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# Marriage-related migration to the UK

## Abstract

Spouses form the largest single category of migrant settlement in the UK, but research and policy making on marriage-related migration to Britain provides incomplete coverage of the phenomenon, having been dominated by a focus in the South Asian populations which are among the largest groups of such migrants. By bringing together immigration statistics with information from academic and third sector sources, this article attempts to provide a more balanced and nuanced portrayal of patterns and practices of marriage-related migration to the UK. In doing so, it reveals important nationality and gender differences in migration flows, and considers how varying marriage practices, social and political contexts, and policies of both receiving and sending countries may work to influence marriage-related migration streams. It also exposes the limitations and lacunae in existing research on this diverse form of migration, highlighting the danger that immigration policy made on the basis of partial evidence will produce unexpected consequences.

## Introduction

Spouses are the largest single category of migrant settlement in the UK (39% in 2008, Home Office 2009), but the limited nature of research on family and marriage-related migration has been widely recognised (Kofman 2001, Migration Advisory Committee 2009). Whilst work in this area has been expanding in recent years, it is by no means comprehensive, and is characterised by a focus on certain issues and regions of origin, while others remain markedly under-researched. The majority of available research concerns South Asian populations whose migration has long been addressed through the lens of kinship. Such ethno-national stereotyping of migration channels has led to the neglect of the important role of marriage in the migration trajectories of other groups.<sup>1</sup> In this article, we review the available evidence to construct a much more comprehensive portrait of marriage-related migration to the UK than has previously been available, focussing on the largest nationality groups of spousal migrants. The complex and varied picture which

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Beck-Gernsheim (2007) on the focus of European research on groups of non-European, non-Christian origin.

emerges challenges stereotypical view of marriage-related migration to Britain, casting light on the variety of processes involved, links with other forms of migration, and gendered dynamics.

The issue of marriage-related migration has been gaining increasing political importance across Europe in recent years, with considerable tightening of spousal immigration regulations in countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands. In Britain, the issue has not received comparable political and public attention to date, but after recent public policy consultations, the raising of the minimum age of spousal migration, and (under the new coalition government) the introduction of pre-entry English language requirements for spouses<sup>2</sup> and a stated aim to cap immigration numbers, it seems likely that Britain will follow the example of its neighbours in seeking to tighten restrictions on spousal immigration. In this context, the uneven availability of evidence described in this article, and examples from recent British history and elsewhere in Europe, suggest a danger that legislation designed on the basis of partial information will have unforeseen consequences for the welfare of citizens and their spouses, or for other migration flows.

The article therefore has four sections. In the first we outline the terminology and data employed in this research. The second section provides an overview of trends in spousal settlement in the UK, to set in context the third section, in which we deal with the evidence on marriage-related migration from the 14 major countries of origin, grouped by region. The final section discusses the implications of the material presented here for future research and policy making in this area.

### **Terminology and Data**

The material covered in this article spans governmental, academic and third sector sources.<sup>3</sup> A range of terminology to describe marriage-related migration exists in each of these fields. In terms of the legal immigration process, would-be spousal migrants to the UK apply for a visa which is referred to as ‘limited leave to enter’ or ‘indefinite leave to enter’ as a spouse of someone settled, or being granted settlement, in the country. ‘Settlement’ here refers to the acquisition of the right of permanent residence. Spousal visa holders may themselves apply for settlement after a probationary period (currently 2 years). The available statistical data on immigration, published in the annual ‘Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom’ reports, thus cover: issue of visas (limited or indefinite leave to enter); admissions (passengers given leave to enter); extensions of leave to remain (temporary right of residence); and grants of settlement. Admissions data distinguishes between those entering as spouses, civil or unmarried partners, or fiancé(e)s (with the intention of marrying whilst in the UK), and those who arrive as the dependants of other categories of visa holder (this category includes spouses, children and other dependants). In this report we principally draw upon statistics of Grants of Settlement, as these include those who enter on another form of visa and later

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<sup>2</sup> With an exemption for applicants from English-speaking countries.

<sup>3</sup> Due to confines of space, use of references is selective and does not reflect the full extent of research undertaken. A full list of literature consulted can be obtained from the first author.

‘switch’ to the spousal settlement route after marrying whilst in the UK. Figures are also available on issues of residence documentation to EEA nationals and their family members, but as the information is less detailed than and not comparable with that on non-EEA migration, we do not include them in our discussion.

In the academic literature, numerous categorisations of migration related to marriage have been proposed, and conventional academic terminology varies according by region. Among the most commonly-used categories are: family formation (also sometimes called marriage migration), family reunification/reunion, ‘tied migration’ (where one spouse accompanies another), and ‘transnational marriage’. These do not always map directly onto visa routes or the presentation of immigration statistics, creating difficulties for analysis, but nevertheless have utility in describing some situations or contrasts. However, as Kofman (2004) notes, categories in this field are fluid and interacting: some overlap, whilst the boundaries between others are less clear in practice.

Given these ambiguities, and acknowledging inter-linkages between categories, we use the terms ‘marriage-related migration’ and ‘spousal migration’ as umbrella terms encompassing all situations where marriage plays a substantial role in an individual’s migration<sup>4</sup>. In the following discussion, ‘spousal settlement’ refers to migrants granted permanent residence rights on the basis of marriage, and (for those nationalities captured by immigration statistics) corresponds to the statistical category of ‘grants of settlement’ to husbands and wives in the UK Border Agency statistics employed below.

## General Trends in Spousal Settlement<sup>5</sup>

### Figure 1 Here

Since the 1997 abolition of the Primary Purpose Rule, under which applicants had to prove that their marriage was not primarily motivated by immigration, the number of spouses granted settlement in the UK

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<sup>4</sup> For the sake of simplicity, fiancé(e)s and civil partnerships are included in this conceptualisation.

<sup>5</sup> The statistics on spousal settlement throughout this article are from the Home Office ‘Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom’ reports and command papers for the years 2000-2008 (and supplementary excel tables) available from <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html>, <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk>, and [www.archive2.official-documents.co.uk](http://www.archive2.official-documents.co.uk). All numbers are rounded to the nearest 5. Statistics on total grants of settlement and total grants of settlement to spouses for 2000-2008 are drawn from ‘Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom’, main excel tables, table 4.3. Statistics on total grants of settlement and total grants of settlement to spouses for 1993-2000 are drawn from the Home Office ‘Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom, 2003’ (<http://www.archive2.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm63/6363/6363.pdf>, table 5.3). Statistics for particular nationality groups are drawn from the following:

‘Control of Immigration Statistics 2008’, supplementary excel table 4c.

‘Control of Immigration Statistics 2007’, table 5.1

‘Control of Immigration Statistics 2006’, table 5.1

Command Paper ‘Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom’ 2005, table 5.1

Command Paper ‘Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom’ 2004, table 5.1

Command Paper ‘Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom’ 2003, table 5.1

Command Paper ‘Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom’ 2002, table 6.1

Command Paper ‘Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom’ 2001, table 6.1

Command Paper ‘Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom’ 2000, table 6.1

has been increasing, rising from 30,190 in 1994, to 57,390 in 2008.<sup>6,7</sup> However, such settlement has not increased proportionately with other types of migration, as can be seen in Figure 1. In 1995 spouses constituted 59% of all grants of settlement, but had fallen to 39% by 2008.

### **Figure 2 here**

The overall upwards trend in grants of settlement to spouses is characterised by peaks and troughs. A robust analysis of these trends is complicated by the time lag between migration and settlement, the varying length of time taken to process applications and appeals, and changes in immigration rules and procedures (see Appendix). Despite this, likely factors contributing to some significant general trends can be identified.

The sharp fall in overall spousal grants of settlement in 2004 is most likely related to the 2003 raising of the probationary period between spousal entry and settlement from 1 to 2 years. Hence, many grants to spouses would have been delayed by an additional year, so this abrupt decrease was temporary. The dip in 2007, could be attributed to a combination of the 2007 introduction of the ‘Knowledge of Life in the UK’ test for those wanting to gain settlement; a change in the qualifying period for settlement in employment related categories from 4 to 5 years in 2006 (delaying grants to main applicants and their dependants); the Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2006 which created alternative routes for spouses of those who could exercise rights to free movement under European law; and the introduction of the ‘Certificates of Approval’ (CoA) requirement in 2005 (under which migrants had to apply for a certificate from the Home Office before marrying in the UK).<sup>8,9</sup> The latter was intended as a measure to combat marriages of convenience for immigration purposes, as irregular migrants and those with limited time remaining on their visa would not be granted a certificate. ‘Sham’ marriages are the subject of increasingly policy attention in the UK, but as empirical evidence on such practices is scarce, and given confines of space, we do not address the issue in this article (but see Charsley & Benson *under review*).

Changes in marriage-related migration flows are also likely to be influenced by changes in the nature or volume of other sources of immigration, so that an influx of migrants in one year, may lead to a later increase of spouses applying to join them. The time between such events is, however, likely to vary greatly. Isolating the particular configurations of changing conditions in receiving and origin countries responsible for changes to total spousal settlement figures would be a complex task, but certain causal relationships *can*

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<sup>6</sup> Figures for spousal settlement between 1993 and 2002 include EEA nationals, whilst those from 2003 onwards exclude them, in line with changes in the categorisations used by UKBA statistics. Accession state nationals are included or excluded according to their accession date. Swiss nationals are excluded from 1 June 2002. Data from 2003 also excludes dependants of EEA and Swiss nationals in confirmed relationships and granted permanent residency.

<sup>7</sup> Data from 1997 onwards includes unmarried and civil partners in the category ‘spouse’.

<sup>8</sup> This is consistent with more detailed statistics showing that most of this decrease was in those settled ‘on the basis of marriage’ rather than at the same time as their spouse (‘Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 2007’, table 5.3).

<sup>9</sup> This system came to an end in 2011 after being judged discriminatory by the High Court and House of Lords. It did not apply to marriages taking place in the Church of England. See Appendix for further details.

be suggested when examining the profiles of particular sending countries. Home Office statistics document over 70 countries of origin of spousal migrants to the UK, but many of these represent rather small numbers of actual migrants. In the remainder of this article, we focus on the 14 countries of origin which account for the largest numbers of marriage-related migrants (>1100 in 2008). In descending order of numbers of grants of settlement, these are:

### **Figure 3 here**

Wives make up the majority (60%) of spousal migrants to Britain, but the gender ratios demonstrate considerable variation between national groups, so that wives account for 93% of Thai and 84% of Chinese spouses, but only 33% of Philippine spousal settlement.<sup>10</sup> Research on marriage-related migration globally has tended to focus on migrant wives, with a comparative lack of research on male marriage-migration (but see Gallo 2006, George 2005, and on the British context Charsley 2005; McGregor 2007; Ahmad 2008, Pasura 2008).

## **Marriage-related Migration by Country of Origin<sup>11</sup>**

### *South Asia/Indian sub-continent*

In regional terms, the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) has long accounted for the largest proportion of spousal migrants to Britain, and represented a third of all grants of settlement in 2008. Unsurprisingly, most research on marriage-related migration to the UK has focussed on South Asian populations. Patterns of marriage-related migration to Britain are diverse, reflecting the region's varied culture, religion and migration histories (e.g. Ballard 1990; Charsley & Shaw 2006), but some common patterns and issues exist.

The historical colonial relationship between Britain and the Indian subcontinent has strongly influenced migration histories, as this region became a source of labour migrants for Britain's post-war economy (Commonwealth citizens held privileged immigration rights until the 1962 immigration reforms). This was initially predominantly male labour migration, but many wives and children were later brought to Britain – predominantly during the 1960s and 70s for Indians and Pakistanis, and 1980s for Bangladeshis (Coleman 1995, Gardner 2006, Gardner and Shukur 1994). As these children and the generations born in Britain have reached marriageable age, 'homeland' marriages have been occurring, but appear to be more prevalent among some ethnic/national and religious groups.

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<sup>10</sup> Marked differences in the countries of origin of immigrant husbands and wives have also been reported in a recent study using Swedish data (Niedomysl *et al* 2010).

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that these reviews often describe general patterns, but should not be taken to imply homogeneity within these national groups (Breger & Hill 1998).

In much of South Asia, love before marriage is not considered a prerequisite for a successful union (although love marriages, or ‘love-cum-arranged’ marriages where parents arrange a match suggested by their children do occur - Mody 2002). In most of the region, brides conventionally move to their husband’s households, so that it has been suggested that for Punjabi women, ‘womanhood implies travel’ (Bradby 2000: 236). However, conventions of husbands moving to the wife’s household exist in some parts of India (e.g. Busby 2000), and even where residence in the husband’s household is the norm, some men may live with their in-laws for pragmatic reasons (see Charsley 2005). Transnational marriage appears to act to balance the gendered mobility entailed by marriage, as relatively equal numbers of wives and husbands from the Indian subcontinent enter the UK (in 2008 the proportion of wives were 52% for India, 56% for Pakistan, and 54% for Bangladesh). Substantially more wives than husbands from Sri Lanka are granted settlement (81% wives), but this case is unusual in the region given the significance of refugee migration.

Some British immigration regulations seem to have been particularly aimed at South Asian spousal migrants, or have had particular impacts on this group. The Primary Purpose Rule had disproportionately affected South Asian applicants (Sachdeva 1993, Menski 1999) leading to increased applications for entry clearance after its abolition, particularly from husbands and male fiancés (Home Office 2001). Most reported cases of forced marriage, which has been cited as justification for recent regulation changes including the raising of the minimum age for spouses to 21, concern those with South Asian (particularly Pakistani) backgrounds. It has also been suggested that the extension of the probationary period before migrants can apply for settlement leaves some South Asian wives vulnerable to domestic violence. Whilst an exception to deportation on marriage breakdown during the probationary period exists for domestic violence cases, proving such cases is often difficult, and the immigrant spouse has no recourse to public funds during the period of the appeal (Anitha *et al.* 2008, Wilson 2006).

#### **Figure 4 here**

Significant differences exist, however, between South Asian groups in marriage-related migration trends, as can be seen in figure 3. India recently overtook Pakistan as the single largest national group of spouses granted settlement. A recent review of the Labour Force Survey 1992-2005 found 24% of British Indians were married to migrants (Dale 2008). Since the 1980s, these have probably been predominantly British-born Indians marrying in their parental or grandparental homeland (perhaps particularly Sikh: Singh and Tatla 2006), but marriage-related migration is likely to be diversifying in parallel with broader Indian migration flows which now include highly skilled science-oriented migrants, service sector workers, and unskilled migrants (Batnitzky *et al.* 2007, Xiang 2007, 2008), challenging conventional understandings of the phenomenon as simply second generation ‘homeland’ marriages. Significant numbers of spouses enter the UK as dependants of Indian students, although this may change after recent changes in the terms of student visas. A smaller but significant number enter as dependants of points-based migrants (Home Office 2008). Marriage-related migration routes appear to be patterned by gender, with women more likely to be

settled on the basis of marriage to a resident spouse, whilst more men are settled at the same time as a migrant partner.<sup>12</sup> Transnational marriage continues among many ethnic and religious groups, often involving at least an element of familial ‘arrangement’, with spousal selection influenced by concerns of household socio-economic mobility, and often involving dowry (e.g. Ballard and Gardner n.d., Coleman 1995, Raj 2003). Within the Indian diaspora, a hierarchy of marriage partners, in which country of residence plays a role, may exist (Mand 2003; Voigt-Graf 2005). The UK and India are only two nodes in this hierarchy, which may also produce marriage-related *out* migration from the UK.

Pakistanis are probably the most studied group of marriage-related migrants to Britain, with research detailing issues including transnational marriage rituals and the gendered experiences of migrant spouses (Charsley 2005, 2006, 2007; Werbner 2010). Marriage has long been established as the main form of Pakistani migration to Britain. Estimates of the proportion of British Pakistanis married to Pakistani nationals vary between 48% of men & 57% of women (Dale 2008), 57.6% (in Bradford 1992-4), and 71% of marriages (in Oxford) (Shaw 2001: 327). The majority of these marriages are arranged or semi-arranged marriages between cousins or more distant relatives – rates of consanguineous marriage appear to be higher in transnational than intra-national marriages (Shaw 2001: 327). Motivations may include the opportunity to invigorate ties to much missed relatives in Pakistan, demonstrate family honour, maintain family assets, further the immigration of kin, and desire for a religiously observant spouse (Ballard 1989, Shaw & Charsley 2006, Shaw 2001). Migration Watch reports (2004, 2005) link the practice to segregation and lack of integration, but insufficient research exists to test this assertion. Contemporary diversification of Pakistani immigration, which now includes substantial numbers of temporary migrants, irregular migrants, and students (Harriss & Shaw 2009, Rana 2009), is likely to lead to diversification of marriage-related settlement. The recent decline in overall numbers suggests some decrease in popularity of transnational marriages, but the very marked drop in numbers of spouses granted settlement in 2004-5 is likely to be the combined result of the extension of the probationary period with disruption to consular services in Pakistan in the wake of 9/11.

The literature on Bangladeshi marriage-related migration is much more limited, but suggests similarities with the Pakistani case. Since the 1980s, migration to Britain from Bangladesh has predominantly been through marriage into the settled British Bengali community (Gardner 2006, Gardner and Shukur 1994). These transnational marriages, which are often arranged, are made possible through existing transnational kinship ties and (anecdotally) a significant portion may be cousin marriages (Gardner 1995, 2006).

The Sri Lankan case is exceptional in the region, thanks to the importance of refugee migration. From the 1950s, growing inter-ethnic tensions spurred the migration of Tamils to the UK, particularly as students. From 1983, civil war between government and the LTTE provoked large refugee movements to S. India, the

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<sup>12</sup> Throughout this article, data on settlement category is taken from the aforementioned 2008 Home Office immigration statistics.



UK, and elsewhere (Van Hear 2006). Asylum applications constitute most Sri Lankan migration to the UK (almost all are Tamils), and approached 4000 in the early 1990s, falling in the mid 1990s but peaking again at over 6000 in 2000 after new offensives, before dropping during a short-lived ceasefire in 2002-04.

Marriage-related migration appears to follow trends of asylum applications, though with a lag of some years. A rise in spousal migration in 2005-06 may correspond to a peak in asylum claims (6395) around 2000, but given the then length of asylum processing time, the lag period may be longer. Evaluations of trends are, however, complicated by the social pressure on men to ensure the marriages of their sisters before their own, 'working for my sisters' to cover dowry and wedding expenses for marriages which may take place within Sri Lanka or the diaspora (Lindley and Van Hear 2007, Fuglerud 1999). Hence a male refugee may arrange the marriage of a sister within the UK or elsewhere, and then perhaps also himself marry transnationally. Many Sri Lankan marriages are arranged, sometimes through brokers of various kinds. Marriage has also become one common route of moving people out of danger in Sri Lanka, although this motivation intersects with traditional marriage practices. Tamils favour marriage to close relatives where possible, and preferably successive cousin marriage, so property exchanged at marriage remains within the extended family. Against this background, dowries traditionally circulate within local family networks, but partners with permanent residence abroad request higher dowry payments, so dowries now circulate transnationally (Fuglerud 1999).

### *East Asia*

#### **Figure 5 here**

Research on marriage-related migration within the East Asian region has been expanding in volume in recent years (e.g. Constable 2005, Piper & Roces 2003) but this expansion has not been reflected in work on Britain. The following section is thus reliant to a significant degree on research conducted with East Asian migrants elsewhere. Although there is a lack of research, marriage migration does loom large in public perceptions of Thai migrants to the UK (Sims 2008a), providing a further example of the ethnic stereotyping of marriage-related migration.

The Philippines has recently overtaken Bangladesh as the third largest national group in marriage-related settlement. Since 2003, the proportions of husbands entering the UK have increased dramatically, to 67% in 2008, representing a dramatic masculinization from a previous pattern more akin to that of Thailand (below). The literature on marriage-related migration from the Philippines overwhelmingly focuses on marriage between Filipinas and foreign men, facilitated by the growth of international introductions agencies (Constable 2003a), rather than family reunification (for a notable exception see DeJong *et al* 1986). Contemporary global Filipina female labour migration for work as domestic labourers and nurses is well documented. In the UK, the recent international recruitment drive for nurses attracted many Filipina migrants (Buchan 2007, Brush, Sochlaski and Berger 2004, Brush and Sochlaski 2007, Choy 2004), making it likely that the masculinisation of marriage-related migration is largely composed of husbands of migrant women nurses, a suggestion supported by 2008 statistics showing the vast majority of husbands gained

settlement at the same time as their wives. Labour migrants or students may also find Western partners within destination countries (McKay 2003, Nakamatsu 2003), and Constable argues that for Filipinas the relationship between marriage and migration is complex, since they ‘do not only marry to emigrate, they also emigrate in order to achieve the desired goal of marriage’ (2003b: 175; cf. Lauser 2008). Marriage-related migration has not, however, been a focus for research on the Filipino population in the UK.

The recent rise in the numbers of Chinese migrants entering Europe through official channels, particularly family based chain migration (Laczko 2003, Ceccagno 2003),<sup>13</sup> is reflected in the steep rise in Chinese marriage-related settlement depicted in figure 4. Limited research exists on this practice (Lee *et al* 2002), but combined with statistical evidence, and research from other countries, suggests various intersections of marriage and migration. Spouses may follow or accompany labour or student migrants who later settle; single migrants may meet a spouse in the UK; Chinese immigrants may marry transnationally (facilitated by networks of family and friends and the ‘picture bride’ phenomenon); and correspondence marriages occur between Chinese women and Western men (Constable 2003a & b; Cooke 2007, Laczko 2003, Levy and Lieber 2009; Siu 2005; Thuno 2003a & b). It is also possible that the ‘astronaut’ families documented elsewhere of Hong Kong and Taiwanese men who have returned to work in Asia (Ong 1999, Waters 2002) also exist in Britain. Chinese marriage-related migration is highly gendered (84% wives in 2008), and most women gained settlement on the basis of marriage to a settled partner, whilst men often obtain settlement at the same time as migrant wives. The 2008 statistics reveal a large proportion of Chinese dependants granted entry clearance as the dependants of work permit holders and students. Since 2000 China has featured as one of the top ten countries of origin of asylum seekers to the UK, and some of those granted refugee status may bring spouses to join them.

In contrast to the probable diverse constitution of Chinese marriage-related migration, it is likely that most Thai spouses gaining settlement are women marrying non-Thai men, with couple formation facilitated by both introductions agencies and international travel.<sup>14</sup> Thailand is a major holiday destination for British nationals, and 73% of the million-plus British tourists visiting Thailand between 1980 and 1986 were male (Truong 1990: 173-174 in Davidson 1995). The sex tourism industry is part of the attraction for some, and may form part of the background for some transnational relationships, but prostitution in Thailand is reportedly unlike the more commodified, brief exchanges in Europe, and may be more open-ended, involving continued contact, further visits and sending of remittances to Thailand (Davidson 1995:49). Thai migration to Britain is dramatically patterned by this highly gendered form of marriage-related migration (93% of spouses granted settlement in 2008 were women). Between 2003 and 2006, only 19% of Thai

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<sup>13</sup> And irregular migration (Laczko 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Although European research has drawn attention to the variety of Thai female migration for factory work, domestic labour, and sex work, as well as as ‘mail-order’ brides (Mix and Piper 2003).

migrants granted entry clearance to the UK did so as wives or fiancées, rather than as students, workers, or other dependants, but settlements in the category of ‘wife’ make up 55-75% of total grants of UK settlement to Thai nationals. Home Office statistics also show that the majority of Thais naturalising as UK citizens between 1997-2007 did so through marriage, and two-thirds of grants of citizenship to Thai nationals between 2001 and 2006 were on the basis of marriage. As a result of the dominance of female marriage-related migration, 2001 census data shows that 72% of the 16,256 Thai people in the UK were women (Sims 2008a: 2), demonstrating the dramatic effect marriage-related migration can have on the characteristics of an ethnic group.

### *Africa*

#### **Fig 6 here**

Despite the fact that marriage-related migration of Africans to the UK constitutes a significant proportion of marriage-related migration (in 2008 over 12% of grants of spousal settlement issued were to nationals of South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana and Zimbabwe), little research appears to exist on this topic. As van Dijk notes, ‘[T]here is limited literature on the meaning of African marriage systems in a globalizing world ... a lacuna that is remarkable given the increasing transnational nature of the ways in which marriages are arranged in African communities’ (2004: 442).

Nigerians have been migrating to Britain since the colonial era, principally for higher education, but often staying on as highly skilled workers. Europe-bound migration diversified following the economic decline and increasing political tensions in the 1980s (de Hass, 2006). The UK continues to attract relatively highly skilled migrants (cf. Hernandez-Coss *et al.* 2006), particularly health workers (Connell *et al.* 2007, Healy and Oikelome 2007), but also students and increasing numbers of asylum seekers - Nigerians were the fifth largest group of asylum seekers in Europe in 2004 (Carling 2005). The majority of Nigerian migrants to Britain originate from southern parts of the country (Hernandez-Coss *et al.* 2006). Literature on Nigerian migration to the UK is limited, with no direct research on marriage-related migration. In Nigeria, wives conventionally move to live with husbands (Watts 1983), but Reynolds (2006) has argued that cultural expectations of African women’s household responsibilities may drive professional women to migrate to the UK, US, and Canada, so the relatively gender-balanced flow of migrant spouses (43% wives in 2008) may include husbands of such women. As in the Ghanaian case below, Pentecostal churches may play a role in some transnational marriages.

Emigration from Ghana grew sharply from the 1970s in response to economic and political turmoil: initial migration streams were to oil-rich Nigeria, then to other parts of Africa, then in the 1980s to Europe, the US and Canada. This migration was mainly for employment and education, but asylum migration was also prominent, particularly in the 1990s (Van Hear 1998). The majority of arrivals have been men, but

significant numbers of women also migrate, particularly to work in the health sector. Ghanaian spousal settlement is fairly balanced in gendered terms (48% women in 2008). Whilst no research evidence on Britain was located, several types of marriage have been documented for Ghanaian men in the Netherlands, including: formalised relationship with a wife still in Ghana; additional customary marriage; relationships with the Ghanaian woman who 'cooks his food'; and contractual marriages in the host country sometimes involving large sums of money and exploitative relations involving marriage brokers (van Dijk 2004:454) – but the scale of such practices is unknown. Recently-established Pentecostal churches – in Ghana, the UK and elsewhere in Europe – may play a role in the increasing transnationalisation of Ghanaian marriage. Many Ghanaians are attracted to these churches by their international networks and cosmopolitan outlook, and messages of success, prosperity and protection from evil (van Dijk 2004: 442).

Zimbabwean migration to the UK, Europe and North American began in the 1960s. Since the late 1990s, substantial numbers of asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants and students have arrived in Britain. Although there are no precise figures, estimates suggest that there are more than 200,000 Zimbabweans living in the UK (Pasura 2008:89-90). There is some literature on highly skilled Zimbabwean migrant workers in the UK care industry (McGregor 2007, 2008) but little on the relationship between their migration and marriage. Pasura (2008) notes the breakdown of traditional marriages as a result of migration and the development of 'move in' (as opposed to marriage) households in Britain - the latter motivated by desires to regularise immigration status and combat loneliness since the introduction of visa requirements in 2002 limited family reunification. In contrast to the general pattern of dips in numbers in 2004 and 2006, grants of spousal settlement to Zimbabweans rose steadily from 2000 to 2005 with only slight decreases in these years. This relatively stable increase may be related to the substantial volume of asylum applications received from Zimbabweans over the last few years (Zimbabwe has featured as one of the top ten nationalities of asylum seekers since 2000).

Despite the fact that South Africans constitute the fifth largest group concerned, no literature appears to exist on South African marriage-related migration to the UK. The UK is a primary destination for South Africans, and since the late 1990s, such migrants have tended to be skilled professionals, many employed in finance and business (Dodson 2002, Sveinsson & Gumuschian 2008). There has also been significant exchange of young working-holiday makers – although South Africans are not included in the 2008 'Youth Mobility' scheme replacing working holiday visas, which may impact on future settlement trends. The 2001 Census records the majority (90%) of South African migrants to the UK as White, but many have British or EEA passports, or are eligible for UK ancestry visas, making size or demographic profile of South African population in the UK hard to ascertain (Sveinsson & Gumuschian, 2008).

### *USA & Australia*

**Fig 7 here**

Americans constitute the seventh largest group of marriage-related migrants granted settlement but are, like many other White English-speaking migrant groups, rarely mentioned (let alone problematised) in the UK migration literature. Spouses account for approximately half of total grants of settlement issued to US citizens between 2000 and 2008, the majority granted settlement on the basis of marriage, rather than 'at the same time' as their spouse. These figures suggest more 'family formation/reunification' than 'dependant migration', but are not conclusive. At 73% female (2008), this is among the most markedly gendered marriage-related migration flows to the UK. A tendency for women to follow male partners (so-called 'tied' migrants) rather than vice versa has been documented both in the UK and the US, so it is possible that similar processes are at work on an international level. If this is the case, there may be a parallel out migration of British wives joining American husbands overseas.

A similar lack of evidence exists concerning Australian marriage-related migration, although there is more research on other forms of Australian migration. The UK is the most popular destination for Australians, accounting for nearly 21% of all Australian emigrants in 1996-2006 (Hugo 2006: 108). An estimated 183,000 Australians (nearly 24% of the total Australian diaspora) live in the UK or Ireland, with the majority in London (Fullilove & Flutter 2004: 15-6, Hugo 2006: 109). Some may hold British passports or entitlement to Ancestry visas. Migration to the UK (e.g. working holiday) is often considered a 'rite of passage' - the 'big OE' (overseas experience) (Conradson, 2009, Hugo, 2006). As with migration from other more developed countries, this movement is 'at times only loosely related to economic factors' (Conradson and Latham 2005: 289). Most Australian expatriates are aged 25-44, relatively highly skilled and concentrated in high demand occupations (Fullilove and Flutter 2004: 13). In the early 2000s, the popularity of the US appears to have increased relative to the UK (ibid. p.18), consistent with fewer grants of spousal settlement after 2003. Hence, Australian marriage-related migration to the UK may be a combination of spouses travelling with work permit holders, and marriage between Australian nationals and UK citizens or settled migrants. Given the volume of young people from Australia spending time in the UK, and vice versa, is likely that some such relationships result from travel/working holidays in either direction.

### *Turkey*

#### **Fig 8 here**

Sitting at the edge of Europe, labour migration from Turkey since the 1960s has resulted in large and well-studied ethnic populations in many European countries, but the small Turkish population in Britain is the focus of less research. The European literature documents an initial largely male Turkish migrant labour force, followed by female marriage migration, although contemporary Turkish spousal migration to Britain (and other European countries – Beck-Gernsheim 2007) demonstrates a fairly even gender balance. Cultures of migration exist between particular destinations and areas of origin in Turkey, facilitated by transnational networks and family obligations, and recent increases in the Turkish populations in Europe have largely resulted from

marriages between migrants and the 1.5 or second generation and spouses from Turkey (Böcker 1994, Lievens 1999, Schoenmaeckers, Lodewijckx and Gadeyne 1999, Timmerman 2006, 2008; Timmerman and Wets 2009, Timmerman, Lodewyckx and Wets 2009). If Turkey were to join the EU, opening up more routes to legal migration, the impact on marriage-related migration would provide a fascinating test-case for the role of immigration considerations in the volume of transnational marriages.

### ***Discussion***

Whilst research on marriage-related migration is patchy and limited, available governmental statistics also suffer from significant limitations. The new UKBA Migrant Survey may provide additional material on the UK context, but a far greater range of statistical information relevant to marriage-related migration is available in some other countries, giving rise to fascinating work on topics including the trajectories of marriage-related migrants in Australia (Khoo 2003), transnational marriage fields in Sweden (Niedomysl *et al* 2010), and divorce among transnationally married couples in Denmark (Liversage forthcoming). In Britain, fundamental issues arise in the task of simply enumerating flows of marriage-related migration. The expansion of the EEA has reduced the number of countries from which visas are required, and therefore the coverage of spousal immigration and settlement statistics. Partial statistics may be available from other sources, but do not give a full picture of how spousal migration may continue, increase, or change character under new political conditions. Moreover, the nationality of migrants may not reflect their full migration trajectory. Numbers of Somalian spousal migrants in the settlement figures appear low, for example, but here is anecdotal evidence that some Somali refugees gain residency or citizenship elsewhere before onward migration through marriage to Britain (Lindley & Van Hear 2007). The true extent of Somali marriage-related migration to Britain is thus unclear. The EC free movement directive (2004/38) which allows spouses to accompany EC exercising their right to free movement between member states (as famously exemplified in the ‘Surinder Singh’ case of a British citizen moving to another European country to obtain previously denied spousal migration, before returning with his wife to live in Britain) further complicates the statistical picture - as Beck-Gernsheim notes, the categories here are ‘fuzzy’ (2007: 273-4). Finally, no evidence is available on the volume of marriage-related *emigration* from Britain.

Such limitations aside, this article provides a more comprehensive picture of marriage-related migration patterns for the UK, and of the relevant literature, than has hitherto been available. Although it suggests that trends in this type of migration are difficult to analyse or predict, given the multiplicity of sources and influences, and the variation in time lags between other forms of migration and subsequent spousal settlement, it clearly demonstrates the wide range of marriage practices and relationships with other forms of migration involved in marriage-related migration to Britain. These range from logics of social mobility maximisation in South Asian arranged marriages, to opportunities presented by travel and communication

technologies in the ‘globalisation of marriage fields’ (Niedomysl *et al* 2010), and the marital diasporas which may eventually result from conflict-related refugee dispersal. It is also clear that marriage-related migration may play a significant role in shaping the characteristics of ethnic groups in Britain, supporting the case made recently by Thomas Cooke that ‘family migration should move front and centre’ in migration research (2008: 262).

Given the confines of a journal article, however, this portrait is necessarily incomplete, covering only national groups selected for their numerical prominence in the immigration statistics. Nevertheless, it also demonstrates that the overwhelming focus on South Asia in the research on marriage-related migration to Britain has been at the expense of a broader understanding of this type of migration, and that there is an urgent need to expand attention to encompass other national/ethnic groups. Chinese, Filipino, American and African groups emerge as particularly numerically significant but understudied populations of marriage-related migrants. As the case of the masculinization of spousal migration from the Philippines clearly demonstrates, marriage-related migration is, like other migration flows, dynamic in both volume and character, presenting challenges for researchers and policy makers attempting to keep abreast of the situation. This dynamism undermines conventional understandings of the principle characteristics and issues of marriage-related migration to Britain, where policy debate has focussed on South Asian groups and forced marriage, whilst public interest in ‘mail order brides’ from other ethnic groups has been evinced by a flurry of television documentaries. In contrast, the complex and dynamic picture presented here demonstrates the considerable variation in the intersections of marriage and migration can co-exist both between and with one national/ethnic groups. In this context, attempts to use nationality as a proxy for different forms of marriage migration (cf. Khoo 2001) are likely to be both inaccurate, and prone to reliance on stereotype.

Reviewing the evidence on marriage-related migration with this broader vision (in both ethnic and temporal terms) allows us to comment on British regulation of this form of immigration – long recognised as a prime challenge for migration regulation given Human Rights declarations and European legislation on migrants’ rights to marry and to family life. The fact that spousal settlement, although still increasing, has not kept pace with increases in other forms of migrant settlement suggests that successive new restrictions on marriage-related migration may have had some impact – although such effects are hard to disentangle from the effects of EU expansion.

It is also clear, however, that changes in immigration regulations (whether or not directed at family migration) can have unforeseen consequences for marriage-related migration, and sometimes negative impacts on migrants and their families. Qualitative research on the effects of 1962 Commonwealth immigration restrictions documents their part in transforming previously predominantly male, temporary/circular migration from Pakistan into family reunification and settlement, by reducing alternative entry routes, and opportunities for circular migration (e.g. Shaw 2000: 30-7). The recent raising of the minimum age for both migrant and sponsoring spouses to 21 was portrayed as combating coerced marriages

of the young, but other research raises the fear that young people may still be forced into marriage, but kept abroad until they reach the age at which they can sponsor their spouse (Hester *et al* 2008), whilst young couples whose marriages were demonstrably not contracted under duress complained at enforced separation.<sup>15</sup> Recent Danish research has also traced unintended effects of the new restrictions on spousal migration (which have been cited approvingly in British policy consultation documents). Increased minimum ages, a ‘combined attachment’ regulation requiring couples demonstrate greater ties to Denmark than to the country of residence of the other spouse, and other restrictions, may have led some to postpone rather than avoid transnational marriage; to an increase in unregulated religious marriages; and created new communities of cross-border marital commuters in neighbouring Sweden where spousal immigration requirements are more lenient (Schmidt *et al.* 2009). If Britain follows its European neighbours in tightening controls on marriage-related migration, the lack of a more complete and balanced evidence base on this diverse form of immigration may increase the risk of further unforeseen consequences resulting from new legislation. Substantial new empirical research in this numerically important and dynamic field is thus urgently needed.

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<sup>15</sup> In media coverage of a joint test case concerning Amber & Diego Aguilar, and Shakira Bibi and Suhayl Mohammed, it was noticeable that the story was illustrated with pictures of the White rather than the Asian couple.



## Appendix: Changes to Spousal Migration Legislation

1980	Conservative government introduces 'Primary Purpose Rule' (requirement to prove that immigration was not the primary purpose of a marriage).
1992	Surinder Singh Case in European Court of Justice: gives family members rights to accompany EEA nationals moving within EEA.
1997	New Labour government abolishes Primary Purpose Rule.
2000	Third country nationals (non-EEA) can stay in UK on basis of marriage to UK/EEA national or permanent resident (provisos of Immigration Rules and Immigration Regulations 2000).
2001	Legal duty on Registrars to report suspicion of marriages of convenience for immigration purposes.
2003	Probationary period before settlement can be granted to those entering as spouses increased from one to two years. Age at which a person may act as sponsor for a marriage visa raised from 16 to 18.
2004	Age at which a person may enter the UK as spouse raised from 16 to 18.
2005	Introduction of Certificates of Approval (CoA) requirement for any marriage involving non-EEA nationals subject to immigration control and UK citizens. The measure was intended to prevent marriages of convenience for immigration purposes, but does not apply to those marrying in Anglican church in England and Wales.
2006	The Immigration (EEA) Regulations 2006 transpose the UK's obligations under European Community law (via the Free Movement Directive 2004/38 EC) into domestic legislation. New rights of residence were created including the ability of EEA nationals and their family members to acquire permanent residence under European law for the first time. Qualification period for grants of settlement to those in employment related categories increased from 4 to 5 years. High Court judgement that CoA scheme was disproportionate and unlawfully interfered with Article 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Surinder Singh European Court of Justice ruling (on family members of EEA nationals) incorporated into British immigration regulations
2007	Adults aged over 18 but under 65 who apply for settlement need to provide evidence that they have passed either the Life in the UK test or an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course. CoA guidance changed to allowed applicants without valid leave to enter or remain (ie. irregular migrants) to apply for a COA.
2008	House of Lords ruling that CoA scheme is incompatible with EHCR. Age at which person can enter the country as a spouse raised from 18 to 21 [for both partners].
2009	Suspension of fee for CoA to comply with House of Lords ruling.
2010	New restrictions on students and their dependants working. Dependants are only allowed to work if the main applicant is pursuing study at degree level or above. Students on courses less than 6 months long are not allowed to bring in dependants. Pre-entry basic English language requirement for spousal immigrants introduced (with exceptions for some majority English speaking countries)
2011	CoA scheme abolished. UK Border Agency publishes policy consultation on new restrictions to family migration.

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Figure 1

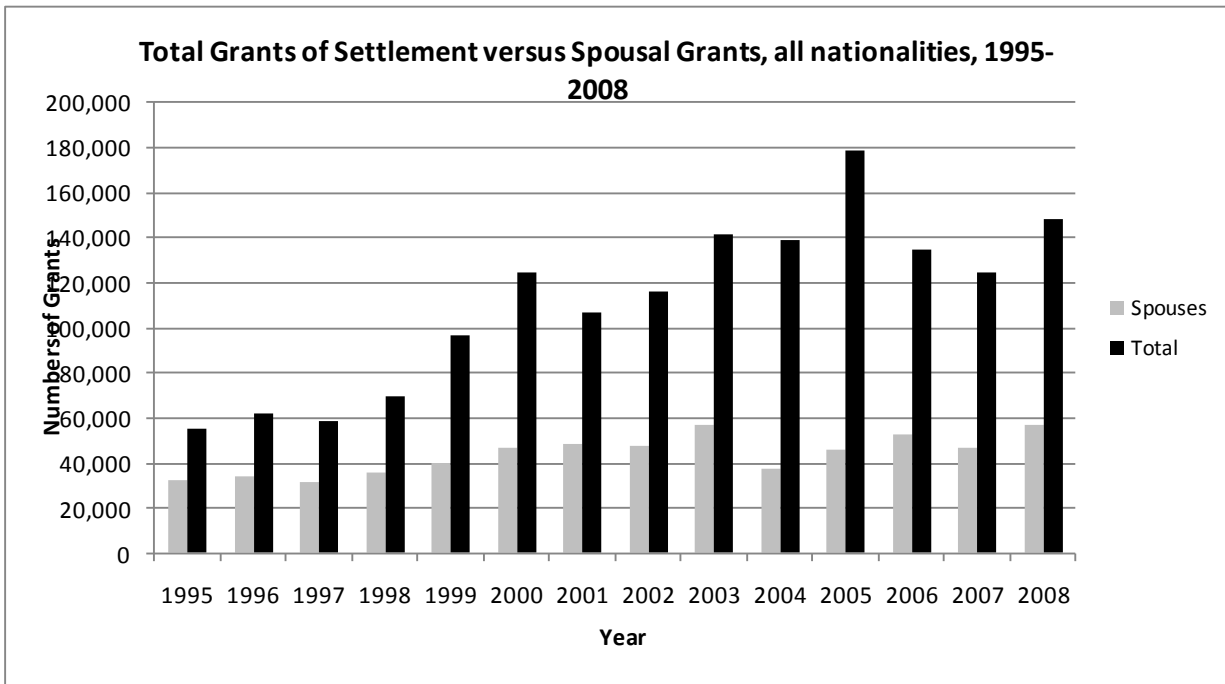
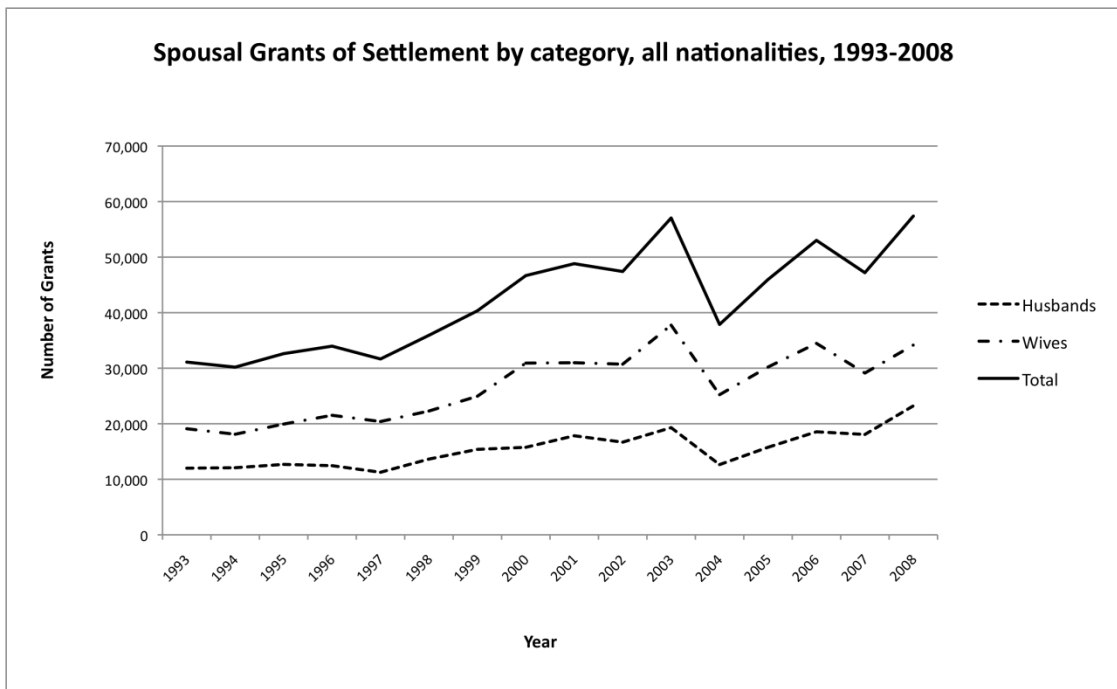


Figure 2



**Figure 3**

<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Grants of settlement, 2008</b>
India	8860
Pakistan	7050
Philippines	3220
Bangladesh	2880
South Africa	2520
China	2455
USA	1875
Nigeria	1840
Turkey	1735
Ghana	1520
Thailand	1195
Zimbabwe	1175
Australia	1170
Sri Lanka	1130

Figure 4

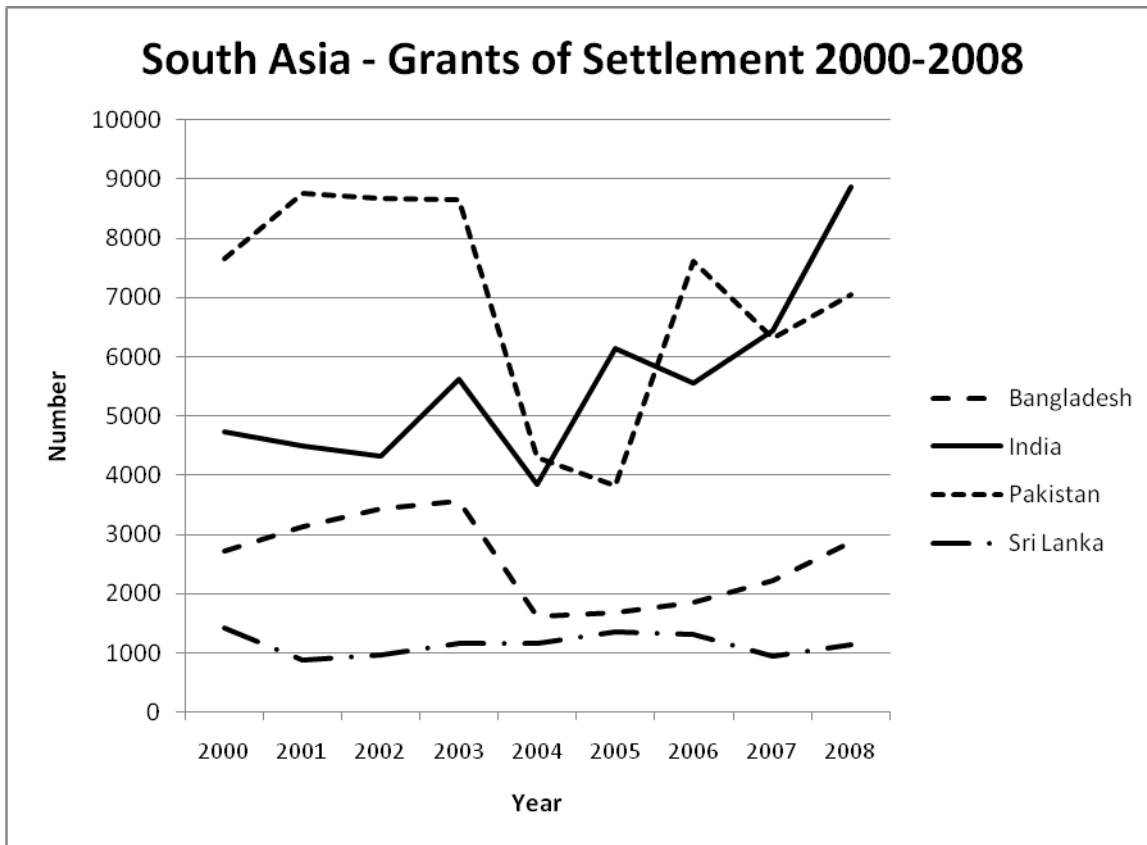


Figure 5

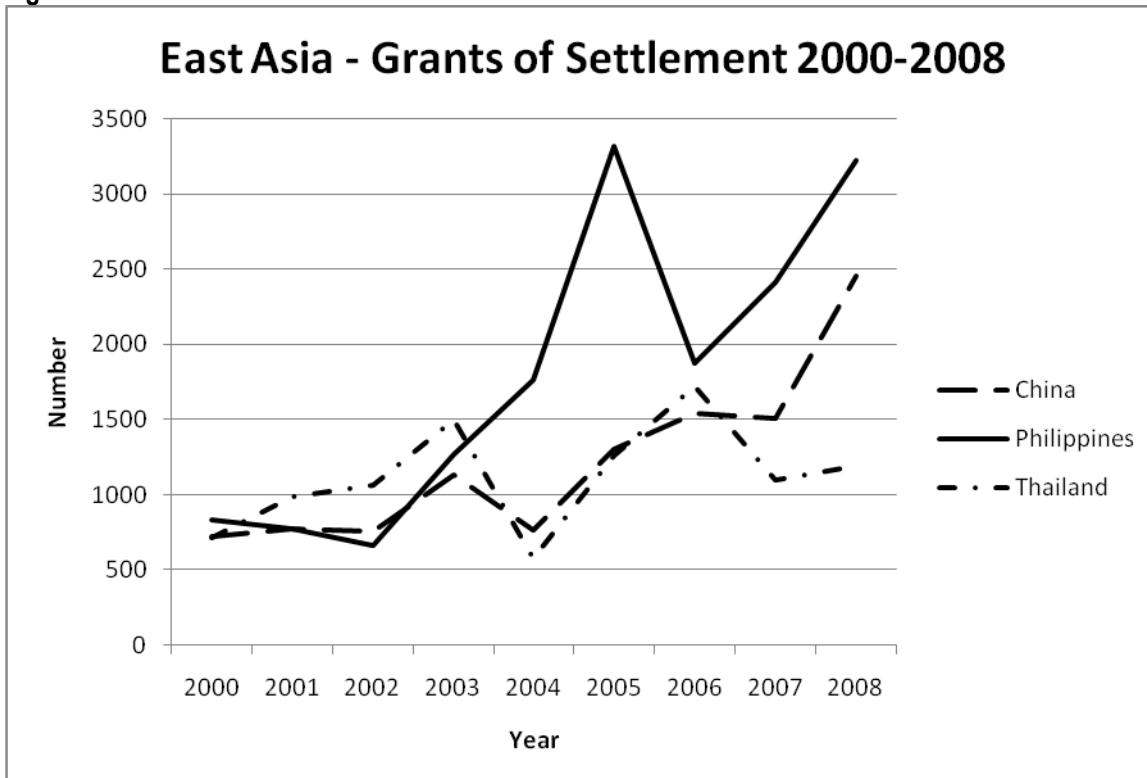


Figure 6

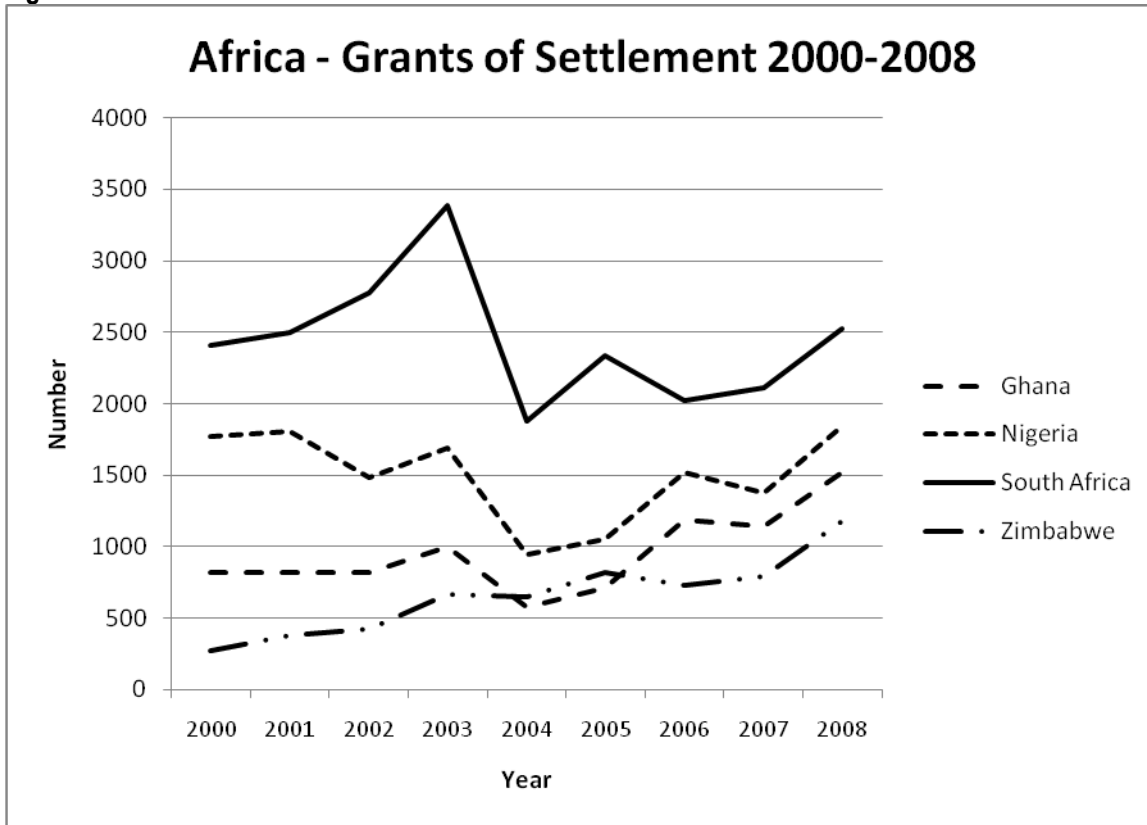


Figure 7

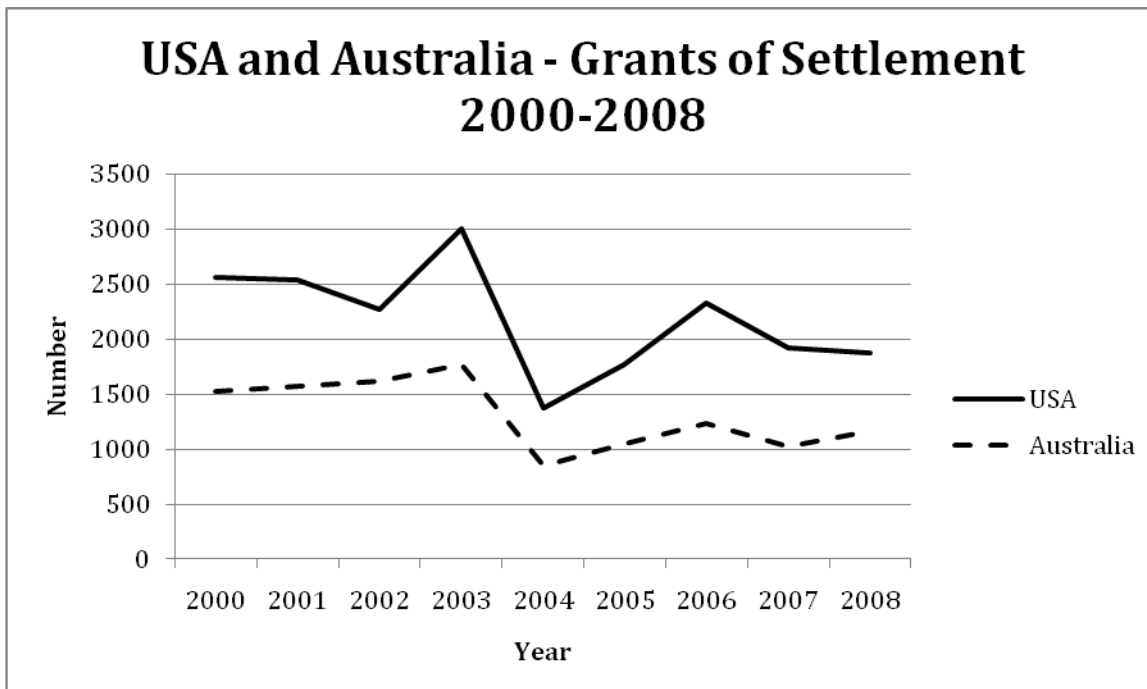


Figure 8

