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UNION FORMATION AND ASSORTATIVE MATING OF FOREIGN POPULATION IN SPAIN

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The dramatic growth of international immigration in Spain during the 90s has considerably increased the number of foreigners and of foreign-born population, changing Spain into an immigration country with one of the highest percentages of population with foreign citizenship in Europe. According to the Spanish Population Register, 3.671.547 people of foreign citizenship were living in Spain at the beginning of 2005, which represents 8,4% of the total population, while those born abroad were equivalent to 9,9% of the total. This increase in the number of foreign population has been accompanied by a significant growth of those events related to family formation amongst foreigners, including marriages and consensual unions. Between 1990 and 2003 the number of marriages concerning foreigners increased from 4% to 12% of the total, reaching 25.618 in 2003. This increase in the number of unions reflects the maturity of the immigration process and its impact upon Spanish marriage markets, which in turn is strongly related to settlement and family-forming migration. The settlement of the oldest immigrants, such as Moroccans, entails an active participation in marriage markets, especially from those young Moroccans already born in Spain who are now at the age of union formation. Besides, family-forming migration explains most of the unions involving the more recent flows arrived during the migration boom of the beginning of the XXIst century, such as Ecuadorians and Colombians.

The increase of the foreigners unions has also entailed important changes in the composition by citizenship of those unions. In 1990, 8,6% of those marriages concerned two foreigners. In 2003, during the migration boom in Spain, this amount increases to 26,5%. Nevertheless, the relative decrease of the intermarriage between foreigners and Spaniards doesn't mean an absolute decrease. On the contrary, the number of marriages between Spaniards and foreigners has doubled, increasing from 7.771 to 18.825 between 1990 and 2003. Besides, we observe important differences by sex and national origin of foreign partners in the composition of their unions, which points to the existence of different intermarriage patterns between men and women, and nationalities. Firstly, the proportion of intermarriage differs by national origin and the length of the time since residing in Spain. Secondly, the involvement of male and female foreigners in the marriage market has evolved differently: in 1990 56,6% of intermarrying marriages concerned a foreign male and a Spanish female; in 2003 the relation is inverse, 59,5% of intermarrying marriages concern a foreign female and a Spanish male, which means that the percentage of foreign women intermarrying has become higher than that of foreign men.

The data used in this research come from the Spanish 2001 5% sample of census microdata. Compared to marriage data from vital statistics, census data have three clear advantages: first, consensual unions can also be considered into the analysis together with formal unions (marriages); second, censuses do capture all unions regardless of their place of formation, thus, it allows to include those couples married abroad but living in Spain in 2001 (considering that we are dealing with foreign population, excluding couples married abroad would have biased our results); and, third, with census microdata we can still consider the union as our main unit of analysis and compare partner's characteristics on the basis of all their individual attributes available in the sample, which are significantly more than those usually captured by the vital statistics. We combine sex, place of birth, citizenship, educational attainment, and marital status to establish a classification of unions. Regarding place of birth and citizenship, we will focus exclusively on those couples having at least one partner with the following national origin: Morocco, Colombia, Ecuador, Great Britain, Romania and Spain, which are the most numerous origins in the 5% sample.

Based on these data, we first explore the relationship between national origin and type of union – formal or consensual - to test, for instance, whether or not the prevalence of living in consensual union differs according to the national origin of the partners. Are consensual unions more common among those national origins in whose country of origin this type of union is quite extended, as is the case for some Latin-American countries? Is living in a consensual union for mixed-origin couples a feasible strategy to live as a couple without the need to formalize a socially inconvenient union?

Second, in a context of decreasing marriage rates and delayed marriage due to postponement of leaving parental home, we examine to what extent union formation patterns of foreign population in Spain differ from those of Spanish born once educational attainment and other characteristics are taken into account. In essence, we aim at answering the following question: How union formation patterns of foreigners contrast to Spanish-born population patterns?

Third, we look into foreign-born population strategies of entering the marriage market on account of their individual characteristics. What are the most remarkable dimensions that arise from these strategies? How does educational assortative mating interact with ethnic intermarriage? And, finally, to what extent assortative mating patterns do reflect broader patterns of assimilation? By answering all these questions, we aim at increasing the knowledge about marriage and assortative mating patterns of foreign population, because, undoubtedly, they will have an impact on family formation and the current and future social structure of Spain.