The son and only child of my Portuguese concierge died suddenly due to an accident last year. He was 36 years old. A tragedy. The loss of a child. The loss of an only child. The apple of his parents’ eye and the main focus of their existence. This could happen to anyone.

But I kept pondering: to what extent was this also an «immigration» story, and a gendered one. This Portuguese couple had come to Paris in 1972, like many others in the waning days of the Caetano regime. They moved into a dual ethnic and gendered labor market: concierge for her, building trade for him – until he became ill and retired early, continuing to do the «male» tasks around the building: changing light bulbs, helping out with small repairs. They returned home every summer, building a house there to return to one day for good. Many people have only one child, but to what extent was this an «immigrant» choice largely due to space constraints, the exiguous lodging in which they lived? (Other

concierges have chosen other solutions, such as sending their children home to be raised by the grandparents.) Concierge lodgings in Paris can be notoriously small. It depends on the neighborhood and on the size and structure of the building. By the same token, we can ask whether hopes of social mobility, true for all parents, are not all the keener perhaps for an only child and keener still for immigrant parents, due to the hopes and dreams inherent in the migration project? In any case, we all saw him grow up – discreetly, not wanting to add the burden of visibility to his/their living on the front lines of our small apartment building. We reveled along with his parents in his successes, small and large, his doing well at school, and ultimately we mourned with them his loss.

How much of the migration story is gendered? How much of migration is a story of class, with the conditions of intimacy and gender dependent on the economics and spatial constraints of mobility and installation? And to what degree are such stories specific to time and place? The Paris infrastructure provides a certain kind of social mix: mostly female concierges most often live with their husbands in the building of those who employ them. This means that the funeral was attended not only by their own extended Portuguese family in Paris, but also by the other Portuguese concierges and other immigrant shopkeepers and friends in the neighborhood – the Turkish couple who run the sewing repair shop next door, the Mauritius concierge family across the street, the French-born, Portuguese origin hairdresser who had attended school with Filipe. But there was also the Ambassador of Portugal to France and the Consul General who knew Filipe through his work. And there were the many French (and international) bourgeois inhabitants of the building: a collection of professionals, high school teachers and principals, university professors and researchers, employees of UNESCO, the Ministry of Education, even an employee of the American embassy. All connected in a communal sharing of grief with a couple who, like the best of concierges, had been a friendly focal point of kindness and sense of security, with whom we all enjoyed exchanging news and advice about our lives and theirs, about the neighborhood, about life in general.

So I kept wondering – how much of this is a migration story? And how much of it is also gendered? In recent years, the question of «return» kept cropping up in my discussions with
Mme D. I remember many years ago how she had mentioned her theory of return: they needed to move back to Portugal before Filipe was nine years old because, after that, he would become too attached to France and his friends and wouldn’t want to leave. How astute I thought at the time. And how true it proved. Indeed, when he was a young adolescent, there was an attempted return. To our (the building’s) sadness but their hopefulness, they planned to go back to Portugal and open a small shop there. And to make sure that Filipe would be okay, they sent him there in advance to enroll in school. He stayed with cousins, went to high school for a semester. And hated it. He came back, and the shop plan seemed to disappear – «it hadn’t worked out». But now, one could say, they were stuck.

Filipe grew up, did well in school, and went to work for a Franco-Portuguese bank in Paris, his bilingualism standing him in good stead. He was able to buy an apartment on the outskirts of Paris, where he could now host his parents, letting them enjoy the greater space and greenery for a couple of days a week. In the last couple of years he had changed jobs, exchanging the stress of bank-life for the joys and anxieties of setting up his own business, a Portuguese-French website. He remained ever the intermediary between the land of his birth and the land of his parents’ birth, the two places he loved, as one cousin put it at the funeral.

But this did not settle the issue of return. And it remained largely gendered. In recent conversations with Mme D., as retirement neared, I had gathered that her husband wanted to move back to Portugal, but she did not. The reason was her son. As long as he was in Paris, she was loathe to be far away from him. A gendered dilemma re-enacted by many immigrant families the world over.

We can ask the question, then, does it make a difference – for emigration, for settlement, for eventual retirement – if a migrant is a man or a woman? Maybe not. Class, national origin, period of migration (1900 v. 2000), individual idiosyncrasies or family traditions, political or social constraints may be as or more pertinent for understanding

3. The subject has recently been explored in the Franco-Portuguese film by Ruben Alves, La Cage Dorée (2012).
many facets of the migration experience. But even as more and more attention is given to «gender and migration», it is still worth asking some basic questions about how gender has an impact on migration, how it may be constructed through migration, and how migration has an impact on gender roles.

This essay proposes to ask more questions than it answers, but it seeks to lay the basis for a wide-ranging reflection on the gender-migration nexus. I will take as examples the experience of immigration to the United States and France, the two historiographies I know best – less in order to contrast two histories or historiographies than to use them as examples of sufficiently similar histories of immigration toward industrializing (then de-industrializing) Western economies that may also illustrate some telling differences. As in any parallel or comparative study, the choice of comparison may have an impact on the results. Historic immigration to Australia, Canada, or within the Pacific Ocean system of migrations may tell another story\(^4\). But I would like to use the French and American cases in order to organize the gender-migration nexus along three lines and thus offer a synthesis of some of the very fruitful literature that has been produced on the question in the last few decades. First, to what extent does gender play a role in the migration process to begin with: choices about leaving, about when to leave, about who stays behind. In other words, is it always men who leave first and women who follow? Second, how is gender constructed through migration, and notably, how do countries of immigration perceive the gender of the immigrants whom they «welcome»? Do immigration laws and officials see all immigrants as equal, regardless of sex? Third, to what extent does migration have an impact on gender? What happens to couples when they reunite abroad? It is not just a question of female «emancipation» – successful or not – but of the reordering of gender roles as a result of migration.

At the intersection of women’s history and gender history
There has been, as more and more of us have argued, an unfortunate dispute between the advocates of women’s history and gender history. When the second-wave feminism of

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The 1960s helped us all «discover» women as historical actors who had heretofore been «invisible», our historic and historiographic joy was immense in finding more and more examples of where women fit into the macro and micro pictures of social history. The immigrant woman became a subject of study in her own right from the 1970s on (although more precociously in the United States than in France). «Adding» women to the migration story was an important part of studying the ways in which immigrant communities were formed. Yet it also led to thinking about different labor markets (such as textile, garments, domestic work), different forms of oppression and different forms of agency. Initial stories of the invisible and the oppressed that emphasized how immigrant women suffered under the constraints of capitalism and patriarchy ultimately gave way to histories of unsung heroines, henceforth seen as the active agents of their own destinies, as agency trumped structuralism in the telling of the tale. Over the last decades, historiographic interest has moved from factory to workshop and homework to the home itself as a site of gendered activity, whether in new forms of paid domestic work or in reflecting upon the intimate, analyzing how bodies reflect and inflect the lived experience of men and women and their sexualities. How have masculinities and femininities literally been engendered through the migration process?

The task is thus triple: we can approach the question of gender and migration by at least analytically separating out three moments of migration: the before, the during, and the after.

*Men and women in motion: Who migrates and why does it matter?* Numbers count in either a «men’s» or «women’s» history of migration. While the male factory worker was and often still is the first image that comes to mind when the historic «immigrant worker» is evoked either in the United States or France, the numbers alone of men and women who have left one country for another are a first indication of the ways in which migration is not a uniform act. How has gender had an impact on migration, on who leaves and who does not? Women may have migrated as daughters or wives, alone or with their families, simultaneously with the men or in a follow-up migration stream. We cannot always know who made the de-
cision to leave. Was it women urging men to go forth, men seeking to better family circumstances, or collective decisions based on a family economy? What about female adventurers or single women seeking jobs or mates?

Donna Gabaccia, pioneer in the field of women’s migration and active participant in the «gender turn», has recently returned to questioning the statistics themselves. In a forthcoming book, Donna R. Gabaccia and Katharine M. Donato insist particularly on how new sources can change the way in which we interpret the gender of migration. «Sex ratios», «gender ratios», as they and others insist, are not the same thing. The counting of men and women has classically been a way for immigration countries to calculate one form of difference upon arrival. But in addition to being a simple counting of sexual difference, it is in their interpretation that the statistics reveal the gendered nature of immigration. Sex ratios help explain not only who migrates; they also reveal gendered ratios – how migration has been conceptualized by state and society.

What can the numbers tell us at any given time about who migrates? First of all, the sex ratios have most often and again recently been interpreted essentially as ways of understanding change over time. Studies of the feminization of migration have turned into a burgeoning field. To take our two examples, it has been found that, historically speaking, the «feminization» of immigration to the United States took place in the 1930s, when the number of women entering the country outstripped the number of men. The same thing happened in France in the 1970s. A first remark can thus point out the disjuncture between history and historiography. More women than men may have come to the United States in the 1930s, but that fact was not noticed (by historians or demographers) in any significant way until the feminist 1970s, when researchers looked for and found this striking fact. If the history and its historiographic discovery were more congruent in France, it

is simply because the phenomenon took place roughly at the time that feminists became interested in the subject.

The question of feminization – as seen through sex ratios – is however only one possible perspective. It is a comparative question over time. But the questions of change over time and the proportions of foreign-born men and women present at any given time should not mask the minority figures. The focus has been on the majority: men yesterday, women today. Yet by breaking down overall figures according to national origins, they also tell us about the conditions of emigration (single, familial?), about political constraints (border closings yet family reunification, for example) or economic opportunities (factory or field, domestic service or the care industry). When 60% of immigrants are men, a 40% presence of immigrant women is still a hefty percentage. The presence of women implies the presence of families rather than an immigration of single young men. Questions of assimilation have been tied to bourgeois family norms, yet we also know that «assimilation» may take on different forms and rhythms for men in a multicultural work environment or stay-at-home women. Women have, ironically, been interpreted in two opposite ways: as bearers of tradition – which can hinder assimilation – but also as signifiers of settlement, of community formation, and ultimately of incorporation.

Georges Mauco, French demographer and one of the first to examine extensively the presence of immigrants in French society, worried about who was assimilable or not in the 1930s. While approving certain groups at the expense of others, he nonetheless emphasized how women could be a stabilizing factor in immigrant settlement. Yet are women precursors to family integration into the new society or a brake on modernity as others have at times argued? More importantly, how have they constructed their new lives and identities in comparison to men? How does the growing presence of women, alongside men, have an impact on community formation and how does community formation facilitate or hinder accommodation to the new society?

But above all, what do the sex ratios tell us about the gendered nature of emigration and immigration? Both political

policy and economic opportunity help construct the *gender ratios* which are not solely the result of a biological determinism. The gender of those who migrate may be the result of cultural, but also political and economic factors. The decision as to who leaves and who waits behind may be an individual one or a collective, familial or village-level decision just as it may be a male or female decision, grounded in gendered traditions and practices. But politically, there are also the laws of entry which have historically determined the sex of those who arrive. When mass immigration – which had been implicitly defined through the labor market as largely masculine – was halted, the restriction of immigration inherently blocked men at the borders. Yet, at the same time, the closing of the U.S. doors through the restrictive legislation of the 1920s and the halting of labor migration to France after the oil crisis of the mid-1970s were accompanied in both countries nonetheless by provisions for family reunification, thus encouraging more women to take to the roads, trains, and ocean. The policies in themselves thus help explain a large part of the «feminization» of the flows that followed in each period respectively.

Departure is also historically linked not just to politics but to labor markets, themselves gendered. Gendered notions of work explain the flows as much as political, biological or cultural causes. Nineteenth century male migrants moved towards male-defined jobs in mining, heavy industry, or agriculture work, while late twentieth century female immigrants help us understand not just the «feminization» of migration but the service-sectorization of the West’s economies as well. Changing labor markets as much as change of political regimes can thus explain the gendered nature of migration streams. Gender ratios are analytic categories rather than simply fixed binaries of demographic sex ratios. And they are as much a result of state policy as they are of labor markets. If yesterday they were the men who left for the factories and the fields, leaving women and children at home in a first stage, today they are the women who depart to find work as nurses, nurses’ aids, or other forms of domestic work. And they are the men who wait at home.

«Men who leave, women who wait» – the gender of transit

Even during the in-between period of getting from there to here, we can ask how waiting is gendered and how gender has
an impact on waiting\textsuperscript{7}. The anthropologist Caroline Brettell was one of the first to point to the implication of different patterns of migration among men and women in her 1986 book *Men Who Migrate, Women Who Wait: Population and History in a Portuguese Parish*\textsuperscript{8}. The title captures the reality and the well-known image of the waiting woman, from Ulysses’ wife Penelope to today. In this perspective, the act of migrating is in itself gendered: men and women do it in different proportions. Men have long been seen as the adventurous sojourners who cross the ocean while women await their return and/or their remittances in the meantime. However, this historic reality and representational figure has been reversed in recent decades by the «discovery» of women migrants, whether they leave along with their families or set out to reunite with already departed husbands or whether they forge out on their own. Today, as a new international market of domesticity has evolved, it is the women who leave first for work, and the men who wait at home or eventually join them.

But we can also ask how the period between departure and arrival – the waiting period – is itself gendered. The moments of immobility that occur during the mobility process can be long. Is the route itself experienced differently by men and by women, alone or travelling with family? How do they each maneuver boats, airplanes, waiting rooms, waiting lines and the harrowing experience of acceptance or rejection at the admitting window? All of these intermediary moments, often forgotten after the trip is completed, are the missing links in the history of migration, which is often less linear than commonly imagined. Migration routes are frequently more zigzag than straightforward, and they include stops along the way which may last several hours, several days, sometimes months or years. How have men and women, in the past as today, navigated these «spaces of passage» which are as material as they are metaphorical waiting spaces between one life and


another? We need to reinterpret the sources, the letters, the memoirs, the photographs to see the ways in which the voyage itself may be a classic concentrate of a gendered domestic division of labor: men lugging the heaviest of suitcases, women preparing and packing the food for the road? (The photos also show women bent over, carrying quilts, bundles, and children en route.) Anouche Kunth has suggested, in her study of well-to-do Armenians from the Caucasus migrating toward France after 1917, that the border was where «the masculine empire began to recede» («Ici commence le recul de l’empire masculin»). The Armenian women took charge of passing the family jewels across the border, and thus began a shifting of roles and responsibility that would become more evident as emigration turned into immigration\(^{10}\). To what extent have immigration welcoming/retention centers been constructed explicitly envisaging different proportions of men and women occupants? What space was set aside for women’s or family dormitories in relation to space for single men? And how, at that crucial moment when the admitting officer makes a decision, does his (?) appreciation of sex and sexuality – barring prostitutes, barring homosexuals – also form part of a gendered migration process?\(^{11}\)

**Representations**

The gendered imaginaries of immigration, particularly by the state, are important to understand, especially due to the

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state’s power to set policy. This can be true for both the countries of emigration and those of immigration. Sending states have imagined (and worried about) the departure of male or female citizens differently. How has the Italian state, for example, understood the departure of its citizens and to what extent was that understanding based on who was envisaged as leaving, men or women? But we can also ask how receiving states and societies have imagined and constructed gendered scenarios of immigration and, importantly, how they have shifted over time.

Gendered representations of migration have to do with gendered ideas about armies and about jobs. In the countries of departure, concern over losing potential soldiers worried many nineteenth century leaders. As for the countries of immigration, we know that American and French needs for an industrial workforce were clearly gendered in favor of men: male immigrants were recruited insofar as those jobs were designated «male» jobs. The notable exceptions were recruitment to the textile factories that were defined as appropriate for and thus populated by women. The need for care service workers today genders workforce and immigration needs in favor of women. In both cases, the gendered categories themselves have been socially constructed, with assumptions about inherent male or female characteristics linked to specific jobs. The point here is not only the actual working of the labor market but the way in which gendered representations of labor markets and immigration have an impact on migration streams. Yet gender stereotyping can also change over time: there is nothing inherently stable in the definitions. Garment work can be considered «female» until male immigrant garment workers arrive just as metallurgy jobs can be defined as «male» before they become deskilled and redefined as «female». Similarly, immigration

streams can be represented as male or female depending on the period. But, at any given moment, jobs and immigration policy may join forces in their representations of who is needed and therefore who is welcome.

Or not welcome. For example, we can study how xenophobic fears are gendered, imagining and targeting male and female immigrants differently. Certain categories of women (or men) may strike fear in the wary eyes of immigration officials. Yet gendered representations of the Other may also depend on the period. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at Ellis Island and other entry points in the United States, for example, women traveling alone were seen with suspicion, imagined to be prostitutes. New fears today in France focus on other women. Veiled North African women or under-dressed Eastern European women have become stigmatized symbols for fears of polygamy and prostitution, imagining worst-case scenarios that have at times widened the circle of suspicion against women as a whole. If the understanding of a «masculine» industrialization led to the immigration of massive numbers of male factory workers from the nineteenth century through a good three-quarters of the twentieth century, we have perhaps now moved into an era in which the «female» service-sectorization of the economy has engendered new representations of work and thus newly re-gendered migration lows. The point is to reconsider migration as – also – a process in which gendered ideas about who should or should not migrate also have an impact on those who actually do/can move.

The effects of migration on gender roles
Finally, how does migration itself have an impact on gender relations? How do periods of absence and shifting labor roles affect families or construct new identities for solo migrants? Arguably, this is the topic that has received the most attention insofar as the debate over emigration as «emancipation» – or not – for migrant women has long been analyzed in connection to «modernization» theory.

The «emancipation» of women through migration has

been postulated but also questioned\(^{14}\). What for some women may be a form of freedom may be a triple discrimination for others, due to class, origin, and sex. A gendered analysis of the effects of migration goes well beyond the classic question of whether emigration is good for the receiving or sending countries. It can also go beyond the question of whether it is «good» for women – or for men for that matter. (The «emancipation» of women literature may be revisited to ask the same question for men, rather than automatically assuming, as has often been the case, that migration has been the great male emancipator.) The gendered effects of migration also raise questions about how individuals and families redefine roles as a result of mobility to new contexts. Beyond the issue of a differential impact of migration on each sex, how does migration affect relations between the sexes and in itself construct or reconstruct gendered identities?

One of the great understudied topics of migration history has to do with the initial period of separation and the difficulties of reunion\(^{15}\). How do readjustments occur as economic roles and breadwinners change places or as some learn language skills more quickly than others? Gendered roles and sexuality may shift. Notions of motherhood (and fatherhood), like patterns of courtship and family roles, may change as a result of moving abroad, where working in factories rather than fields and access to new forms of urban leisure have an impact on courtship, marriage, childbearing and family size. As the recent volume *Intimacy and Italian Migration* well shows, the «Italian mother» is not an unchanging constant over time and across emigration sites, even if she and the Italian family have become a trope of national identity\(^{16}\). Whereas settlement has been studied largely in cul-

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\(^{14}\) There was a recent iteration of this debate at a conference held in Paris entitled *The Implications of Migration on Emancipation and Pseudo-Emancipation of Turkish Women*, held at the Institut d’études avancées, November 8-9, 2013. It explored Nermin Abadan-Unat’s 1977 article – «Implications of Migration of Emancipation and Pseudo-Emancipation of Turkish Women», *International Migration Review*, xi, 1, 1977, pp. 31-57 – in light of today’s historiography.

\(^{15}\) See, e.g., *Cancian, Sonia, Families, Lovers, and their Letters: Italian Postwar Migration to Canada*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2011.

tural terms – assimilation versus retention of ethnicity – what about its differential impact on men and women and on the relations between the two?

**Italian women in comparative perspective**

The global figures of change over time may however mask more specific national or economic migration patterns. Comparing the sex ratios of the Irish, the Germans, the Italians or the Mexicans in the United States or of the Italians, Poles, and North Africans in France over the twentieth century may reveal how differences upon arrival, relating to conditions and practices at home, converge over time through the experiences of settlement.

If we ask about the Italian state’s vision of those who left and how it tried to woo them back, the question for the study of Italian women can also be how their experience has compared to Italian men’s. But focusing on one group can also allow for a divergent comparison, asking how emigration to the United States, to South America or France differed for Italian women (and men)? Such a comparison may complicate the picture both with regard to reasons for migration but also the travails of travel, and the difficulties and opportunities of settlement. Matrimonial migration, the contours of solo migration, work experience before and after migration are just some of the questions that can still use further research just as the experiences of Italian women may be compared to those of women of other nationalities.

The comparative question inevitably implies: comparison to what/whom? To Italian women in diaspora – in Paris, New York, and Buenos Aires? (Only one-quarter of the Italian immigrant population in the United States was female in 1929, whereas there were 42% women among Italians in the closer

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country of France at roughly the same time)\textsuperscript{19}. To Italian men at the point of arrival and settlement? To other immigrant women in the United States (or at other destination points)? And at what point is it useful to compare Italian-born women to their own daughters, born in the country of settlement? Each question emphasizes different aspects of the – gendered – experience of migration.

Finally, we may return to the question of return. Who does it? Men, women? Couples, singles? At what point is the migration cycle «over»? Or do today’s means of transportation allow continuing cycles of mobility for both men and women? At last news, the D. couple are unsure whether or not they will return permanently to Portugal. They realize they have lived in France for longer than they have lived in Portugal. But it seems that it is now Mr. D. who is more inclined to stay and Mme D. who wants to return… to be closer to her son’s grave, in Portugal.

It is ultimately important to think about the ways in which our research itself has been gendered or more generally how the moments of our writing and the historiographic questions asked have an impact on what we «find». To what extent have we – researchers – collectively worked with certain assumptions about work, state policies, and the meaning of sex ratios. Assimilation, modernization, and participation in the labor force seem to have been largely constructed as male, while tradition has been construed as female unless, on the contrary, family values are seen (by whom?) as a stabilizing force ultimately aiding assimilation itself\textsuperscript{20}. More work needs to be done in understanding the ways in which categories such as «assimilation», «modernization», or «tradition» have been gendered by legislators, polemicists, immigrants, and historians alike.
