male-dominated circuits of migration.

Findings. Overall, the results show that the average age-standardized gender composition of immigrant populations varies across census periods, albeit modestly. The mean age-standardized percent female for all census periods is 47.7 whereas the mean

[1] For the analysis, I have divided the census samples into five geographic regions: North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, Asia and Africa.

for unstandardized estimates is 49.4 percent. The net difference of 1.7 percent in the global percent female is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) based on two-tailed, paired difference of means test. The results suggest that the unstandardized calculation of gender ratios consistently over overestimates the feminization aspect of migration. Figure 1 (Appendix A) illustrates the shifts in the gender composition of global immigrant population based on standardized (blue circles) and unstandardized (red triangle) estimates for all samples. Figure 1 also includes trend lines for standardized (blue) and unstandardized (red) estimates. The trend line representing unstandardized estimates crossed the 50 percent mark in early 2000, suggesting that women now constitute at least half of the total immigrant stock for these 56 countries. The trend for standardized estimates depicts a more modest upward trend and the line is consistently below the 50 percent mark.

The differences between standardized and unstandardized estimates indicate that although women may now constitute at least half of the total migrant stock in absolute figures, the observed upward trend may not entirely be due to women's increasing participation in the cross-border movements in recent years. It may also be due to other demographic factors such as feminizing of the aging migrant population and different rates of return migration among men and women. With respect to the latter point, some studies suggest that while male immigrants intend to return to their native countries, women often prefer to stay in the foreign land (e.g. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Grasmuck and Pessar 2001). Finally, note that the two trend lines in Figure 1 diverge over time, indicating a growing gap between standardized and unstandardized estimates. This suggests that the effect of age is stronger now than in the past and that there may be more women in aging foreign-born populations than men.

Variability across Time and Space. Table 2 (Appendix A) describes the study's sample divided into three historical periods based on census years, and presents the means and standard deviations of the age-standardized and unstandardized estimates of the gender composition for each period. North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia have experienced an increase in the share of female immigrants. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the share of female immigrants rose from 46 percent to 49.1 percent between pre-1990 and post-2000, representing a 3.1 percent increase. In Asia and North America, the increases were of smaller scale (2.8 and .8 percent, respectively). In contrast, the immigrant population in Europe has remained gender balanced across the periods, but in Africa, women's representation reduced considerably, from 47 to 44 percent between pre-1990 and post-2000. Hence, in Africa immigrants continue to be predominantly male and increasingly so compared to earlier times. Note that we have to approach the African case with caution because of its limited data coverage. Unlike the other regions, the African region consists of the smallest number of nations (N=12) and fewer have data for multiple census years.

Variability by National Origin. In this section, we shift gears to examine the gender composition of foreign-born populations in particular destinations by their national origin. Below is a sample of my analysis for North America. In our full paper, we present different sections for findings on Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, Asia and Africa. However, tables for these four regions are appended for review.

Compared to other regions, the three North American countries – Canada, Mexico and the United States – have more extensive data in terms of historical coverage. Figure 2 (Appendix A) summarizes those data and shows that the estimates of gender composition of foreign-born populations in these three countries have been over 45 percent since 1960. In the United States, women comprised half of the total immigrant population in 1970 and 1980, but since then their share has remained just under 50 percent. In Canada, the foreign-born population has also become increasingly feminized; here women's representation has risen steadily since 1930 and crossed the 50 percent mark in 2000. In Mexico, there is more variation. Male immigrants continue to dominate in terms of overall numbers, but since 1960 more women have been immigrating to Mexico. However, the upward trend in women's representation among immigrants in Mexico remains lower than trends in the United States and Canada.

While both Canada and Mexico have experienced recent increases in women's share of immigrant stock, the United States has experienced the opposite trend. That is, while the gendered stock of U.S. immigrants is currently less than 50 percent female, the most recent estimates suggest a small downward trend. Donato et al. (2011) showed that this decline is due to the increase in Mexican migration to the U.S. since 1980s. Although the flow of Mexico-United States migrants is one of the largest between any two nations in the world, it has been male-dominated largely because of it contains a large share of unauthorized migrants (Fry 2006). Therefore, after excluding Mexican-born immigrants from the analysis, Donato et al. (2011) found that women's share among the remaining foreign-born population was 51 percent in 2006, compared to 49 percent when Mexico was included.

To further explore the issue of variation in the gender composition of immigrants in North America, we identify the top three sending nations to North America and estimate their gender composition for the latest available years. Examining variations in the gender composition of immigrants by their national origin helps to identify variation in specific migration circuits between nations in North America and elsewhere. Moreover, assessing the gender make-up of these national origin groups inform us whether these migration circuits are essentially gendered.

Figure 3 (Appendix A) displays standardized estimates of the gender composition for the top three national origin groups in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The nations are ordered by the size of their foreign-born populations: the United States has the largest (in 2005, approximately 40 million), followed by Canada (5.7 million in 2001), and then Mexico (approximately 520,000 foreign-born persons in 2000). Within each country, we then show the gender compositions of the three largest national origin groups, with the largest presented first. In the United States, the biggest immigrant group is from Mexico (28 percent of the total foreign-born population), followed by China (5 percent) and the Philippines (4 percent). While Chinese and Filipino immigrants are clearly female dominated, Mexican immigrants are largely male, as expected. The Philippines is one of the biggest labor-exporting countries in Asia and send large numbers of women to undertake care-related jobs in the developed, oil-exporting, and newly industrialized nations, including the United States (Parrenas 2001; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Battistella 2004; Oishi 2005). In addition, the United States and the Philippines have

cultural and historical links as well as bilateral military agreements, which include presence of United States military bases in the Philippines until 1991 (United States Department of State 2012). Among other things, the presence of a U.S. military base has contributed to the marriage related migration of Filipinas to the United States (Donato 1992).

In Canada, the largest immigrant group was from Central/South America and the Caribbean (11 percent of foreign-born population)[2], closely followed by the United Kingdom (10.5 percent) and then China (6 percent). Since the largest immigrant group includes individuals from all of South/Central America and the Caribbean and data cannot be disaggregated, it is difficult to formulate a generalizable immigration story for this diverse group. Nevertheless, the standardized estimate of percent female show that the immigrant population from this sending region is distinctly feminized (54.2 percent). The second and third largest groups - United Kingdom (50.7 percent) and China (51.3 percent), respectively – are also feminized. These findings clearly illustrate that women are traveling in equal numbers, if not exceeding, their male counterparts, to Canada. Also, notably, female dominated Chinese immigrants have a significant presence in the United States and Canada.

In Mexico, the vast majority of immigrants, over two-third (69 percent), originate from the United States, and 49.2 percent are women. The second and third largest sending nations, Guatemala (6 percent) and Spain (4 percent), sent far fewer immigrants to Mexico. While the population of Guatemalan immigrants in Mexico is gender balanced, Spanish immigrants in Mexico were more heavily male. In general, these estimates suggest that the immigrant populations in Mexico are less feminized than the other two North American countries.

Conclusion/Theoretical Significance of the study. There is now a large body of scholarship that attests to the importance of gender lens in migration research. Recent studies have made considerable strides in "gendering" migration theories by demonstrating that motivations, experiences and consequences of migration are distinct for men and women. The next important and logical step towards developing a coherent and comprehensive understanding of male-female migration is to examine the gender distribution of migrants and how that varies across space and historical times. Past research efforts (e.g. Tyree and Donato 1986; Oishi 2005; United Nations 2006; Donato et al. 2011) have started the groundwork and looked into the gender makeup of immigrants in several countries. These works have further raised intriguing questions regarding the gendered processes, circuits and consequences that characterize contemporary migration. This paper begins to start answering some of those questions.

The results show that there is an observable shift towards feminization of immigrant populations globally, but the extent of feminization is not uniform and varies considerably across nations and regions. Some trends of de-feminization are also observed in some cases, particularly in Brazil, Ireland and South Africa. These nations draw in more male than female migrants. Even more remarkable differences in the

[2] The data on Central and South America and the Caribbean cannot be disaggregated.

gender composition of immigrants emerge when inspecting the gender distribution of immigrant populations by national origin living in regional destinations.
A second finding is that the extent of feminization is more conservative than what is generally portrayed in academic and non-academic reports. The age standardization produces more conservative estimates of gender composition and ensures that the greater enumeration of female migrants as compared to men is not due to the larger presence of women in the aging foreign-born population from which men are leaving at a higher rate than women. Methodologically, we demonstrate how the effects of differential mortality rates of men and women at older age can be controlled for using the age-standardization procedure. Age standardization is widely used in demographic studies and adds power to the estimation of population related statistics. Future migration studies can greatly benefit from this technique.

On the substantive side, findings from this paper add to the already formidable evidence that migration is essentially gendered. Importantly, the uneven representation of women in immigrant populations and gender-specific migration circuits suggest that international migration occurs in the interactive context of individual, household, societal and state level factors. As such, this paper maps migration circuits that link sending and receiving communities to uncover why some countries send more women than men and vice versa. Although the male migration circuits are somewhat consistent with what neo-classical theories predict, women's circuits have some unique features. The study offers evidence that female dominated migration streams are characterized by household service labor, sex work, and other care-related activities such as the cases of female African nurses in European countries, Filipina domestic workers in the United States, and Paraguayan sex workers in Argentina. Some circuits also highlight the role of non-tangible motivations such as the matters of family and marriage (e.g. migration of Indian brides to Nepal) in driving female migration. There is also some speculation that highly skilled women are now traveling abroad to pursue educational and career aspirations.

A state's stance on emigration of women also plays a vital role in patterning male-female migration. Countries like Bangladesh and Nepal have restrictive policies on women's migration for low-skilled and domestic work abroad. Hence, there is low representation of Bangladeshi and Nepali women in the Gulf countries compared to their male counterparts. On the receiving end, immigration policies geared towards importation of cheap, manual labor to work in the construction and mining industries select on male migration. On the whole, there is convincing indication that migration circuits can be best understood by taking an integrative approach such as the one propounded by Oishi (2005). Further research by including more cases and historical data are needed to build on these findings and refine the templates for male and female migration circuits.

Implications. The feminization of migrant populations has important implications for migrants and their families, for sending and receiving communities, and for migration regimes at national and transnational levels. First, women's movement to take up wage employment and pursue aspirational goals challenges normative gender expectations. At the household level, migration of women, who are traditionally the caretakers, shifts the balance of power and reconfigures the household division of labor. On the flip side, emigration of women, especially mothers, in the family creates care strain in the family and adversely affects the children (Parrenas 2005). In addition, the transnational

relationship stresses marital ties and challenges the traditional notion of the family – the extent of which is not fully known at this point.
The large exodus of women also affects the local marriage market by shrinking the pool of marriageable women in the sending communities. The negative effects of sex ratio imbalance have been documented extensively in India, China and South Korea where sex-selective abortions have produced significantly more men than women. In the receiving communities, the immigration of young women expands and diversifies marriage market for the native men. For immigrant women, the pool of preferred marriage partners is dramatically reduced in the foreign land since immigrants prefer endogamous marriage (Pagnini and Morgan 1990; Angrist 2002). As a result, unmarried immigrant women may intermarry or delay/forgo marriage altogether. Moreover, when immigrant women marry men at the destination communities, the likelihood of return migration is reduced, which results in permanent care - and brain- drain from the sending communities.

Women's increasing migration to undertake certain categories of jobs also affects the labor market. Although migration increases women's participation in the labor force overall, it may contribute to the segmentation of the global labor market whereby immigrant women are funneled into low-paying domestic jobs with little prospects for advancement. Studies have shown that immigrant women are often confined to enclave economy that offers lower pay, long work hours and challenging working conditions (Zhou and Nordquist 1994; Chiswick and Miller 2005; Xie and Gough 2009). In addition, the intimate services and emotional labor that women from poorer countries provide in the richer economies become commodified in the global capitalist system (Constable 2009). Hochschild (2003) goes as far as to argue that the extraction of love and care - the new gold- from the developing world to benefit the richer parts of the world is the new form of imperialism. In addition to "care drain," the sending countries also experience brain drain as educated and highly-skilled women to seek better opportunities elsewhere (Dumont, Martin and Spielvogel 2007).

The changing gender composition of immigrants also raises questions about the suitability of current emigration and immigration laws for catering to the increasingly feminized migrant populations. The current migration regimes still operate under the presupposition that migration is a male phenomenon. Countries that have recently started sending more women may not have legal structures to facilitate female migration and to ensure their well-being at the destinations. This may lead to exploitation and abuse because destination nations often lack proper support systems and regulations about recruitment of migrant workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Often, receiving countries are not prepared to address to the needs of an unprecedented number of female immigrants from a range of countries and cultures. For example, Thierfelder, Tanner and Bodiang (2005) discuss the inability of the Swiss health care system to adequately address specific gynecological and obstetric health care needs of migrant women from African who have undergone female genital mutilation. This is one example of the inadequacy and lack of preparedness among destination countries for culturally diverse, female dominated immigrant populations. This suggests that new legal framework and migration regimes should be tailored to meet the needs of the changing demographics of migrant populations.

Appendix A: Tables and Figures

Table 1. Datasets and Geographic Units Used in the Analysis by Region

Country	No. of Censuses with Nativity Data	% of Population in Sample	Years Covered
NORTH AMERICA			
Canada	4	1-2.7	1971·1981·1991·2001
Mexico	5	0.4-10.6	1960·1970·1990·1995·2000
United States	6	1-5	1960·1970·1980·1990·2000·2005
SOUTH/CENTRAL AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN			
Argentina	4	2-10	1970·1980·1991·2001
Bolivia	2	10	1976·2001
Brazil	5	5-6	1960·1970·1980·1991·2000
Chile	5	1-10	1960·1970·1982·1992·2002
Colombia	5	2-10	1964·1973·1985·1993·2005
Costa Rica	4	6-10	1963·1973·1984·2000
Cuba	1	10	2002
Ecuador	5	3-10	1962·1974·1982·1990·2001
Jamaica	3	10	1982·1991·2001
Panama	4	5-10	1960·1970·1990·2000
Peru	2	10	1993·2007
Puerto Rico	5	1-5	1970·1980·1990·2000·2005
Saint Lucia	2	10	1980·1991
Venezuela	4	10	1971·1981·1990·2001
EUROPE			
Armenia	1	10	2001
Austria	1	10	2001
Belarus	1	10	1999
France	7	5-33	1962·1968·1975·1982·1990· 1999· 2006
Greece	1	10	2001
Ireland	4	10	1971·1981·1996·2006
Italy	1	5	2001
Netherlands	3	1.2	1960·1971·2001
Portugal	3	5	1981·1991·2001
Romania	3	10	1977·1992·2002
Spain	3	5	1981·1991·2001
Switzerland	4	5	1970·1980·1990·2000
United Kingdom	2	1-3	1991·2001

Table 1. Datasets and Geographic Units Used in the Analysis by Region Continued…

Country	No. of Census with Nativity Data	% of Population in Sample	Years Covered
ASIA			
Cambodia	2	10	1998·2008
Egypt	1	10	1996
Iran	1	2	2006
Iraq	1	10	1997
Israel	3	10	1972·1983·1995
Kyrgyz Republic	1	10	1999
Malaysia	3	2	1970·1980·2000
Mali	2	10	1987·1998
Mongolia	1	10	2000
Nepal	1	11.35	2001
Pakistan	1	2-10	1973
Palestine	2	10	1997·2007
Philippines	2	10	1990·2000
Thailand	4	1-2	1970·1980·1990·2000
AFRICA			
Ghana	1	10	2000
Guinea	2	10	1983·1996
Kenya	2	5	1989·1999
Malawi	3	10	1987·1998·2008
Rwanda	2	10	1991·2002
Senegal	2	10	1988·2002
Sierra Leone	1	10	2004
Slovenia	1	10	2002
South Africa	3	2-10	1996·2001·2007
Sudan	1	15	2008
Tanzania	2	10	1988·2002
Uganda	2	10	1991·2002
TOTAL	**147**		

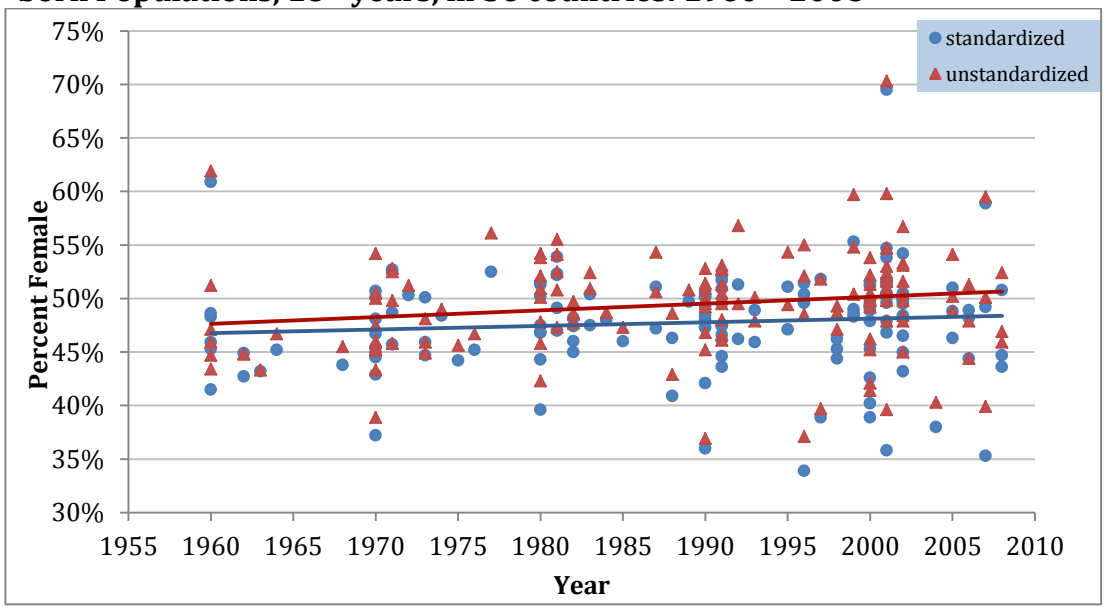
Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-International), accessed in May 2012

Table 2: Variations in Gender Ratios of Immigrant Populations across Geographic Regions and over Time

Geographic Regions	No. of Countries (Samples)	Percent of Foreign-Born Population that is Female					
		Mean (SD), Standardized Estimates			Mean (SD), Unstandardized Estimates		
		Pre 1990	1990-1999	2000-Present	Pre 1990	1990-1999	2000-Present
All countries	56 (147)	47.3 (3.8)	47.5 (4.2)	48.4 (5.5)	48.7 (4.1)	49.6 (4.5)	50.2 (5.3)
North America	3 (15)	48.3 (1.8)	48.5 (1.0)	49.1 (0.8)	50.2 (3.1)	50.5 (0.9)	50.8 (0.8)
Latin America and the Caribbean	14 (51)	46.0 (2.0)	47.5 (1.9)	49.1 (2.6)	47.2 (2.6)	49.5 (1.7)	51.1 (2.8)
Europe	13 (34)	50.5 (4.8)	50.8 (2.1)	50.4 (2.2)	51.7 (4.7)	53.2 (3.1)	52.0 (2.9)
Asia	14 (25)	46.0 (5.0)	44.1 (5.9)	48.8 (9.8)	46.2 (4.4)	46.2 (6.3)	50.0 (9.4)
Africa	12 (22)	47.1 (3.2)	45.7 (4.8)	44.2 (5.7)	49.7 (3.5)	47.6 (4.7)	46.6 (5.0)

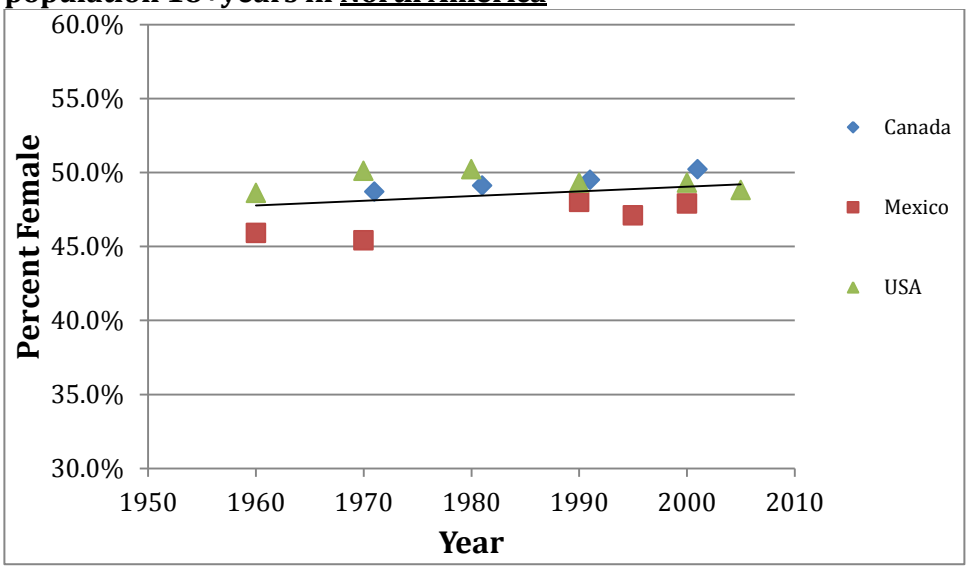
Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed in May 2012

Figure 1: Age-standardized Estimates of the Gender Composition of Foreign-born Populations, 18+ years, in 56 countries: 1960 – 2008



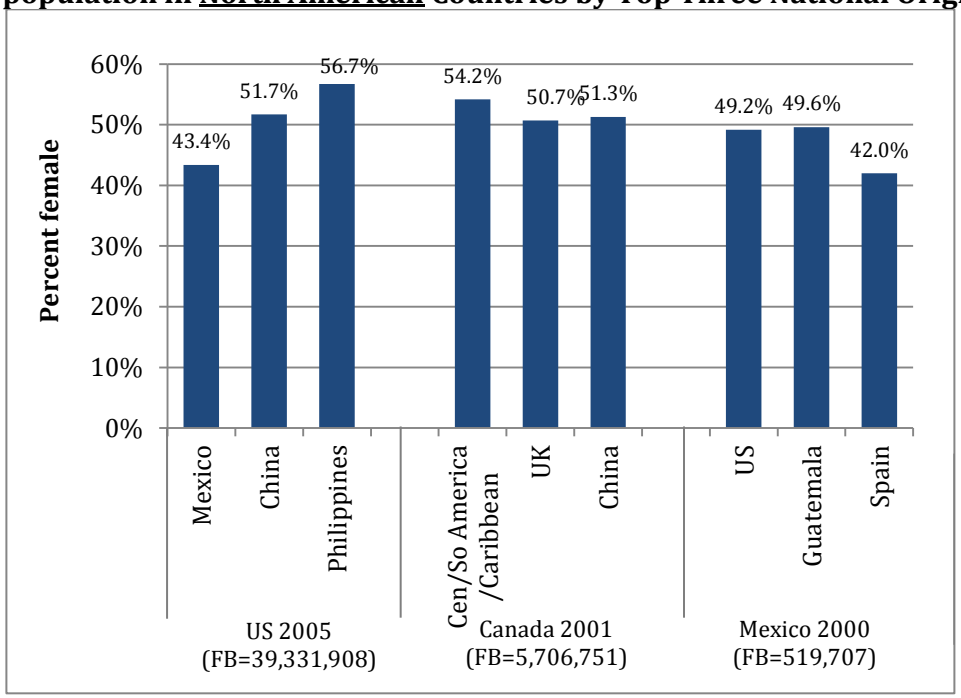
Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed in May 2012

Figure 2: Age-standardized Estimates of the Gender Composition of Foreign-born population 18+years in North America



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed May 2012

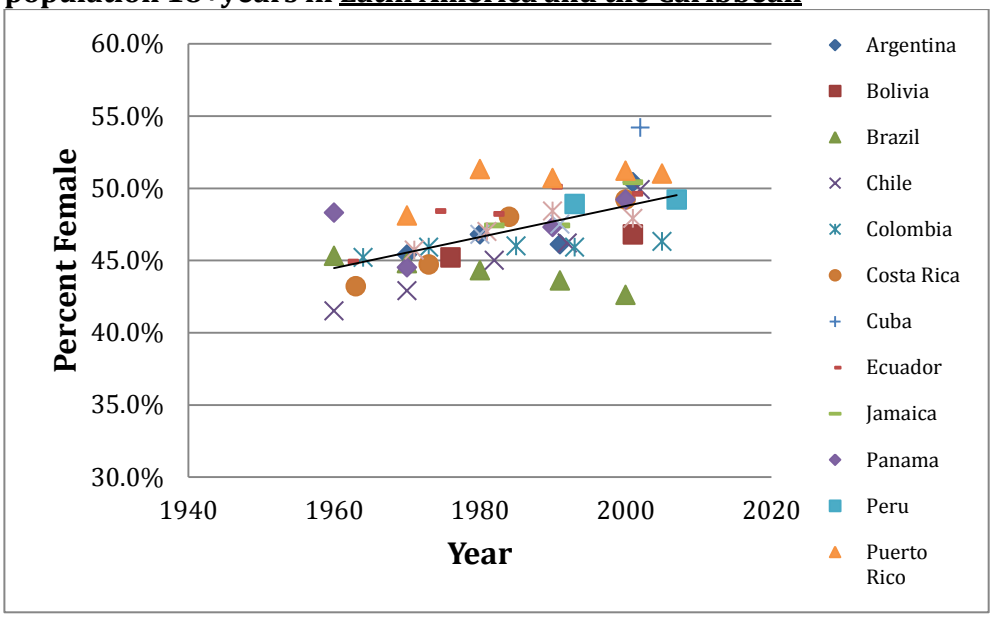
Figure 3: Age-standardized Estimates of the Gender Composition of Foreign-born population in North American Countries by Top Three National Origins, 18+ years



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed in May 2012
Note: FB= total number of foreign-born living in country in that year

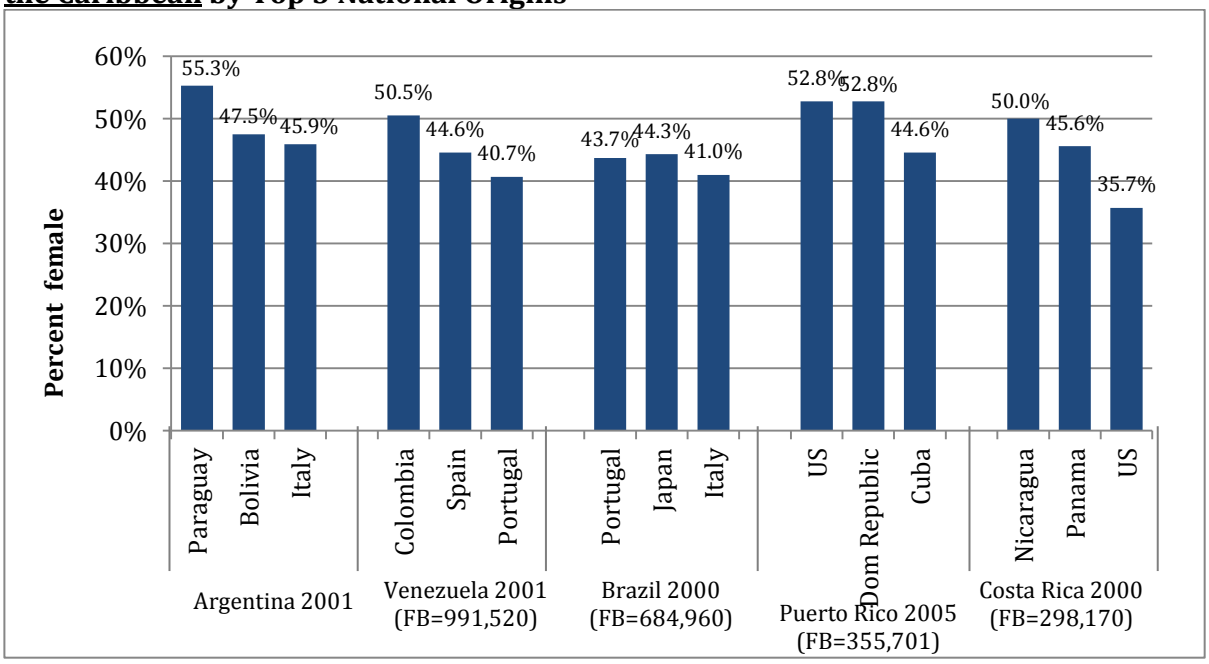
Additional Figures:

Figure 4: Age-standardized Estimates of the Gender Composition of Foreign-born population 18+years in Latin America and the Caribbean



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed in May 2012

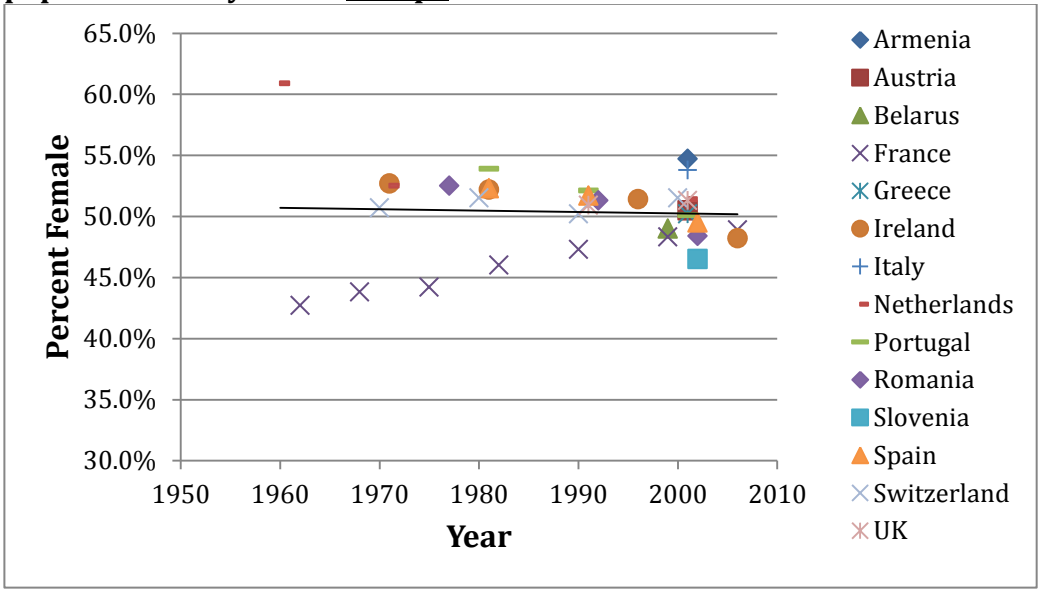
Figure 5: Age-standardized Estimates of the Gender Composition of Foreign-born population, 18+ years, in the 5 Largest Regional Destinations in Latin America and the Caribbean by Top 3 National Origins



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed in May 2012

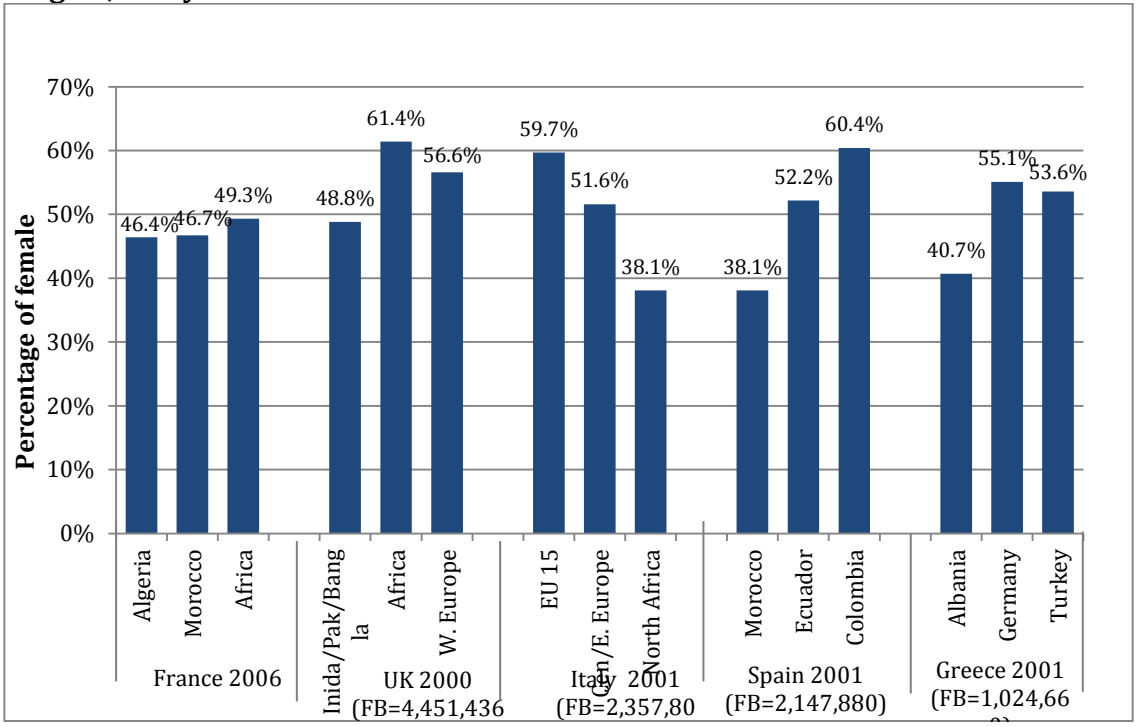
Note: FB= total number of foreign-born living in country in that year

Figure 6: Age-standardized Estimates of the Gender Composition of Foreign-born population 18+ years in Europe



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed in May 2012

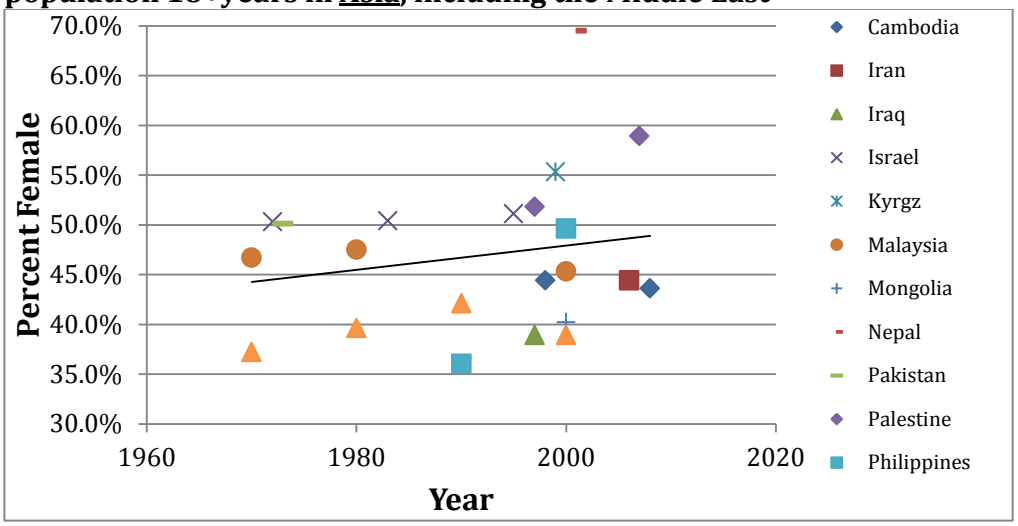
Figure 7: Age-standardized Estimates of the Gender Composition of Foreign-born population in the 5 Largest Regional Destinations in Europe by Top 3 National Origins, 18+ years



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed in May 2012

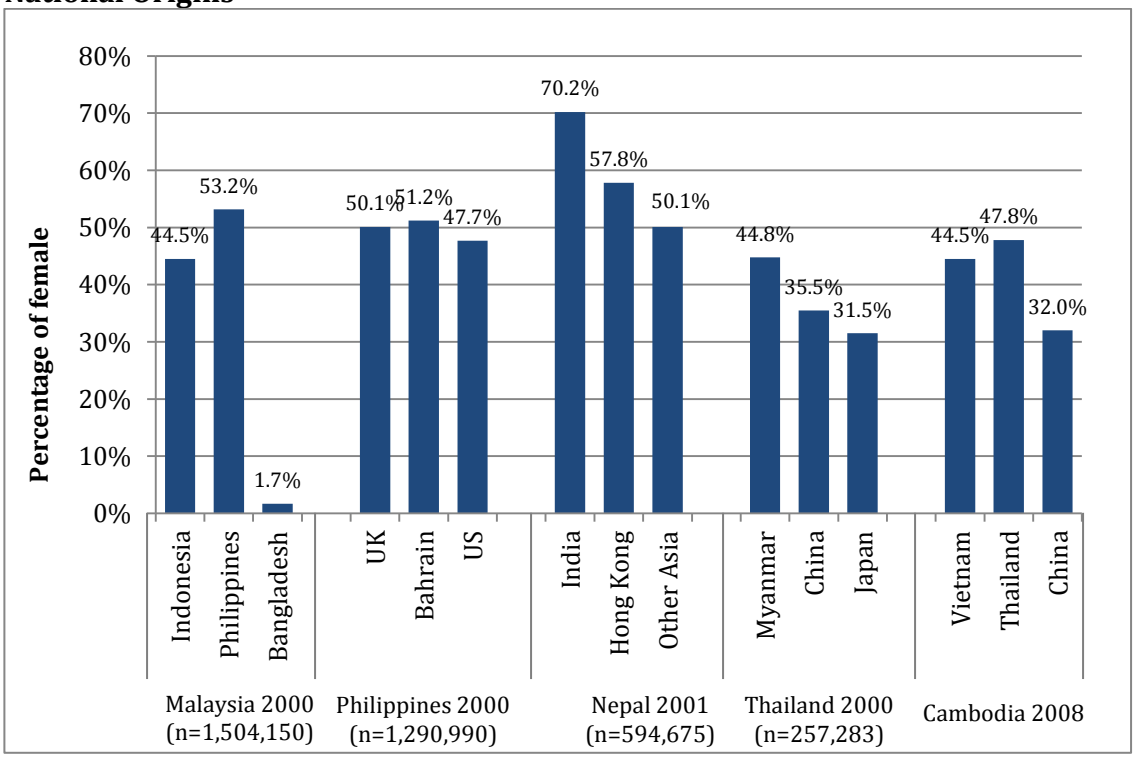
Note: FB= total number of foreign-born living in country in that year

Figure 8: Age-standardized Estimates of the Gender Composition of Foreign-born population 18+years in Asia, including the Middle East



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed in May 2012

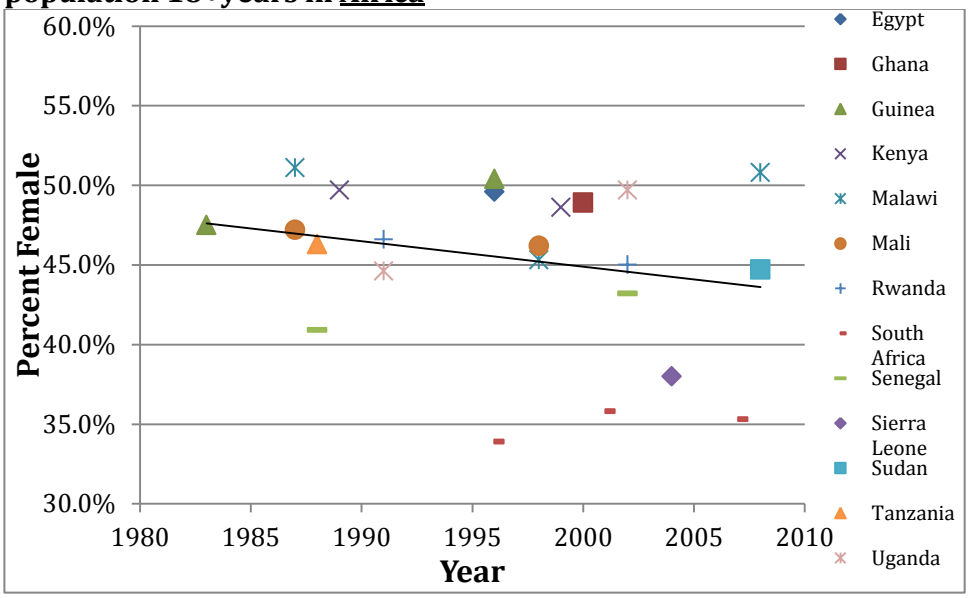
Figure 9: Age-standardized Estimates of the Gender Composition of Foreign-born population, 18+ years, in the 5 Largest Regional Destinations in Asia by Top 3 National Origins



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed in May 2012

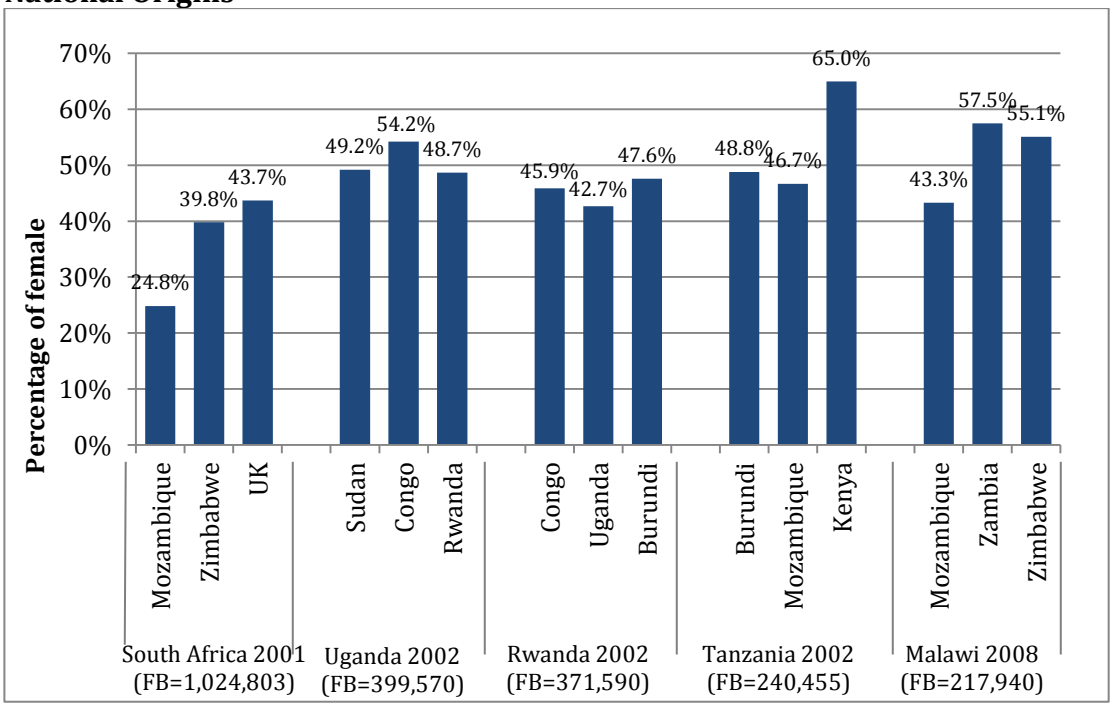
Note: FB= total number of foreign-born living in country in that year

Figure 10: Age-standardized Estimates of the Gender Composition of Foreign-born population 18+years in Africa



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed in May 2012

Figure 11: Age-standardized Estimates of the Gender Composition of Foreign-born population, 18+ years, in the 5 Largest Regional Destinations in Africa by Top 3 National Origins



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS- International), accessed in May 2012

Note: FB= total number of foreign-born living in country in that year.

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