**Migrant voices**

**A tale of many cities – Living and working in Ypejhú,**

**Buenos Aires and Madrid**

Mercedes was born in Ypejhú, Paraguay, in a large family with twelve brothers and sisters. Her father worked cultivating wheat and her brothers helped him from a very early age in order to support the family finances. When she was 18, Mercedes left home and went to live with her boyfriend, Pedro. Some years later, Maicol, her only son, was born but the couple decided to split up. Since she was unable to maintain her household, Mercedes decided to migrate to Argentina in the footsteps of her sisters and school friends. Her son stayed in Paraguay and Mercedes’ mother took care of him as she was already caring for her other grandchildren.

Mercedes has been living in Buenos Aires for 15 years now, working as a cleaner, domestic help and babysitter. At the beginning, her housing and working conditions were difficult: “I was working informally, many hours a day, living in a rented room, sharing with other three Paraguayan women whom I didn’t know, and I was missing my son a lot”. When the economic situation became difficult in Argentina, Mercedes used all her savings to buy a ticket to Madrid, Spain, and moved there looking for new horizons: “It was 2001, my boss had suddenly fired me, and the owner of my rented room asked me for more money to stay. I didn’t think twice: I took my savings, bought the ticket and left with the only suitcase I had.”

In Madrid, Mercedes’ first job involved cleaning in a bar and then cooking in a restaurant. However, her employer was not treating her well and she was missing her family and son: “When I was living in Buenos Aires, I always tried to escape to Paraguay to visit Maicol and spend time with my mum. I went by bus and it wasn’t that expensive. While in Spain, it was impossible to travel home and I started to feel very lonely”. That was when Mercedes decided to return to Argentina after two years in Madrid: “I came back to Buenos Aires and it was starting from zero again. But the country’s situation was a bit better after recovering from the financial crisis”. Currently, Mercedes lives in an apartment that she rents in the district of San Fernando, Buenos Aires Province, where other Paraguayan migrants also live. Although it is small, she lives by herself and has running water, electricity and a toilet, something that she did not have in Ypejhú, where almost 45 per cent of the population does not have access to sanitation. “My apartment is small but nice. I have to travel two hours to get to my job, but I don’t care. I have decorated the room and it is now cosy. I feel good to have a little place for when my son visits me”. However, Mercedes admits that she feels unsafe and is afraid of walking alone at night.

Thinking about the future, Mercedes imagines herself with a foot in Buenos Aires and a foot in Asunción, where her son currently resides: “When I’m in Buenos Aires, I miss the Paraguayan rhythm, the calm, the tranquility and the warm temperatures all year round. But when I’m there, I miss the movement of the city, the bars, the streets, the buildings. I think that, as a popular song says, I’m not from here, not from there”.

IOM (International Organization for Migration) 2015. World Migration Report 2015: Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to manage Mobility. IOM: Geneva. <http://publications.iom.int/system/files/wmr2015_en.pdf> p.30