

# Gender Differences between Mexican Migration to the United States and Paraguayan Migration to Argentina

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This article deals with the issue of gender and migration in a comparative manner. It aims at identifying factors that affect the gender composition of migratory streams, including family formation and children. It compares two contrasting streams: Mexican migration to the United States, which has traditionally been male-dominated; and Paraguayan migration to Argentina, which comprises a larger proportion of women with patterns of migration relatively similar to those of their male counterparts. Using quantitative information from the Mexican Migration Project and the Paraguayan Migration Survey, and qualitative in-depth interviews, the authors examine differences in patterns of migration and the factors associated with them. The article concludes that differences are due mainly to historical traits in the initiation of the flows, the economic and social role of women in each sending country, migration policies and border controls, and the contexts of reception (resource opportunities).

*Keywords:* family and international migration; gender and international migration

**I**n this study, we consider the issue of gender and migration in Latin America by comparing patterns of female migration in two different migratory systems: North America and the Southern Cone. Specifically, we examine Mexican migration to the United States and Paraguayan

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migration to Argentina. Migration from Mexico has traditionally been dominated by males, who constitute a greater portion not only of the migrant flow but also of the migrant stock residing in the United States. Many scholars have noted this distinctively gendered pattern of migration and have pointed out a number of factors that determine the differential migratory propensity among men and women: the effect of male-dominated guest-worker programs in initiating the flows; the relevance of cultural norms—in particular, role expectations and gender socialization—that privilege males; the effect of different resource opportunities open to men and women; and the influence of gender barriers and gendered risks.

In the case of Paraguayan migration to Argentina, the sex composition of both the flow and stock suggests a propensity to migrate that is similar for men and women. Paraguayan women are not only more likely to migrate than their Mexican counterparts but are also more likely to undertake movement independently. In contrast to the case of Mexico–U.S. migration, however, little is known about which factors affect gender patterns of migration among Paraguayans. Our main purpose here is to analyze, in a comparative manner, broad differences in gendered patterns of migration in these two cases.

We start with a description of each country's sociohistorical context to understand the distinct cultural roots of the different patterns of male and female migration that have emerged in each place. We then empirically describe in some detail sex differences in international migration in Mexico and Paraguay, first contrasting the representation of females in migration stocks and flows to understand male-female differences in the propensity to migrate and then comparing cumulative age-specific first migration probabilities for men and women in the two streams. We then move on to assess the independent versus associational nature of female migration in Mexico and Paraguay and the effects of family-related traits on the probability of first migration by spouses. Finally, to build a more comprehensive understanding of these diverse patterns, we present ethnographic data from in-depth interviews conducted among Paraguayan women in Buenos Aires. These data reveal how the women originally decided to migrate, under what circumstances they moved, and what kind of resources (notably social networks) they could count on. Their stories illustrate the migratory decisions and underlying motivations of Paraguayan women.

## Gender and Migration in Comparative Perspective

The two migratory flows considered in this article share some particularities. First, they are both long-standing traditions in the sense that Mexicans and Paraguayans have been migrating to the United States and Argentina, respectively, for several decades, in both cases responding to economic circumstances in both sending and receiving areas. In both cases the flows occur between neighboring countries and are largely unidirectional, going overwhelmingly to one particular destination: the United States and Argentina, respectively. Beyond these similarities, however, these migratory streams differ in significant ways, as for

example in the sizes of the Mexican and Paraguayan economies and in the relative economic gap between sending and receiving countries.<sup>1</sup>

Crude measures of the overall proportion of migrants indicate that the propensity of Mexicans to emigrate is higher than that of Paraguayans, since about 10 percent of the Mexican population resides in the United States<sup>2</sup> compared with just 6 percent of Paraguayans residing in Argentina.<sup>3</sup> Data from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP)<sup>4</sup> and the Paraguayan Migration Survey (PMS)<sup>5</sup> (part of the Latin American Migration Project, or LAMP) point to a similar difference. Among all persons surveyed in Mexico, 13.4 percent report having migrated to the United States at least once; among those surveyed in Paraguay, the figure is 10.8 percent.<sup>6</sup>

The most significant cross-national differences are found with respect to male and female patterns of migration. Whereas migration propensities are very different for Mexican males and females, among Paraguayans they are relatively similar. As documented in more detail below, Paraguayan women are significantly more likely to migrate than Mexican women, whereas Mexican men are much more prone to migrate than those from Paraguay.

Several reasons explain sex differences between these two migration streams, such as the role of the state in initiating and regulating migration (through guest-worker programs, legal residence requirements, and border enforcement), the nature and characteristics of labor markets (prevailing wages and employment rates), undocumented migrants' access to public goods and services (education and health services), and cultural contrasts between origin and destination (common versus different language and cultural heritage). Beyond these explanations, a key factor in understanding sex differences in migratory patterns is cultural: the gender-family system that prevails in each country and the role it specifies for women in society.

Women have traditionally played a more central role in the Paraguayan economy. In her analysis, Potthast (1998) shows that during the nineteenth century Paraguay had a segmented agrarian structure in which a subsistence economy coexisted with an export-oriented economy. The expansion of export-oriented agriculture had a significant effect on the organization of production and the sexual division of agrarian labor. In pre-Hispanic times, women were in charge of subsistence cultivation while men devoted their time to hunting and fishing. When export-oriented agriculture developed, women remained in charge of household production, while men redefined their roles and began selling their labor to newly created commercial farms. Many men had to migrate for long periods, leaving all household responsibilities and the cultivation of crops in the hands of women. As a result, women not only assumed control over activities in the domestic and subsistence spheres but also became active in developing commercial endeavors and offering personal services. For example, women were central in the commercialization of agricultural crops, as well as in cigar and textile production. They also began to sell their labor as domestic servants in towns and cities, so their representation in cities consequently grew.

Before the War of the Triple Alliance with Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay (1864-1870), about half of all households were female-headed, many by never-married

women since births out of wedlock and extended households were common. After massive male mortality during the war, the matrifocal pattern of Paraguayan society intensified under an imbalanced sex ratio that forced women to undertake all sorts of work. Female-headed households continued to be significant, and the number of illegitimate children grew. Potthast (1998) argues that while these historical processes did not engender a society or culture centered on women, they did create a situation in which women, particularly mothers, were the only stable factor in the life of families (with most domestic units being centered around women) and in which women played a central role in the economy.<sup>7</sup> Today, even though the demographic situation has changed, women still play a significant role in the peasant economy, though not necessarily a privileged one. Recent estimates indicate that whereas women constitute only 20 percent of all household heads, they represent 47 percent of heads of poor rural households (Heikel 2004).

Mexico underwent a much different path of economic development throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and women came to play a more subordinate role in both the family and the economy. On one hand, inward-looking industrialization and concomitant urbanization generated increased labor opportunities for women (especially young and single women). However, at the same time, these forces also contributed to the separation of private and public spheres, with the relegation of women to the former. Social expectations and cultural norms came to restrict women to reproductive and domestic activities within the home (de Barbieri 1984; Benería and Roldán 1987). Patriarchal attitudes and a gendered division of labor have persisted to the present, though not all contemporary Mexican families are characterized by extreme patriarchy (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).<sup>8</sup>

In addition to differences in gender relations and female social roles, there are other significant features to be considered in accounting for sex differences in migration patterns between Mexico and Paraguay. One relates to the origin of the flows. Mexican migration began with active recruitment from the United States focused initially on the agricultural sector, with the resulting flow of farm workers dominated overwhelmingly by men (Donato 1993; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Cerrutti and Massey 2004; Feliciano 2008; Escobar Latapí et al. 1998). The fact that Mexican migration was biased toward men is clear from the MMP data. Women constitute only about 9 percent of those who migrated before 1960. Although their representation increases thereafter (Cornelius 1990), the share of women remains relatively stable and low between 1960 and 1985, at about 28 percent. The highest proportion of women among migrants was observed between 1985 and 1995, when women constituted around one-third of the flow, but that proportion decreased later.<sup>9</sup>

Although agricultural labor initially attracted Paraguayans to the northeast region of Argentina, migration was never organized and promoted by the government but rather developed in a more spontaneous and erratic manner. In addition, political turmoil in Paraguay, especially during the Chaco War (1936) and Civil War (1947), promoted migration that was more diverse with respect to social

background. Even when the migration was confined mainly to the northeast provinces of Argentina, it was not significantly biased toward men. Data from the 1947 census indicate that 47.6 percent of Paraguayan migrants living in Argentina were women, and estimates from the LAMP's PMS show that women constituted about one-quarter of those who migrated before 1960. Later on, as Argentina's regional agrarian economies entered into crisis, Buenos Aires began to attract a growing number of migrants, and the relative number of women significantly increased (Rivarola, Galeano, and Fogel 1979). During the 1960s and 1970s, Buenos Aires became the preferred place of destination for Paraguayan migrants.

Men and women decided to migrate there to pursue low-skilled jobs in construction, manufacturing, and personal services that were being created under the development model of import substitution industrialization (ISI) (see Marshall and Orlansky 1981). Throughout this period, the relative number of Paraguayan women within migrant streams—and consequently within the stock of migrants in Argentina—grew. By 1960, half of all Paraguayans residing in Argentina (49.6 percent) were women (Marcogliese 2005), who constituted 38.4 percent of the 1960 through 1975 migrant cohorts. Women's representation continued to grow in later years, reaching 53.7 percent of the 1976 through 1989 cohorts and 54.2 percent of more recent arrivals (1990 onward).<sup>10</sup>

In the period of ISI, migration from neighboring countries around Argentina increased even as internal migration grew to a peak, with similar factors fueling both migratory streams. Nonetheless, the continuous flow of migrants to Argentina stemmed not only from job creation and labor shortages in Argentina but also, and prominently, from economic stagnation in Paraguay. Indeed, the process of Paraguayan urbanization has been one of the slowest in Latin America. Between 1950 and 1970, the proportion living in urban areas grew only from 34.6 to 37.4 percent, and today it stands at just 56.7 percent. The lack of industrial development and the relatively small size of the service sector explain the slow expansion of cities (Galeano 1982).

From the end of the 1970s onward, the consolidation of a new agrarian entrepreneurial structure in Paraguay was accompanied by a decline in the peasant economy. Emigration from Paraguay was fueled by rural population growth in the small-holding sector and increased land values (Galeano and Morínigo 1982). Migration—both internal and international—became a frequent coping strategy for impoverished rural dwellers, and given the importance of women as earners and producers in the rural economy, female migration was not discouraged and was often promoted.

Besides these other historical factors shaping the nature and characteristics of migration flows, there is one more salient reason for the greater acceptability of female migration and the higher propensity of women to migrate: the barriers to border crossing and the associated risks of being undocumented are much lower for Paraguayans migrating to Argentina than for Mexicans trying to enter the United States. Curran and Rivero-Fuentes (2003) argue that owing to gender socialization and greater sexual vulnerability, Mexican women are subject to greater social control and more elevated risks in the course of undocumented migration

and are, thus, much less likely to move independently outside of the company of male family members. In an era of tightening border controls, crossing into the United States without authorization has become costly, dangerous, and even life-threatening.

The situation is very different for Paraguayan women, since the borders between Argentina and Paraguay have traditionally been quite permeable. People from Paraguay as well as other bordering countries are generally able to enter Argentina without major problems.<sup>11</sup> Compared to U.S. ports of entry, Argentine ports of entry are considerably less controlled, and the consequences of and penalties for being an undocumented migrant in Argentina are much lower. As a consequence, movement between Paraguay and Argentina has historically been easier, cheaper, and less risky than between Mexico and the United States. For Paraguayan women it is not particularly dangerous to cross the border as a tourist and remain in Argentina as an undocumented migrant. Women's decisions about whether to move independently or with other family members are therefore less affected by fears of suffering abuses while crossing or being deported, which are prevalent in the minds of Mexican women contemplating a trip to the United States.

Nonetheless, once in Argentina, being undocumented prevents migrants from obtaining formal-sector jobs, but holding informal jobs is common for low-skilled natives as well as foreigners, in contrast to the situation in more developed labor markets. Even though migrants are overrepresented in the informal sector, the vast majority of informal workers are still native, and within the informal sector, average earnings are similar for natives and migrants (Cerrutti and Maguid 2007). At present, in Argentina, four in ten Paraguayan men work in construction and six in ten Paraguayan women work in domestic services. Even though both sectors are very sensitive to economic cycles, they have traditionally constituted easy points of entry to the labor market for new male and female migrants.

In addition, by law, undocumented migrants in Argentina have the right to use publicly provided health and educational services. As a result of these contrasting conditions in the United States and Argentina, men have traditionally dominated the Mexico–U.S. migration while women have played a distinctly secondary role, whereas women have played a much more central role in Paraguayan migration to Argentina. We now consider these differences in a more systematic manner.

## Data and Methods

For this analysis, we employed data from a variety of sources, including quantitative data from population censuses and from binational surveys done by the MMP and the PMS, as well as in-depth interviews conducted with Paraguayan migrant men and women. The MMP and the PMS yield comparable data as the surveys shared a similar research design that involved data collection at places

of both origin and destination. The PMS randomly sampled six hundred households in four Paraguayan districts (Carapeguá, San Roque González, Paraguairí, and Piribebuy). Data were gathered in two stages—between 1999 and 2000 in Carapeguá and San Roque González, and in 2003 in Paraguairí and Piribebuy. These samples were complemented with a smaller purposive sample of Paraguayan migrants originating in the same districts but residing in Argentina (ninety cases).

The communities in Paraguay include both urban and rural populations. The urban population corresponds to respondents interviewed in town centers with higher population densities, more commercial activity, and better transportation. Rural areas are farther out from these centers, and access is limited by the poor quality of mainly dirt roads. Given that Paraguay is a bilingual society, trained assistants fluent in both Guaraní and Spanish conducted the interviews. As with the MMP, they gathered information on all household members and administered a yearly life-history inventory to record retrospective data on the migration, employment, and family histories of household heads and spouses. Additional components of the survey enumerated economic resources available to the household, such as housing, land, and businesses, and also the prevalence of migration within the family. The survey collected information about first, last, and additional migration trips for all household members. Migration information and place of residence were also collected for the immediate family of the household heads and spouses, such as parents, siblings, and other relatives.

For the analysis presented here, we employed both the full data sets, with information on all household members, and a more restricted analysis focused only on women who were heads of households or spouses. We described gendered patterns of migration by taking into account sex composition of migrant stocks and flows over time and the percentage of women among Mexican and Paraguayan migrants. To capture the differential propensity to migrate, we estimated cumulative age-specific first-migration probabilities separately for all Mexican and Paraguayan men and women.<sup>12</sup> To examine the independent or associational character of female first migration, we conducted a relatively simple multivariate analysis. Based on retrospective information in the survey, we estimated discrete-time event history models to identify the determinants of first migration. In these models, each person-year of exposure is treated as a separate observation, and the dependent variable is whether a first international trip occurred in that year. The estimates refer only to women who were heads or spouses at the time of the survey, since it is only for them that we have information on conjugal history and number of children.<sup>13</sup>

The discrete-time models were estimated using logistic regression models in which explanatory variables are all time-varying covariates. The independent variables include age, education, and marital status. We also included a variable to measure whether a woman's husband or partner was in the country of origin or destination in the prior year. While we initially wanted to test the independent effect of having children, we found that among both Mexican and Paraguayan

spouses, being in a union (either married or consensual) and having children were tightly correlated. In the vast majority of years women spent outside of a union they remained childless, whereas during years spent in marriage or cohabitation they have children. Only a tiny minority had a child outside of either a formal or informal union.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, to understand gender differences in migration better, we drew on ethnographic data gathered from Paraguayan migrants in Argentina. Specifically, we used information collected in twenty in-depth interviews of female and male migrants to reconstruct the decision-making process they underwent in choosing to migrate to Argentina, focusing on the main migratory reasons, the role of migrant networks, and the nature of relationships with origin communities.<sup>15</sup> In selecting these cases, we purposely sought variation in migrants' ages and periods of arrival in Argentina. In an effort to avoid selection biases, interviews were collected from people who did not know each other and were embedded in different migrant networks.

## Patterns of Male and Female Migration

Although the overall propensity to migrate is slightly higher in Mexico than in Paraguay, the two countries exhibit significant sex differences in the likelihood of international migration. Table 1 presents descriptive information on sex differentials in migration for each country. As previously mentioned, the share of females in both migrant stocks and flows is greater among Paraguayans. The propensity of Paraguayan women to migrate is roughly double that of their Mexican counterparts. In both cases, however, women are almost equally inclined to migrate only once (71 percent among Mexicans versus 75 percent among Paraguayans), indicating their low tendency to be temporary or circulatory migrants in both settings.

Another, more systematic way to look at these differences is through the analysis of cumulative age-specific first-migration probabilities. Figure 1 presents these probabilities estimated for males and females using MMP and PMS data. Here differences are striking: at age fifty-five, the cumulative probability of first U.S. migration for Mexican men was around 0.45, compared with just 0.15 for women. Thus, in Mexico, the probability of international migration is three times greater for men than for women. In contrast, among Paraguayans, men and women end up at age fifty-five with the same cumulative likelihood of migrating for the first time to Argentina, about 28 percent. Of note, the Paraguayan male and female curves fall practically in the middle of those for Mexican men and women. In addition, the age schedules of cumulative migration look very similar for Paraguayan men and women, suggesting that they migrate at similar ages. Once again, however, the gender differences are pronounced among Mexicans, with male probabilities rising steeply at young ages and female probabilities rising steadily and evenly throughout the life cycle.



TABLE 1  
Sex Differences in Mexican Migration to the United States  
and Paraguayan Migration to Argentina

Comparative Characteristics	Mexicans	Paraguayans
Migrant stocks in U.S. and Argentina <sup>a</sup>	9,177,485	322,962
Migrants as percentage of population in origin country <sup>b</sup>	10.6	6.3
Percentage of women in migrant stock <sup>a</sup>	44.6	57.6
Percentage of women in migrant cohorts <sup>c</sup>		
<1960	8.3	21.4
1960–1984	26.1	36.8
1985–1994	28.5	49.6
>1994	31.3	51.5
Females		
% at origin and destination with migratory experience <sup>d</sup>	9.1	22.4
% at origin with migratory experience <sup>e</sup>	6.4	12.3
Males		
% at origin and destination with migratory experience <sup>d</sup>	32.5	27.4
% at origin with migratory experience <sup>e</sup>	29.7	19.5
Percentage of female heads and spouses with only one trip <sup>e</sup>	71.0	74.9

a. Population Census of Argentina 2001 (INDEC) and U.S. 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau).

b. Estimation based on censuses of Paraguay (2002) and Argentina (2001), II Censo de Población y Vivienda en México (INEGI), and the 2005 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau).

c. Estimations from Mexican Migration Project and Paraguayan Migration Survey.

d. Calculated for heads, spouses, and children interviewed at both origin and destination.

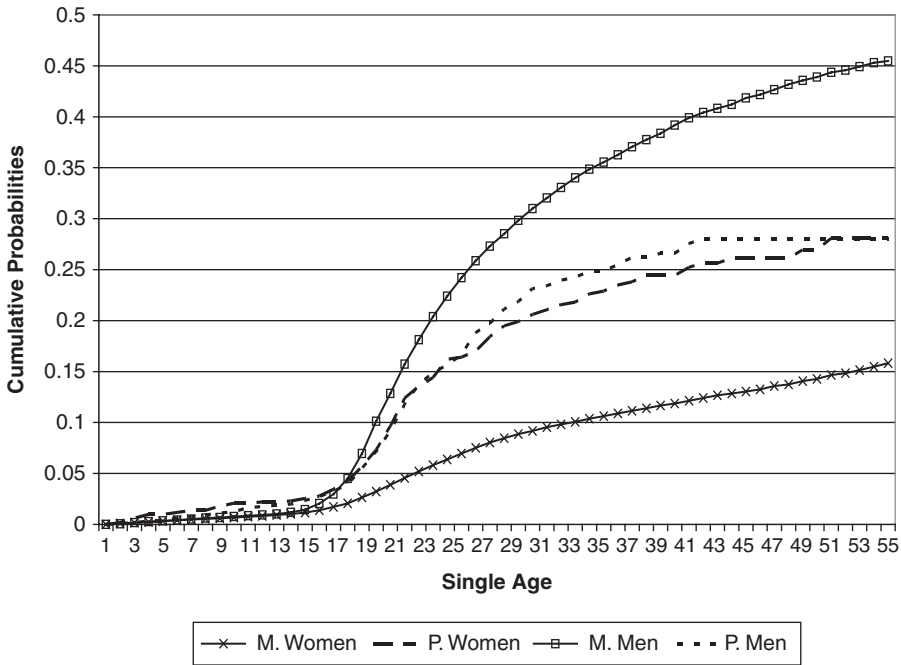
e. Calculated for heads, spouses, and children interviewed only at origin.

## Independent versus Associational Migration

Another significant distinction between the Mexican and Paraguayan migration streams concerns the link between female migratory decisions and the family. Research has shown that Mexican migrant women are relatively unlikely to move independently, being more likely to follow other family members, in particular their husbands (Cerrutti and Massey 2001). Scholars have argued that Mexican women have more agency in the migration process than the notion of associational migrants implies (Feliciano 2008), as indicated by their greater propensity to settle permanently relative to males, suggesting that they migrate not only to seek economic opportunities but to gain independence (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). In addition, one recent study argues that because women face higher barriers to migration than men, network connections are more important in facilitating the movement of young female Mexicans (Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003).

Acknowledging the existence of diverse processes, different motivations, and contrasting cultural norms governing the decision of males and females to migrate,

FIGURE 1  
Cumulative Age-Specific First Migration Probabilities  
for Mexican and Paraguayan Men and Women



then, Mexican women appear to be significantly less likely to move independently than Paraguayan women. Whether or not they migrate to reunify families, to get work, to gain more independence, or for any other reason, descriptive data consistently show that Mexican women in a conjugal union tend not to migrate individually. Among female spouses with migratory experience, 78.1 percent began migrating when they were married or cohabiting.<sup>16</sup> Recent MMP surveys include a question for all respondents on marital status at the time of migration, and responses to this question allow us to examine the interaction between marriage and migration for the whole population and not simply currently married spouses of the head. Among all respondents, 64 percent of female migrants were married when they first moved.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, among those Mexican women who are currently heads or spouses and have migratory experience, 66.1 percent migrated for the first time after the birth of their first child.

The pattern of female emigration from Paraguay is strikingly different, as Paraguayan women are much more likely to migrate for the first time at younger ages and outside of a marriage or cohabiting relationship. Only 33.1 percent of all Paraguayan spouses with migratory experience reported migrating for the first

time while married, and more than half of all spouses and heads (54.5 percent) migrated before the birth of their first child. Differences between the latter two percentages suggest that women's independent migration is not uncommon in Paraguay, even after having a child.

Assessing how many migrants have lived apart from their children is not easy given the nature of the MMP and PMS data, and collecting this information would be very costly.<sup>18</sup> In the case of Mexico, MMP data yield a crude estimate of the relative number of women residing in the United States at the time of the survey who had at least one child in Mexico. Among married mothers with migratory experience, 22.5 percent were in the United States at the time of the interview; and among these women, 52 percent had all their children living in the United States, 26.4 percent had all their children in Mexico, and 21.5 percent had children in both Mexico and the United States. This tabulation, however, does not control for the age of the children, so some of the children in Mexico could be older than eighteen. The same calculation done on female heads of households revealed that 60 percent had all or some of their children in origin communities.<sup>19</sup>

To test more systematically the effect of conjugal status on women's decisions to migrate, we estimated a series of discrete-time event history models to analyze the determinants of taking a first international trip in Mexico and Paraguay. As mentioned above, the independent variables included are age, education, and conjugal status.<sup>20</sup> We also included a variable to measure whether women had a husband in the country of origin or destination, compared to having no husband or partner at all. These estimates are presented in Table 2.

As the coefficient estimates reveal, the pattern of first migration by age is different for Mexican and Paraguayan women. Among Paraguayans there is a clear increase in the probability of migration with rising age, with the likelihood reaching a peak in the late twenties and remaining relatively high until age thirty-five before it starts decreasing. In Mexico, however, the age pattern is quite different. The overall effect of age is more muted, and the likelihood of taking a first trip peaks in the age interval twenty through twenty-four before falling off rapidly (see model 1). The pattern also changes after controls are introduced for the location of the husband or partner, moving toward a bimodal shape in which the probability of migration is low at young ages (before age fourteen), higher in the twenties, lower in the thirties, and then rising again at older ages (after age forty).

In terms of conjugal status, model 1 shows that being in a union generally lowers the probability of taking a first international trip for women in both countries, but the effect is much stronger for Paraguayan than Mexican women. Yet when we take into account the location of the husband or partner, we observe a difference between these two groups. In both countries, the female probability of first international migration was significantly lower if the husband was in the community of origin, and the size of the coefficients was very similar. The effect of having a husband in the destination country is very different for Paraguayan and Mexican women, however. Among the former, having an expatriate husband has no effect on the likelihood of migration, suggesting that Paraguayan women are

TABLE 2  
 Estimates of Discrete-Time Logit Models Predicting  
 Spouse's Likelihood of First Migration

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Mexico	Paraguay	Mexico	Paraguay
Age				
<10	-2.744***	-0.928	-3.009***	-0.983
10-14	-1.743***	-1.383°	-1.994***	-1.451°
15-19	0.038	1.268**	-0.215	1.198**
20-24	0.459***	1.920***	0.190	1.848***
25-29	0.295**	1.674***	0.018	1.596***
30-34	-0.073	1.080°	-0.332*°	1.033°
35-39	-0.145	-0.090	-0.341°	-0.116
40-44	0.010	0.098	-0.115	0.082
45+	—	—	—	—
Education				
Primary or lower	—	—	—	—
Primary complete	0.574***	0.465**	0.558***	0.487**
High school	0.888°	0.465°	0.910***	0.498**
More than high school	0.231	-1.794°	0.318°	-1.757°
Conjugal status				
In marriage or union	-0.720***	-1.158***	—	—
Location of husband or partner				
At destination	—	—	1.231***	0.118
At origin	—	—	-1.237***	-1.272***
No husband or partner	—	—	—	—
Intercept	-5.945***	-5.585	-5.695***	-5.533***
No. of observations	462,997	20,564	362,997	20,564
Degrees of freedom	12	12	12	12
-2 log likelihood	12,474***	1,360***	11,976***	1,354***

SOURCE: Mexican Migration Project and Paraguay Migration Survey.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

not migrating for family reunification. In contrast, the effect of having a husband in the destination country is strong, significant, and positive for Mexican women. Indeed, for Mexican women, the probability of first migration was 2.4 times higher for married women with a husband abroad compared with single women. In contrast, Paraguayan women whose husbands were abroad had the same statistical likelihood of migrating for the first time as their unmarried or noncohabiting counterparts. These results clearly indicate the associational nature of female migration in Mexico compared with Paraguay.

Finally, in terms of educational selectivity, our analyses indicate that Paraguayan women migrate most frequently with intermediate levels of education—a complete primary or high school education compared with incomplete primary education;

those with postsecondary schooling are significantly less likely to migrate. Among Mexican women, education is more positively associated with the likelihood of international migration, but the effect is not linear. Women in all educational categories above incomplete primary schooling are more likely to migrate; however, those with a high school education are more likely than either primary school graduates or those with some college education to migrate, a pattern consistent with findings from a recent study of educational selectivity by Feliciano (2008).

## Contexts of Decision Making

In this section we focus on the lives, experiences, and perceptions of Paraguayan women living in Buenos Aires to shed some light on their migratory decisions and to interpret more clearly their migratory patterns. The stories are illustrative of women's motivations to migrate, how they decided to move, and the type of resources they mobilized to make the trip. Although the section focuses on women, we make some references to the migratory process among men.

Despite the small number of cases, there is broad representation among interviewees with respect to age, period of migration, and duration of residence in Argentina. Table 3 summarizes the characteristics of the respondents in our sample. The year of first arrival ranges from 1968 to 1999, although most reported migrating in the 1980s and 1990s. Consistent with quantitative data from the PMS, most women (as well as men) arrived when young, the age of first entry ranging from sixteen to thirty-three years old. The large majority, however, migrated in their twenties.

Despite these similarities between men and women, there were differences along gender lines in family context, the nature of the event triggering migration, and the kind of networks that assisted them in making the move. Among women, despite the fact that it was not a selection criterion, none migrated initially with their husbands or with the purpose of family reunification. Indeed, nine of the twelve women were single when they decided to move to Argentina, and the remaining three were separated. The separated women had children when they first moved, and they were not the only women who were mothers when they first left for Argentina, as one never-married woman reported a daughter and another reported leaving when she became pregnant. These characteristics signal the independent nature of female migration in Paraguay.

Many of the interviewees came from small towns or rural areas, where their families had small landholdings that were not large enough to feed a growing family. Others arrived from more urbanized areas around Asunción, the capital city, but their families also had significant difficulty making enough income to support a large family.<sup>21</sup> Economic needs and the search for greater opportunity are by far the most common reasons given by both men and women for their decision to migrate to Argentina.

In most cases, however, economic reasons were not the only motivations reported by women, who often argued that other factors had triggered the decision

TABLE 3  
 Characteristics of Female Migrants Interviewed in Buenos Aires

Number	Current Age	Age at First Migration	Year of Migration	Marital Status at First Migration	Number of Children at First Migration	Type of Migration Network	Current Family in Argentina	Plan to Return
1	33	25	1995	Single	0	Female	Husband and one child	Wishes but not feasible
2	35	26	1994	Single	1	Female	Husband and second child	No
3	36	16	1983	Single	0	Female	Two children	No
4	32	16	1987	Single	0	Female	Husband and one child	Tried but did not work
5	32	28	1999	Separated	2	Female	Family in Paraguay	Few more years
6	39	27	1991	Single	0	Female	Husband and one child	No
7	31	20	1992	Single	0	Female	Husband and child	No
8	46	30	1987	Separated	1	Female	Husband and other child	No
9	62	33	1974	Separated	3	Female	Children in both countries	No
10	52	21	1972	Single	0	Female	Husband and children	No
11	56	23	1968	Single	Pregnant	Female	Daughter and granddaughter	No
12	30	19	1992	Single	0	Female	Husband and children	No

to migrate. These motives included a change in family situation that increased the need for economic support, the sudden appearance of a guaranteed job in Argentina, the desire to get away from a repressive family environment, the shame of an unexpected pregnancy, and expectations generated by other relatives or friends when they visited Paraguay and talked about their lives in Argentina.

A common factor that *all* women share is that the migration was either supported or promoted by female chains of assistance. In other words, women migrated by drawing on resources provided by other women. Female relatives were most significant in both insisting on and promoting female emigration and were the ones who most often provided help during the initial stages of the process. Female friends and neighbors were the second most likely to provide assistance. Finally, we encountered one case in which migration was promoted by a female Paraguayan labor recruiter. In contrast, the migration of men was assisted mainly by other men, who instilled the aspiration to move and helped them to find work. However, men also received help from female relatives, most notably sisters, who provided assistance in finding shelter and companionship when they first arrived in Argentina.

One of the differences between the motives of male and female migrants is the family situation at the time of the move. Reasons to move reported by single women were different from those reported by men, including having been brought on vacation to Argentina and ending up staying; having been offered a guaranteed job in Argentina, even when they were not looking for work; needing to achieve more independence from parents; and wanting to earn money for a specific goal, such as buying land or a house. In the words of one respondent who initially came to Argentina not looking for work,

I came here because an aunt who is my mother's sister lives here. I came on vacation and there was just an amnesty here, and because they [her relatives] arrived a long time ago and were doing all the paperwork to get their documents, I started to do the same. In the meantime, I got a job, but I thought about it twice as it wasn't a very interesting job and I wasn't planning on working. Then I thought, "It doesn't matter if it doesn't turn out OK. I'm on vacation, and I can go back whenever I want." But I ended up staying here, because of the money, because the difference was huge. (Roxi, age thirty-nine, arrived in 1991)

Another woman mentioned how high wages in Argentina enabled her to earn money for home acquisition:

Here in Argentina, you can earn a fortune compared to Paraguay. Almost all people come to work here. They work and they leave. . . . They build their houses in Paraguay. My dream was to come to Argentina. I had planned to come, buy a small parcel there and build a little house. (María, age thirty-three, arrived in 1995)

One young woman reported how she was just beginning to think about migration when a visiting neighbor offered her a guaranteed job in Buenos Aires:

When I turned twenty-two I said to myself that it was time to try my luck coming here. At the same moment there was a neighbor [female] who was looking for people to go to

Buenos Aires, and she got me for that trip. I came with a job—when I got off the bus I was already in the house where I went to work as a domestic servant. I came in search of a better future. I came looking for that, and I found it. . . . Thank God. (Marcelina, aged fifty-two, arrived in 1973)

In another case, a woman told how the motivation to migrate arose from the glowing reports from a migrant sister of life and work in Argentina:

My older sister was the first one coming to live in Argentina. Every time she went back to Paraguay she would tell us about Argentina, and she insisted that we had to go. She used to tell us how good her situation here was, how nice it was here. She would tell us if we wanted to come, that it was like an adventure. There one gets the idea that here [in Argentina] everything is easier. . . . We always wanted to come. . . . We did not have kids or husbands, we were single, so my father took us here and in the meantime, my brother looked after the chores in the field. (Eli, age thirty, arrived in 1992)

Another woman told us of her desire to escape a domineering mother, along with a desire for greater opportunity:

I came to escape my mother. We never had a good relationship; she used to hit me. I felt persecuted by my mother, who was always telling me what to do. Here in Argentina you have more opportunities. In Paraguay if you don't steal or you are not in the drug business, you can't do anything. (Albertina, age thirty-six, arrived in 1983)

Among women who had children and were either separated or never married, the decision to move was determined by a sudden change in their family circumstances. Their migration paths are more complex and in many cases include either a temporary frustrated return to Paraguay or a pattern of circular migration. The complexities of these stories are clearly illustrated by the case of one woman who lived in a consensual union for twenty years but never married. In her words, "I never got married. I'm not fond of marriage—if it doesn't work and you have children you can't leave him" (Marisa, age sixty-two, arrived for the first time in 1970).

Marisa had six children in her two decades of consensual union, but she decided to migrate more definitively after she separated. She had siblings and her mother living in Argentina, and one of her daughters had moved as well.

Then, whenever I had money problems, I would travel to Argentina. Every time I needed money I would come, work for a few months, and return to Paraguay. I would leave my children with my sister in Paraguay, and I would come to work. In 1974, I came to stay for good. I brought two of my other children and left the other three in Paraguay. Every time I was coming here I could see that in Argentina there were a lot of possibilities to get ahead and to have a job. Also for my kids, I realized that they had more opportunities to go to school here and to get some education. That would be a great help for them in the future. In Paraguay it was not the same.

Marisa's mother returned to Paraguay and took care of the grandchildren who remained there. Marisa sent money home while her mother was alive and her children were young and went back to visit at least once a year. After her mother



died, the situation changed, and Marisa has not gone to visit Paraguay for the past eight years. She assesses her experience in a very positive way: "I am very grateful to this country; it gave me so many things. Now I consider myself as Argentinean as Paraguayan."

A similar story is that of Rosa, whose move was prompted by an unexpected pregnancy:

I decided to come because I made a mistake. I got pregnant and feared the reaction of my family. My older sister came to Argentina a few years before. I always liked Argentina, ever since I came here for the first time. Even in a crisis life is better; it is better in education for the children, in the health services for the children. I always found it better here. There is a lot of social help and the children don't lack anything; they can eat at school; they don't need anything. In Paraguay it is not the same. You have to pay in all possible senses and for everything. I feel sorry when I have to admit that it is worse in my country, but here I find a lot of help. (Rosa, age fifty-six, arrived in 1968)

The first time she arrived in Argentina she was not planning to stay; and when she had her daughter, her mother came to Argentina and took them back to Paraguay. After more than fifteen years, Rosa migrated jointly with her daughter, who had a baby soon after arriving in Argentina. After a while they had housing problems and went back to Paraguay, but an economic crisis in Paraguay made Rosa decide to go back to Argentina with her granddaughter, now for good. Since then they have lived together with Rosa's daughter, who is the main provider of the household.

Finally, Laura's story illustrates another path experienced by women who had a child out of wedlock, decided to migrate, left their children in Paraguay, and ended up establishing a new family in Argentina:

I had many friends who lived in Argentina, and when they traveled to Paraguay they would tell me to go with them, but I never had the will. But when I had the baby, it was a different thing. I had to do it. I didn't want to come, but my family was poor and they couldn't give me any help. (Laura, age thirty-five, arrived in 1993)

Even though Laura initially brought her daughter to Argentina, she soon realized that with a baby she could not work the number of hours she needed as a domestic servant, so she took her daughter back to Paraguay and left her with her mother. In Argentina she began a new romantic relationship with a Paraguayan man and had a second daughter. Currently she travels every two or three months to Paraguay, and her older daughter visits at the end of every year. She misses Paraguay and her family and would like to go back with her partner. In the meantime, however, while working in Argentina, she has paid for her mother's parcel of land and built a house in Paraguay:

We plan to return someday to Paraguay. But the problem is to start all over again, to search for a job. Nowadays, my partner and I have jobs here, so while we have these jobs we will stay. My husband says that he wants to go back, but I think he isn't sure. He has never worked there.

Women's feelings about living apart from their children are not uniform. Those who have children in Paraguay have been living apart from them for a long time. They have no definite plans to bring them to Argentina, for varying reasons. Some think that in Paraguay they will be raised in a safer environment. Paradoxically, this perception is the opposite of that of those women who have all their children in Argentina. Others do not bring their children because they think they do not want to come. Some have the feeling that it is unfair to take those children away from the persons who have been providing care, usually their grandparents. In any case, it is clear that being a long-distance mother is not stigmatizing and fits within a common pattern of provision of care that goes beyond parenthood. Care provided by grandmothers and aunts left behind has long been a strategy employed in female international migration and, probably more importantly, in internal migration.

Long-distance motherhood is an elusive concept to measure, since it surely varies at different stages in women's migratory processes. Long-distance motherhood takes place most commonly among women who are separated or divorced when they migrate and to a lesser extent among those who are never married but had unexpected children.

## Conclusion

In this article, we addressed the general question about which factors determine differences in gendered patterns of migration. We comparatively assessed two well-established migration streams characterized by very different patterns of female migration: Mexican migration to the United States and Paraguayan migration to Argentina. The former has traditionally been male-dominated. Mexican women not only have a much lower representation among migrants; they are also less likely to move independently. In contrast, women comprise a significantly larger share of Paraguayan migrants, and female patterns of migration are quite similar to those of their male counterparts, occurring mainly when they are young and single.

Several factors appear to explain these differences. One relates to the origin and the initiation of the flows. Even though sex composition of migratory flows can change over time, there are reasons to believe that inertia also plays a role. The singularly male character of migratory flows from Mexico was initiated by guest-worker programs in the 1940s and has changed little over time. Although the flows have feminized, women still are significantly less likely to migrate. In contrast, women have historically played a more significant role in migration streams from Paraguay, and the flows have become even more female-dominated over time.

Reasons for these clear differences can be found in the socioeconomic role of women in the two sending countries, which in turn determines to what extent independent female movement is accepted and even promoted. In the case of Paraguay, the central role of women in the economy associated with the decline of peasant

agriculture generated propitious conditions for both the internal and international migration of women. At the same time, economic processes in Argentina generated a demand for labor for both men and women from Paraguay.

However, a third component comes into play in the case of Paraguay, as moving back and forth to Argentina has traditionally been easier and cheaper for men and women alike. The barriers and risks of migration are thus much lower for Paraguayan than Mexican women. Their parents, other relatives, and to a lesser extent husbands have come to accept, and even promote, independent female migration, since they know that women will arrive safely and without serious difficulty in Argentina.

Finally, the contexts of departure and reception are also important. The flexibility of labor markets and the clearly established niches of economic activities for Paraguayan women in the personal service sector in Argentina have been significant factors in explaining their higher propensity to migrate. Given that the costs of migration are low, it is understandable why so many Paraguayan women try their luck by moving to Argentina in search of work, as was illustrated with the testimonies of Paraguayan migrants.

## Notes

1. Even though there were large variations over time in the relative gaps between the economies of sending and receiving countries, differences between the United States and Mexico were generally larger than between Argentina and Paraguay. International Monetary Fund (IMF) data for the year 2006 indicate that whereas Argentina's gross domestic product per capita at purchasing power parity (PPP) is 3.0 times higher than Paraguay's, the U.S. GDP per capita at PPP is 3.8 times higher than the Mexican. Furthermore, absolute economic differences between receiving countries are apparent, since U.S. GDP per capita at PPP is 2.7 times that of Argentina. If differences are considered in U.S. dollars and not at PPP, they are significantly more pronounced.

2. Data from II Censo de Población y Vivienda-México 2005 (INEGI), and the 2005 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau).

3. Data from the 2002 Paraguayan Population Census (DGEEC) and the 2001 Argentina Population Census (INDEC).

4. <http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu>.

5. This survey was collected for the research "Paraguayan Migration to Argentina," Center for Population Studies, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Data was collected in two stages, the first stage with support from the Population Research Center at the University of Pennsylvania and the second stage with a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

6. Estimated with heads, spouses, and children surveyed as members of the household.

7. Today, in Paraguay, 25.9 percent of all households are headed by a woman; among those ages twenty to fifty-five, only 45 percent are married, 20 percent are in consensual or de facto unions, and 35 percent do not have a partner. Their labor force participation rate continues to be high within the Latin American context: for the country as a whole, about one-half of women ([www.gov.py](http://www.gov.py)).

8. For recent changes in family and gender relations, see García and Oliveira (2006) and Ariza and Oliveira (2004).

9. Paradoxically, while Mexican women were considerably less likely to migrate internationally, they were more likely to migrate internally. Their overrepresentation among internal migrants was explained by regional economic disequilibrium, the erosion of artisan and agrarian production, and the generation of a domestic service labor demand in the cities.

10. Among the 6 percent of migrants who do not remember their year of migration, the proportion of women reaches 61.9 percent.

11. Gaining access to either permanent or temporary residency was more problematical and changed over time; policies were more restrictive under military governments and more permissive under democracies.

12. We use a life table approach employing individual person-year files in which each person is followed from birth until either the age he or she migrated for the first time or was interviewed. Individuals who never migrated are censored at their age at the time of the survey. Transitional probabilities are estimated by dividing the number of individuals making the first trip at a given age by the number of persons at the beginning of the period minus half of the censored cases. Cumulative probabilities of migration by age are estimated as follows:

$$Q_t = Q_{(t-1)} + q_{(t-1)} \times \{1 - Q_{(t-1)}\},$$

where  $Q_t$  and  $Q_{(t-1)}$  are the cumulative probability of having migrated by the beginning of age  $t$  and age  $t - 1$ , respectively, and  $q_{(t-1)}$  is the transitional probability of migrating during age  $t - 1$  (given that the person did not migrate until that age).

13. For the case of Mexico, due to the fact that marriage and union history is available only for heads of households, we have to use their information to reconstruct spouses' conjugal situation at each age, under the assumption that most women marry or cohabit only once and that these unions or marriages match the last one experienced by their male partners. The proportion of Mexican male heads who have had more than one marriage or union is relatively low; therefore, we assume that potential biases are relatively low. We have to follow the same procedure with children. For the case of Paraguay we could overcome this limitation since data include marriage and union schedules from both heads and spouses.

14. This could be the effect of selecting only spouses for the analysis, since the relationship between having children and being in a union might be considerably different for women who are either daughters or heads of households.

15. These interviews were collected at the end of 2003 as an exploratory phase of a larger research project on Paraguayan and Peruvian migrants residing in Buenos Aires.

16. Even if we restrict the analysis to spouses who are relatively young (less than forty-five years old) or to those who were surveyed after 1990 or even after 1998, the percentages of those who move married is still as high (77.3 and 78.9, respectively).

17. Estimated among women who migrated for the first time at age eighteen or older. We restricted the population to this age range since at younger ages it is more likely that women migrated for family reunification purposes.

18. Knowing how many female migrants have left children in the origin communities and for how long they have lived apart demands specific data collection procedures. All women should be considered, since it is likely that long-distance mothers are more likely to be single, separated, or divorced, so focusing only on currently married women or heads of households may bias the results. Complete migration schedules would have to be gathered from all members of the household.

19. Unfortunately, we do not have a similar measure for Paraguayan migrants. However, recent estimates from a large sample of migrants from neighboring countries in Argentina (INDEC, Encuesta Complementaria de Migraciones, 2005) indicate that among surveyed female migrants ages twenty through fifty, only 5.2 percent have children under age fourteen living in Paraguay. Nevertheless, this proportion varies considerably depending on where these migrants live. For example, among women who live in the capital, who are more likely to work in domestic services and live with their employers, this proportion reaches 10 percent.

20. As mentioned, we did not include number of children since for current spouses of the heads, and particularly for Mexicans, timing of marriage and childbearing are strongly correlated.

21. Fertility rates are still high in Paraguay. Most interviewees have a large number of siblings (between six and twelve).

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