

*Gender and International Migration,
from the Slavery Era to the Global Age*

by Katharine M. Donato and Donna Gabaccia

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This is an extraordinarily important and useful book for population experts as well as social scientists in general. As our television screens document the sorrowful exodus of masses of people out of the Middle East into Europe and elsewhere, this study helps to put this crisis into context. In fact, it is more than helpful. It is crucial reading if we are to understand our current situation in the history of Western population movements.

Donato and Gabaccia have cast a wide net and taken the long view. The long view is to follow studies of migration, mostly into the Americas, from the sixteenth century to the early twenty-first century. This casts a new light on the questions of the migration of women, popularly viewed as a recent development. The wide net is to have examined the work not only of demographers but also historians, linguists, and social scientists of many kinds. They gather up many studies of the movements of people, providing new insights usually ignored in demographic studies.

We follow a fascinating story derived from the analysis of flows of migrants, and then, in a later section, from the analysis of stocks. This approach sounds rather dull and routine, but it is far from that. In fact these chapters, which make up the bulk of the book, are downright exciting. They are rich with hypotheses about why migrations were male-dominant, male-predominant, or gender-balanced. Their lengthy examination of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database casts light on our understanding of nuances of the trade, and makes explicit the importance of looking at both stock and flow data. In the “proletarian migrations” from 1800 to the mid-1920s, and subsequent twentieth-century migrations, they draw upon International Migrations data and, later, UN and ILO data, despite their limitations. All sources of data used are described in detail. For students of demography who struggle with the tangled and inadequate data issues on migration, they raise very important questions about results obtained from using only one data set. For example, the consequences for both sending and receiving countries of labor force participation, intermarriage, and languages emerge from different types of historical, economic, and stock and flow data, and begin to differentiate the migration patterns of women from those of men. This study is a splendid example of how a wide range of disciplines can help us understand the analysis of population movements in the 21st century. It also

helps us see why the periodic hysteria about refugee and economic migrations that emerge in some receiving countries is misguided.

To use this short monograph with students, first I would have them read carefully both the Introduction and Part I of the book. In these first 52 pages, the authors pack in so much sophisticated understanding of the transition of sex-based data into gender analysis; of the complexities of migration data, which is no minor headache; and of the sobering fate of women demographers in North America prior to the 1960s that those pages alone justify buying this book.

On this latter point, they distinguish between those North American women researchers working in “state science” as compared to “social science” in the first half of the twentieth century. Having myself seen the work of Irene Tauber in the Office of Population Research at Princeton University in the mid-1960s, it is good to now see the work of her generation of women statisticians used in relation to the feminist school that “completely rejected the epistemological foundation of the women’s statisticians’ research on sex and migration” (p. 28). The authors revive the meaningful use of migration data through their theoretical discussion in a brief but clear and compelling analysis of “the gender challenge,” and in subsequent use of both sex and gender concepts throughout the chapters that follow. It is a model that could be usefully employed in re-reading earlier migration studies.

No doubt, debates will flourish among readers of this work. Fine points will be made. Quibbles will arise with the data, theory, analyses, and the titles used on some of the figures and tables. Good—that’s how real scholarship works. But if you have the slightest interest in looking at our Canadian population situation and data with fresh eyes and putting our migration history into the context of the rest of the Western world, or in helping your students understand the sex-gender differences, read this monograph.