

The Swiss Immigration to Misiones-Argentina (1935-1939): An Analysis Based on Migration Theories

La inmigración suiza a Misiones-Argentina (1935-1939): un análisis a partir de las teorías migratorias

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the phenomenon of Swiss immigration to the National Territory of Misiones, Argentina, between 1935 and 1939. From an analysis based on different migration theories, we identify the structural factors that led to the mobility of people of that origin and the influence of social networks as a strategic value in the consolidation of links between migrants in the process of adapting to the new environment. The analysis of qualitative sources will reveal the reasons that led them to make the decision to emigrate, the prevailing immigration policies at every moment, and the need to adapt to an entirely new environment.

Keywords: 1. migration theories, 2. social networks, 3. immigration, 4. Puerto Rico, Misiones, 5. Argentina.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo aborda el fenómeno de la inmigración suiza hacia el Territorio Nacional de Misiones, Argentina, entre 1935 y 1939. A partir de un análisis basado en distintas teorías migratorias, identificamos los factores estructurales que propiciaron la movilidad de personas de ese origen y la influencia de las redes sociales como valor estratégico en la consolidación de vínculos entablados entre los migrantes en el proceso de adaptación al nuevo entorno. El análisis de fuentes cualitativas permitirá develar los motivos que los llevaron a tomar la decisión de emigrar, las políticas migratorias imperantes en cada momento, y la necesidad de adaptarse a un entorno totalmente nuevo.

Palabras clave: 1. teorías migratorias, 2. redes sociales, 3. inmigración, 4. Puerto Rico, Misiones, 5. Argentina.

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INTRODUCTION

Although migration only pertains a small proportion of the total population, this process exerts a disproportionate effect both in the country of origin and in the one receiving.
(Timur, 2000, p. 2).

From the second half of the 19th century, important changes took place in Argentina that impacted heavily on its population dynamics. The insertion of Argentina into the global market with an agro-export economy and its participation in the new international division of labor, the creation of a centralized bureaucratic system and the sanction of the National Constitution, the delimitation of its borders with neighboring countries, the settlement of migrants in its territory, and the search for cultural homogeneity by developing a country made up of “white people,” were all part of the process. One of the bases for this model was, on the one hand, the availability of lands, and in the other —related to the first— a strong demand for a workforce to populate those lands and make them productive.

During the period between 1880 and 1920, massive immigration was an important process, only surpassed in the American continent by the United States, which “influenced on the size, composition, life rhythm and spatial distribution of the population” (Novick, 1997, p. 5). Thus, between 1880 and 1914, Argentina was the second immigrant-receiving country in the American continent, which allowed for significant growth in population from 1,800,000 inhabitants recorded in the country in 1880, to reaching almost 12,000,000 people by the end of the 1920 decade (Novick, 1997, p. 5). For this reason, this phase in history is known as the “alluvial Argentina or the period of massive immigration” (Lobato, 2000, p. 11). Even if the State did promote certain policies to encourage migratory influxes on one side and regulate them on the other (among those, we can count the subsidies for transportation for some groups and stays at the Hotel for Immigrants in Buenos Aires), still the main reason to emigrate to Argentina was its economy and not any intervention by the State (Devoto, 2009).

The creation of colonies with mainly Swiss population in the country and in Misiones, however, does not date to that period. The first Helvetic settlements date back to 1856, with the founding of Baradero and Esperanza, respectively in the provinces of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe, and then by 1858 Swiss immigrants began to arrive at San Jerónimo Norte and San Carlos,³ also in the province of Santa Fe. With the cereal exploitation boom of the late 19th century, many of these immigrants would return to their country of origin upon failing to secure their access to farmland due to the sudden raise in their price (Tech, 1989).

³For information on the Swiss colonization in Entre Ríos, see Álvarez (1984) and Gori (1988), and for Santa Fe, see Schobinger (1957).

In Misiones, the moments of significant Swiss immigration influx can be narrowed down to two well delimited periods: during the decade of 1920, and the period between 1935 and 1939, the record of people went from 800 in 1925 to 2,000 in 1939 (Glatz, 1997). The heterogeneous nature of the Swiss immigration in both periods was not only the result of the historical context in which they arrived (although the likelihood of being or not able to cultivate yerba mate was an important factor), but was also due to their region of origin (whereas Santo Pipó received Swiss people coming from small French settlements in the decade of 1920, the immigrants were mainly coming from small German settlements by the mid-1930s), the operative mechanisms of the migration project, and the socio-demographic differences of the immigrants, all factors imprinting distinct characteristics onto the colonies formed by them and into the relationships arising within those colonies.

The spatial focus of this analysis will be on the immigrants who arrived between 1935 and 1939 at different places in Misiones, focusing then on Puerto Rico that along with Eldorado and Montecarlo (the colonies that made up the Alto Paraná in Misiones), were the principal regions within the National Territory that received this migratory influx.

This work is organized in four sections: the first one will present the employed methodology and analyzes the main sources of this work; the second one will set forth the main discussions that took place around two of the theories (the structural and the social networking ones) employed in the analysis of the migration phenomenon throughout the 19th and early 20th century. The third will address the phenomenon of Swiss migration to Misiones from the structural factors that fostered the mobilization of people of said origin; and the fourth section will analyze the influence of social networks as a strategic value in the consolidation of the links established between migrants, in the process of adapting to their new environment.

METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork consisted of carrying out in-depth interviews with Swiss immigrants (Lorenzo Zimmermann, Marie Schedler de Schweri, Emilia Fintzterer de Schweizer) and their descendants (Eugenio Keller, Clara Guldemann, Patricia Muster, Estela Gentilduomo de Lagier, Jerónimo Lagier, Guido Lagier). Interviews are, according to Luis Enrique Alonso (1998), of great use for the reconstruction of past actions, for the study of personalized representations, and the bonds between individuals.

The interviews made possible for every interviewee to narrate the life story of their families, their migratory experiences, the reasons for emigrating, previous knowledge of the new environment of migration or lack of it, the creation of migration networks, their contacts with colonization campaigns, and the fabric of the solidarity networks between their ethnic group and those outside of it in the process of adapting to their new location, allowing for an approach from the subjectivity of the actors themselves.

Studying the story of Mr. Luis Ferrari⁴ *En Misión a Misiones* and analyzing the documentary *Gli eredi della crisi* from 1971 was of great value in addressing the second migratory influx (Pellegrini, Maranesi, Berini, & Manfrini, 1971). In the first case, the work introduces a synthesis of the stories and experiences of a Helvetic government official in his journey and presents information of great value about the living conditions of those immigrant groups, the main hardships they faced in their adaptation to an environment quite different from their usual one in Europe, the diseases common to tropical weathers, the most recurrent practices for the preservation of their identity traits and cultural patterns, as well as the difficulties in keeping the bonds with their home country, among others.

In turn, in *Gli eredi della crisi* we can find narrations of those immigrants who traveled from Europe to Misiones. This material showcases stories about the tough conditions that they had to face upon arriving at a scenario very different from that they left behind, the critical situation in Switzerland that drove them to emigrate, how they prepared for the execution of their migratory plan, and the relationship they kept with their home country.

STRUCTURAL MIGRATION THEORIES VS. SOCIAL NETWORK THEORIES: DISJUNCTION OR CONJUNCTION?

Traditional approaches to explain international migratory influxes focused their attention on the factors of expulsion and attraction of immigrants, analyzing the structural conditions of their areas of origin and reception that propitiated the mobilization of individuals. Within these aspects, it is possible to include the approaches that focus their interest on pessimistic views, such as poverty and demographic pressure in the areas of origin as drivers of migration, and from optimistic perspectives, such as the possibility of improving their wealth in the areas of origin, as the principal causes for migratory mobilization. It was E.G. Ravenstein, who towards the end of the 19th century, enunciated certain principles characterizing migrations, understanding them as forced movements of the capitalistic system and the laws of supply and demand; in this way, the prerogative is that migrants always appoint their behavior towards maximizing economic benefits (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino, & Taylor, 2000).

From Ravenstein's formulations and his famous "12 laws of migration," the first and most complete enunciation of the "pull and push factors" explicative model was established;

⁴After the signing of the Swiss-Argentinian Treaty for Emigration and Colonization on July 6 of 1937, Luis Ferrari was appointed Emigration Deputy, and he held office until his resignation on June 30 of 1939 (Schneider, 1998, p. 208). Between July and August of 1937 and while in office, he visited the different colonies populated by Swiss people subsidized in Misiones, to report the Immigration Central of the Swiss government in Argentina on the conditions there; the booklet *En Misión a Misiones* resulted from that visit, published in 1942, 50 copies and no further editions.

within this framework, societies were presented as stable and static, and the individuals would fulfill their role in a standardized way; looking at migrations from an evolutionist background, these theories understand the “human progress in a unidirectional and ethnocentric way,” as in this process migrants move to more industrialized areas with well-developed commercial trade (Díaz, 2007, p. 161).

In an attempt to provide a more accomplished framework for Ravenstein’s theories, in 1965 Everett Lee wrote *A Theory of Migration*, wherein he presented a set of “18 hypotheses” building upon the theoretical framework explanations of migrations from the view of the “pull and push factors”; in these hypotheses, the author highlights other factors of a personal nature, “such as perception, intelligence, personal contacts or information” (García Abad, 2003, p. 333). According to Lee, migration is selective because the conditions of each person (gender, social class, age, education level) strongly influence the way in which each migrant reacts to the “pull and push factors” and on the possibilities they have of overcoming obstacles.

In association with this macro-economic and structural theory for the analysis of migrations, a micro-economic analysis involving the individual decisions of migrants is presented, this way,

[...] the actors, being rational and individual, decided to migrate due to a cost-benefit calculation that drives them to expect positive net gains, generally in currency, as a result of the migratory option. Potential migrants take the costs and benefits of transiting to international places into consideration, and emigrate where there is hope of obtaining superior net gains [...] In theory, a potential migrant will transit to any area where it is to be expected for the net yield of migration to be greater (Massey et al., 2000, pp. 12-13).

The decision to emigrate is then based on a “rational election” whose goal is to maximize an economical utility function for the individual. However, it was from the decades of 1950s and the 1960s, and mainly from Anthropology, that the first critiques to the prevailing structuralist model began to appear: to focus the attention on relationships is very different from viewing the migrant as a passive subject brought under laws external to his or her will (García Abad, 2003, p. 329).

In the last decades of the 20th century –especially from the 70s and the 80s– and starting from the background set in Anthropology by the Manchester School, the foundations for strong revisionism on migration studies were established, focusing on classic theories. It was Max Gluckman, from the Manchester School, who focused his attention on the conflict and the conception of a dynamic reality within social processes. From the premise that “the structure implies dialectical conflicts, and that this dialectical relationship between both is mediated by social practices” (Lube Guizardi, 2012, p. 20), the situational analysis of the social relationships would allow to understand the behavior of individual in different social contexts (Lube Guizardi, 2012; Favero, 2012).

Following this trend, the use of categories such as social networking and migration chains are the tools used to explain the migratory influxes of the second half of the 19th century from Europe to different points in America, including Argentina. Coming from a micro-analytical conception, this view focuses “on the networks of information established within the social groups that included those migrants already settled in Argentina and their families residing in their country of origin” (Massena, 2013, p. 95). In this way,

Migration networks are sets of interpersonal bonds linking migrants with other migrants preceding them and with non-migrants in the areas of origin and destination, by means of kinship, friendship, and country ship nexus. This nexus increases the chance of international mobilization since they lower the costs and decrease the risks of transit and increase the net gains of migration (Massey et al., 2000, pp. 24-25).

These “categories stress the social links of a given group, as well as the solidarity networks that emerge within it, and the information networks that circulate and influence the decision to emigrate” (Massena, 2013, p. 96). In the studies on migration, the propagations of networking theories were conceived as an “alternative” or “rather as an expression of rejection” towards structuralist views (Míguez, 1995, p. 23); making use of said theories gained strength when the idea of a melting pot of races entered the debate, upheld by the studies on migration throughout no small part of the 20th century, becoming “common currency” by fitting in “the idea of alienation, standing on a scenario in which the poor who emigrated to the new world [...] started a journey that drove them to lose their own individual and group identity” (Ramella, 1995, p. 11).

More recent studies that focused on migration phenomena on a global scale point out the need to include, in addition to those more structural and economic factors of both population expulsion and attraction, the individual, psychological, and emotional aspects that stimulate the process.

If structural theories conceived migration as an economic product, and networking theories assessed the behaviors under which individuals interact, none of these views managed to understand the complex process of migration phenomena independently, as,

[...] any theoretical explanation supported by only one of these elements will necessarily be incomplete and misleading, and will provide a faulty base for the understanding of international migration and the development policies that that welcome it (Massey et al., 2000, p. 30).

Both macro- and micro-analyses are not mutually exclusive and incompatible, but rather answer different questions and provide distinct answers to the study of the same social phenomenon. The analytic view based on networks or chains contained in the groundbreaking works of Samuel Baily and Fernando Devoto does not reject the structural notion, but move “the research axis towards the relational” (Míguez, 1995, p. 24).

Precisely, the logic that characterized the migratory process from Switzerland to Argentina in general, and particularly to the current province of Misiones, intensified during the periods of profound crises in the European country. In fact, up until the first years of the 19th century, Switzerland was the European country with the least emigration. And so, certain economic and political factors would impact the social and psychological aspects of the population.

In this way, we intend to expand the analysis starting from a micro-analytic approach and analyzing the macro. In this sense, and as pointed out by Míguez (1995), our aim is not to focus on a single theory disregarding the contributions of others, as each one explains the migration phenomenon from different angles. This work is framed within this proposal: on the one hand, the idea that the crisis and its effects, as well as the social-climbing aspirations of the migrant, played an important role in deciding to mobilize, and on the other hand, the assumption that social networks and particularly family, friendship and country ship bonds featured prominently in the adaptation process of the migrant to the new scenario.

Structural Factors of Swiss Immigration to the National Territory of Misiones Between 1935 and 1939

Although traditionally migrations were addressed from structuralist approaches —the pull-push theory being predominantly employed (dealing with immigrant expulsion and attraction factors)—, the migration process of Swiss people to Misiones would not be understandable without starting from a structural analysis. Such process was due to the favorable policy towards immigration from European countries that prevailed in Argentina, adding to it the critical situation which many States in the old continent were going through. Thus, the creation of Swiss colonies in Misiones did not represent a case exceptional to other cases of other origins, as it also happened due to a convergence of factors: National territory needed population and Switzerland needed a place that would receive its population surplus.

In the second half of the 19th century, rural areas in Switzerland were population ejectors, affected by a series of liberal measures, among them the implementation of the Napoleonic code regime, which implied an excessive inheritance division of real estate. At the same time, “there were bad crops and a decrease in the prices of rural products, progressive unemployment in the textile industry due to technical advancements” (Schobinger, 1957, p. 31). In turn, “farmers were severely impacted by reason of the international trade expansion and the competition from abroad” that came along with the introduction of the railway in 1847 (Schobinger, 1957, p. 31). The instability of the country in the second half of the 19th century was largely due to the advance of capitalism in its territory.

During the first half of the 20th century, the situation in Switzerland did not appear to improve. The years after the First World War were the most severe; “inflation, revolutions, unemployment [and] hunger [were common happenings] in what is known as the old

continent” (Roth, 2008, p. 57), and from the second half of the 1930s decade, with the repercussions of the global economic crisis.

Even if Switzerland underwent a notable recovery in the mid-1920s, the economic depression that unleashed because of the global economic crisis was one of the most severe ever hitting the country. While the repercussions of this crisis were seen later in relation to other European countries, its aftermath was strong. Unemployment numbers, reaching 8,000 people (0.4% of the total population) in 1929, went as high as 93,000 people (4.8%) by 1936 (Schneider, 1998).

The areas most affected by the “rationalization of workplaces” were construction and textile industry workers (Glatz, 1997, p. 204). All throughout Europe, the most dramatic situations were due to the deficiencies of the social security public systems (particularly so in long periods of crisis), with a percentage of the workforce ranging from 0% to 25% being covered, except for “Germany, where 40% of the population had right to unemployment insurance [...]” (Hobsbawn, 2007, p. 100).

Banking activities were also heavily impacted by substantial difficulties, having its balance cut in half by 1936. In this sense, the Swiss Federal Council and the National Bank’s adherence to a deflationary policy resulted in a long period of economic depression, the Swiss franc devaluating 30% by mid-1936 (Schneider, 1998; Bouquet, 2005).

In other instances, more than the severe economic situation, some Swiss people considered emigration before the possibility of a conflict in Europe and how unsafe it could be to stay in their homeland (E. Fintzterer de Schweizeir, personal communication, October 14, 2015, and L. Zimmermann, personal communication, November 9, 2010).

Among the internal factors we can count the state policies that promoted immigration for the purpose of fostering the populating of the country and attracting workforce to work the fields. The ideal of the immigrant expected to arrive at the country was set forth in 1853 in article 25 of the Constitution of the Nation of Argentina, which states that:

The Federal Government will foster European immigration; and there will be no restriction, limitation nor taxation for entering Argentinian territory to foreigners who come with the goal of working the land, improving the industries, and introducing and teaching the sciences and the arts (Devoto, 2009, p. 34).

By promoting European immigration, the aim was on “the possibility of obtaining the individual desired by the dominant class of Argentina; in the post-enlightenment European, the individual one wants to be is sought” (Halpern, 2009, p. 27). The European immigrant was “someone associated with working and, as a desired object, to agriculture” (Devoto, 2009, p. 34); however, their role was not restricted to providing workforce, as it embodied the civilizing ideal for the young country. In this sense, the immigration and colonization law of 1876 understood the terms “immigrant” and “foreigner” as synonyms, but only in the

case of those who entered “in steam or sail ship,” coming from the “ports of Europe or those located in outside capes”; besides this first characterization, an immigrant was one who entered the country in second or third class (Devoto, 2009, pp. 31-32).

In turn, since the consolidation of the national State, Argentina began its journey towards insertion in the global market as a provider of primary products. Agricultural production destined for exportation was the “dynamic factor for growth” and directed the achievement of the state policies followed by the ruling sectors. As driving forces of transformation, “progress” and “civilization” were central elements in the expansion process of the national State.

The annexation of great extensions of land into the state orbit and the increase of “the exploited surface and the volume of export production” (Oszlak, 2012, pp. 192-193) made it evident that populating was required. The demand for foreign workforce came to compensate for the scarcity of population in the territory, and thus “immigration should populate the desert, and agricultural colonization should build a sociability in Argentina that its extension and lack of population made otherwise non-existent” (Devoto, 2009, pp. 229).

As for Misiones, it was the scenario of great political-administrative and military instability for the entire 19th century as a result of the dispute for its territory by different border States and by some of the provinces belonging to Río de la Plata. This situation implied a late jurisdictional and territorial organization, in turn delaying the organization of the colonies and the settlements of European immigrants.

Misiones remained under the jurisdiction of Corrientes from 1832, until 1881 with the creation of the National Territory. Within the frame of this process, a great polemic arose between the province of Corrientes and the national government regarding the *Project of Law on the Federalization of Misiones*. However, in the face of the inevitability to create a new National Territory and the consequent loss of the right to use and enjoy those lands, in June 1881, the leaders of Corrientes authorized a rapid sale of the Misiones lands in large fractions of 25 square leagues. Almost two-thirds of the territory were “sold” this way, standing out among the great owners, former governor of Corrientes Antonio B. Gallino and Julio A. Roca, brother of the country’s then-president.

Finally, with the creation of the National Territory of Misiones on December 22, 1881, the national State wanted to achieve two clear goals: solve the ongoing border problem with the province of Corrientes and to incorporate a new space into the national domain. The conformation of large private estates that ensued from this process became, however, an obstacle to the establishment of agricultural colonies, as it limited the availability of land.

The creation of an extractive front⁵ of native wood and yerba mate positioned Misiones among the extra-regional relations of Pampa capitalism, conditioning the beginning of the colonization process to the disappearance of the large private estates (Hernández, 1887, p. 17).

By 1894, the national government managed to invalidate some of the land sales in Misiones after its territorializing, as they did not comply with the corresponding measurements; thus, the lands recovered became settlement centers for the first European immigrants that arrived at Misiones.

The populating of Misiones was propelled first by state mechanisms. Although the first colonies were established in the southern part of the Misiones National Territory —among them, Santa Ana and Candelaria, measured in 1883 by Rafael Hernández— official colonization gained more strength with the re-foundation of old Jesuitical colonies such as Apóstoles in 1897, which received Polish Galician immigrants as promoted by then governor of the National Territory Juan José Lanusse.

The settlement of Swiss immigrants in Misiones corresponded to a period in which the access opportunities to public land in the provinces with mild weather were already closed. During the mid-1930s decade, emigration was seen as a relief mechanism for the social pressure Switzerland was going through due to the high unemployment indexes: after the signing of the *Swiss-Argentinian Treaty for Emigration and Colonization* on July 6, 1937, more than fifty Swiss families were expatriated to Argentina.

The destination point was the Misiones National Territory, not only due to the land being accessible but also because counting “with an initial capital not above 4000 francs” (Ferrari, 1942, p. 37), the sale of native wood from the economic unities would provide additional income for future settlers; effectively, these advantages offered by Misiones translated into numbers: between 1900 and 1939, 60% of Swiss people who entered the country had the National Territory as a destination, whereas after the signing of the 1937 *Swiss-Argentinian Treaty for Emigration and Colonization*, 74% of the subsidized arrived at this same destination.

If we follow after the theses held by Ravenstein (1885) to analyze Swiss migration during the second half of the 1930s decade, perhaps the first one would explain best the structural reasons behind these phenomenon, as it were the economic disparities in

⁵By the late 19th century and early 20th century, worker organizations were formed for the extraction of native wood and yerba mate at both margins of the Paraná River. In the case of yerba mate natural growth regions, these trees would sometimes reach over 18 or 20 meters; to make their harvest easier, these were subject “to uncontrolled clearing at all times and places” and so “the process of their destruction was slowly but inexorably set in motion” (Daumas, 1930, p. 6).

Switzerland and the possibility of gaining access to land as owners in Misiones that influenced most strongly the constitution of this migration movement.

The other postulates held by the author, however, can hardly be applied to this case in particular. For example, pertaining the third law—which holds that migrants mobilizing long distances generally prefer large trade or industrial centers—and the seventh law—linked to the lesser propensity of native populations residing in cities to migrate compared to rural area populations (Arango, 2000)—the situation unfolded inversely to Ravenstein’s theory, as migrants departed from urban centers which were commercially and industrially more developed than Misiones.

Up until the beginning of the 20th century, a large portion of European migrants still preferred the United States as the main destination, but by the beginning of the 1920s, the laws fostered by this country in immigration matters turned away from the liberal trend of granting access with no major restrictions. In fact, the 1921 Quota Acts reduced the number of immigrants to the United States, and the migration origins moved from the south and east of Europe to northern and western Europe (Massey & Pren, 2013). The Quota Acts also established a cap for the entrance of migrants “to a 3% of the total amount of residents of each national group at the time of the 1910 national census” (Devoto, 2009, p. 164).

Sanctioned by the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, the entrance limitation was taken to a greater extreme, as emigration visas were now granted to only a 2% of the total amount of applicants of each nationality in the United States, based on the 1890 national census. This selective measure was intended to favor even more the access of individuals coming from northern Europe, and to limit that of migrants from southern and eastern Europe (Devoto, 2009, p. 164).

After 1920, Brazil underwent changes around the treatment of migration. This State, which during the second half of the 19th century was an important destination for immigrants, went through important changes in the orientation of its migration policy during interwar periods allowing the entrance of “European labor immigration, and preference was given to nationals of European countries that were the main origin of previous migration influxes, rather than to nationals from other countries” (VV. AA., 2004, p. 574).

The orientation of Brazilian migration policies towards ethnic selection was based on achieving integration between establishes and newly established migrant communities, as well as to prevent that cultural diversity would translate into “a liability for immigrants” (VV. AA., 2004, p. 574). By the 1930s, Brazil implemented a restrictive policy not so much in terms of migratory flows but rather in labor integration ones: the companies doing business in the country had to have “at least two-thirds of their employees” of national origin (Devoto, 2009, p. 166)

Australia is another example of the era of the implementation of highly restrictive migration policies. By 1924, a quota system was implemented that was even more strict than

that of the United States, as it specifically limited the entrance of individuals coming from southern European countries. Achieving White Australia through the migrant selection criterion was the objective pursued. At the same time, and even if there were no legal dispositions of “racial exclusion,” other highly ambiguous mechanisms were set in motion with one clear concern: “to prevent the massive arrival of Asian workers, particularly Chinese ones” (Sánchez Alonso, 2007, pp. 239-240). Shortly after, an economic criterion followed the racial one, by establishing a minimum amount that the immigrant had to have at the time of entry to the country, to prevent migrants from being a burden to the State (Devoto, 2009, p. 166).

In New Zealand—a country that was discarded by the Swiss in the 1930s as a migratory destination due to its “high living cost”—the situation was very similar to the Australian case, even more arbitrarily. Since 1920, the legal dispositions oriented towards repelling the entrance of people from close Asian countries even allowed the rejection of immigrants “with no justification needed” (Devoto, 2009, p. 167). In both Oceania and Canada, governments would not only did not restrict the access of British migrants but also encouraged it by paying part of the traveling costs.

In Argentina, the State also implemented protectionist migration policies as a mechanism that aimed at preventing competition in the labor market, “to protect internal employment and fight unemployment” (Novick, 1997, p. 8). Between 1931 and 1940, the decrease in European immigration to Argentina was significant—although less than in the United States—, as only 310,000 people arrived against the 1,760,000 of the first decade of the 20th century, and the 1,400,000 immigrants in the period from 1921 to 1930 (Devoto, 2009, pp. 162-163).

Within this context of severe restrictions is where the arrival of the largest number of Helvetic immigrants took place: between 1936 and 1939, over 1,000 people emigrated from Switzerland overseas, and most established themselves in Argentina, Brazil, and, to a lesser extent, Canada. Even if Swiss migration into Argentina was not massive—Frid (2013) estimates that between 1857 and 1940, 50,000 Swiss people entered the country, with a net migration of 25,000 for the period—in South America, Argentina was still the principal receiver of this influx, only surpassed in the same period by the United States.

Towards 1939, the entrance of immigrants was interrupted as the Swiss borders were tightly closed unless one would get special permits. At the same time, the Swiss labor market improved; the army stood out as an employer during that period, garnering many recruits for the defense of the borders before the possibility of war.

Social Networks in the Process of Adaption

Without neglecting the contributions of the structural approach, the micro-analysis approach will allow to “reconstruct the fabric of social and political relationships in a society characterized by heterogeneity, mobility, conflict, fluidity” (Piselli, 1995, pp. 64-65). In this sense, social networks provides the elements for an approach that starts from the individual and their practices and strategies of adaptation on a daily basis, also allowing to identify the fabric of relationships they establish with others, thus enabling to “reconstruct trajectories and channels of social mobility,” studying “the conflict and change dynamics from the within” (Piselli, 1995, pp. 64-65).

Certain structural factors impact on the social and psychological area of the population, which does not necessarily involve an individual in isolation, but rather represents a family survival strategy. In fact, many of the Swiss immigrants who arrived at Misiones in the second half of the 1930s were family groups that resulted most affected by the economic depression, including artisans and workers coming from large urban centers; for them, the jungle represented the unknown, inhospitable, isolation. In 1942, in his notes on traveling through the Swiss colonies in Misiones, Luis Ferrari wrote: “What and how many problems! What and how many questions! First, the disparity of the weather, then the different languages and the contrast between livelihoods, and between the old and new environments” (Ferrari, 1942, p. 23). Certainly, and as pointed out by the Swiss government official:

To uproot oneself to a home from, say, *Untergelafinger* [Switzerland] to Puerto Rico, is not only, nor mainly, a financial move or a matter of economic reach, or of consequences communicable in numbers; it is an operation whose projections in social and cultural order surpass those of other nature (Ferrari, 1942, pp. 22-23).

Most Helvetic migrants settled in rural areas of Argentina between the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, and only 25% of them had urban areas in Buenos Aires and Rosario as their destination. In Misiones, an important juncture of the Swiss colonies migration process was linked to the beginning of work for the yerba mate plantations towards 1902 and its profitability in the following years, starting with the formation of a migration network revolving around the “green gold call.” The creation of the Yerba Mate Regulatory Commission⁶ in 1935 did not mean, however, that new migrants were to dedicate to urban activities but rather the implementation of new farmlands as an adaptation mechanism.

⁶The Yerba Mate Regulatory Commission (CRYM, for its acronym in Spanish) was created on October 4, 1935, under the Law No. 12236. This commission taxed \$4 Argentinian pesos on every new yerba mate plant and regulated the pruning of the already existing ones; due to this, Swiss immigrants who arrived between 1936 and 1937 were not able to sow further yerba mate (Zang, 2013, p. 40).

In these scenarios, the arrival of future colonizers was particularly difficult, not only due to the scarce resource with which they came into the new environment, but also because the acquisition of many land plots was carried out without previous inspection, or even when due diligence was done, the lack of knowledge of agricultural practices resulted in bad choices.

Going over the clearings, Johannes [Schedler] and his eldest daughter went about looking for a farm to buy. They found it in Línea Cuchilla, where there already were some Swiss families. Johanness, who logically knew nothing about agriculture, chose the beautiful plot of land No. 88, as a stream ran through it, and he liked it, even if the soil was not good for cultivation as it was a large rocky terrain (Schedler de Schweri, 2003, p. 1).

Besides the little knowledge they had about rural labor, Eugenio Keller added the factor of “the circulation of wrong information among immigrants” regarding the cultural works in the farm at the time of sowing; thus, the interviewee explained:

[...] a colonist associated the cultivation of cassava with that of potato, and started by sowing pieces of cassava root; the days passed, and after he went over the farmland several times looking sprouts and finding nothing, he discussed this with other colonist and it was only then that he was informed this was not the way the plant reproduced (E. Keller, personal communication, October 4, 2013).

Keller would remember the anecdotes of his parents and pointed out that joking was also quite common:

[...] one day this German-Brazilian colonist jokingly told a Swiss immigrant who had just arrived at Línea Cuchilla that he should buy two bundles of *fumo* [black tobacco], cut them into pieces and then plant that in the farmland. [A few] days after this same colonist asked what was the result of the operation, and the Swiss man answered that there were no visible sprouts but that those pieces of *fumo waren schon ziemlich dick* [where already quite thick] (E. Keller, personal communication, October 4, 2013).

The problem of the urban origin of immigrants not only lied on how difficult it was adapting to the rural labor “in the wild,” as it was also worse for those who did not have an occupation to pursue and that would be of use in their new environment:

For example, dad was a carpenter and he would help other colonists building their houses and sheds, and even built furniture [...] in the case of Senn, he was a cab driver in Switzerland... but what good is a cab in the wild? (E. Keller, personal communication, October 4, 2013).

The settlement of Swiss people took place mainly in the colonies established with private capital, and these started to emerge in Misiones during the first decades of the 20th century, after the exhaustion of the extractive front, a process that brought along the division and sale of large private estate to entrepreneurs dedicated to colonization endeavors.

There were several cases in which Swiss migrants turned into colonizing entrepreneurs to attract fellow countrymen. In 1919, Eugenio Lagier —a native of Aubone, Switzerland—

bought land from the Roca family in association with Luciano Leiva from Santa Fe and sold them to Swiss immigrants after dividing them into lots. In 1925, Julio Ulyses Martin—a Swiss-French immigrant from the small settlement of Vaud—requested his 4,000 hectares of land in Oro Verde—a Swiss colony along Río Paraná, 20 km from the colony of Puerto Rico—to be measured for the formation of a Swiss colony (Gallero, 2009); in 1937 Enrique Bucker—native of Maltes, Lucerna—requested the same in Puerto Esperanza; Bucker, despite having settled there since 1926, did not hesitate to attract Swiss immigrants during the recession period of this country.

Even if the private colonies in Puerto Rico, Eldorado, and Montecarlo mainly consisted of migrant groups coming from Germany and by Germans coming from Brazil, these colonies also received Swiss immigrants in different periods, more so towards the mid-1930s.

As pointed out by Dolores Juliano (1994), people tend to group in one destination according to the places they come from “not as a consequence of an occasional confluence at the destination location but due to a link originating in the genesis of the migratory phenomenon itself” (Juliano, 1994, p. 94).

In the early 1920s, Swiss immigration to the colony of Puerto Rico was quite scarce, and the arrival of Johan Christian Theler at Cuña Pirú (located southeast of the Puerto Rico colony, about 20 km from the Río Paraná) and, shortly after, of his family, can be seen as a first precedent of the Helvetic presence in the colony.

As a result of the deterioration of his fields and of the dairy farm that he owned in Ambrosetti, in the province of Santa Fe, Theler decided to move to Misiones—a place recommended to him by the Swiss Peter Allemann, then-writer of the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* newspaper—and “summon” his entire family, which remained dispersed between Switzerland and Santa Fe, hoping to ensure jobs for his son and son in law “in the brilliant urban centers” that were taking shape in the Alto Paraná colonies, and to gather at once all of his family in one place (Theler, 2007, p. 39). In this case, migration was a family strategy in which social networks aided to consolidate the process.

Since the signing of the 1937 Swiss-Argentinian Treaty for Emigration and Colonization, following on the ideas of Dr. Wilhelm Joos,⁷ the Swiss government tried to solve their social problems through emigration. This way, Luis Ferrari—a member of the Swiss Consulate in

⁷ Wilhelm Joos was born in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, on April 1 of 1821, to a wealthy family, and studied medicine in renowned European universities. After graduating as a medical doctor, he visited different countries such as Argelia and Egypt, in Africa, and Colombia, Brazil and Costa Rica in America. These travels allowed him to acknowledge diverse economic and social problems, and once back in Switzerland he promoted the emigration of the most impoverished Swiss social strata, result of a growing industrialization (Arletazz, 1979).

Buenos Aires— managed to relocate 400 Swiss nationals in Misiones, arriving at the port of the capital. At the same time, as recommended by a Swiss resident in Santo Pipó —a Swiss colony located in Alto Paraná, 70 km away from the city of Posadas, provincial capital of Misiones— named Jacques de Chambrier, an agreement was signed with Adolfo Schwelm for the settlement of immigrants and the allotting of land to the new colonists for half their prices, and granting them greater payment facilities.

Once the Treaty was signed, over 50 Swiss families settled in Argentina. The destination point was the Misiones National Territory, not only due to the land being accessible but also because counting “with an initial capital not above 4000 francs” (Ferrari, 1942, p. 37), the sale of native wood from the economic unities would provide additional income for future settlers.

On the other hand, in the Pampa region, 20 hectares of land is insufficient for the accomplishment of extensive exploitation; besides that, the price per hectare was way higher than that of Misiones, due to the fertility of the soil and because the land was located closer to the consumption centers of the country and port. Also, each colonist was meant to cover the costs of wire-fencing their properties, an expense that was not immediate in Misiones.

Within this framework, after 1937, the Colonizing Company Eldorado organized the sale of land to Swiss immigrants who distributed themselves over km 28 of Eldorado, in Línea Cuchilla, and San Alberto; the latter were located in the Puerto Rico colony. Adolfo Schwelm saw in this situation an opportunity to attract immigrants to his colonies, and so he propelled intense propaganda to sell the land for a lesser price than they were sold to colonists without subventions: “the price of 70 pesos per hectare, instead of 110 and 120 pesos, which was the price paid for these same lands up until four or five months ago” (Ferrari, 1942, p. 27).

In the context of economic recession, the Swiss government promoted immigration as a relief mechanism to the social pressure happening inside the country, as a result of unemployment, in this sense, the signing of the 1937 Swiss-Argentinian Treaty for Emigration and Colonization follows along the lines of such policy. Thus, “*für die Ursprungsregionen der Auswanderer bedeutete die Abwanderung nach Übersee eine Entlastung*” [for the regions of origin of emigrants, emigration abroad meant relief] (Andrian-Werbung Von, 2007, p. 15). Most Swiss immigrants that arrived at Misiones in this way were those that had been more heavily affected by the economic crisis, and they left looking for a way to improve their fortune in the place that would offer the most advantages for their insertion, considering the scarce resources with which they arrived (Zang, 2013).

At the time of leaving Switzerland, not all of them had direct information —as in, provided by other migrants— about the characteristics of Misiones and, in that sense, the

colonization companies employed in Europe for the attraction of migrants provided disparate information:

[...] they would even tell you what was the food here —remembered one Swiss immigrant coming from Basile— but they did not say that it was all mountains here; *das war sehr schlecht* [that was quite bad] [...] there were many promises and lots of information circulated around, but very little of it was true (A. Wurlig in Pellegrini, Maranesi, Berini, & Manfrini, 1971, without numbering).

And so, the construction of social networks after their departure, during their journey, and once settled in their destination, represented an important contribution in the process of adapting to the new space.

On its own, the information that circulated in advertising brochures published in Europe about the differential advantages of potential migration locations did not represent sufficient motives for people to mobilize. In many cases, it was necessary to have first-hand information provided by migrants already settled in the new destination, and so family and country ship relationships played an outstanding role in the decision of traveling.

The Studer family, for example, emigrated to Argentina within the frame of the project promoted from Switzerland by Emil Immoos, president of the Artisans Home of Zurich. Immoos, “as a member of a special commission sent by the Swiss government,” traveled through south Brazil, Chile, and Argentina, studying the living conditions and the possibilities these regions offered for the transit of immigrants. Besides providing information and advising their countrymen eager to emigrate on the characteristics of those places, Immoos’s project took into account a preliminary period of gastronomic adaptation: “every day one would eat rice and beans, and drink cooked mate” (Engeler, 2008, p. 148).

As one of the first immigrants settling by the mid-1930s in Línea Cuchilla, Francisco Studer provided information to his countrymen still in Switzerland. The first contact that the Zimmermann had with Misiones took place after receiving a letter from Línea Cuchilla where Studer advised them against migration:

[...] he wrote and told us how things were here; he told us about the different insects such as *mbarigütes*, *uras*, and *piques*, about the heat, but he also told us there were large mountain areas [...] but when we knew about the mountains, that is what convinced us as we were working the wood in Switzerland already, and we knew that the mountains in Misiones would provide the raw material we needed to keep on working something similar (L. Zimmermann, personal communication, November 9, 2010).

In this new reception space, the reconstruction of “previous social environments, by means of informal networks of information and reception” (Juliano, 1994, pp. 93-94) became evident many times. This way, economic reasons such as the devaluation of the Swiss franc in other parts of the world, and particular reasons such as having information

about the vast mountain areas in Misiones, were determining factors in choosing the destination.

Not only us, others had contemplated the possibility of going to New Zealand, Canada or Australia, but those places were discarded because a sum of about 1,500 francs was necessary, and the possibility of contact with other immigrants you knew where smaller [...] many years ago, my uncle had emigrated to New Zealand, but over time we never knew about him anymore (L. Zimmermann, personal communication, November 9, 2010).

Thanks to previous contacts with friends and family who arrived before them, “migrants accessed knowledge, assistance and other resources that facilitated their transit” (Massey et al., 2000, pp. 24-25); and so, those migrants who arrived earlier served as guides and advisors for those coming after from Europe, both in terms of the organization of the farms and of the agricultural works, as well as in getting to know the vegetation of the place and the necessary care for the control and interaction with insects. In this sense, we can posit social networks as a form of social capital⁸ (Arango, 2000), that served immigrants — through the bonds established beforehand, and even already in their destination— as an enabling mechanism for the migration process, as it allowed to achieve access to certain goods or information.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the second half of the 19th century, Argentina began an organization process towards becoming a nation. Argentina’s integration into the global market and its participation in the international division of labor, the creation of a centralized bureaucratic apparatus, the sanction of the National Constitution, and populating its territory with immigrants were all components of this process. In this scenario, one of the main characteristics of the period between 1880 and 1920 is related to the arrival “of a large contingent of immigrants coming from Europe, who made up the mass of workers of the primary and secondary sectors” (Massena, 2013, p. 97).

However, the jurisdictional instability that characterized Misiones during much of the 19th century, delayed the settlement of immigrants in its territory. The formation of large private estates that followed the creation of the National Territory in 1881, and the prevalence of an extractive front for the exploitation of its resources, would again translate

⁸Bourdieu thought of social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248); focusing on the benefits accessed by individuals who are part of certain groups, there is “a growing consensus in terms of social capital represents the ability of actors to ensure advantages for through belonging to networks or other social structures” (Portes & Böröcz, 1998, pp. 3-6).

into holding back the beginning of the colonies-formation process. Towards the end of the 19th century, and with strong State support, the first taxable colonies emerged south of the territory, with the foundation of Santa Ana, Candelaria, and Apostoles, located in south Misiones.

When it comes to Swiss people, their settlement was in private colonies predominantly, emerging in the national territory from the first decades of the 20th century, after the gradual exhaustion of the extractive front. Many Swiss immigrants bought land for the subsequent formation of colonies after the settlement of other compatriots.

As a result of the economic crisis that Switzerland went through by the mid-1930s, new contingents of Swiss immigrants began to arrive at Misiones; they settled mainly in the colonies of Alto Paraná. Among the structural reasons for their emigration we can count, on the one hand, high unemployment rates and the devaluation of the Swiss franc resulting from a global economic crisis, and on the other, the broadcasts by colonizing entrepreneurs such as Adolfo Schwelm in Alto Paraná, who through his company promoted the settlement of Swiss people in the region.

By July 1937, the Swiss-Argentinian Treaty for Emigration and Colonization was signed, through which the legal bases for this migratory flow were set. By means of this treaty, the Swiss government granted about 4,000 francs per family for their transfer and establishment in Argentina. The greater part of immigrants who entered the country in this period would settle in Misiones due to the availability of land and its low cost, compared to mild-weather provinces. These immigrants, who were urban workers, were the most affected by the crisis in Switzerland.

Despite Swiss migrations to Misiones having taken place mainly during periods of severe economic recession in the country of origin, structural causes were not the only influence on the mobility of these people. The lack of experience in agricultural work, difference in weather, and the difficulties to communicate with their families in Europe undermined the morals of the recently arrived. In this sense, the formation of new social networks was strategic to the processes of integration and adaptation to the new environment, playing a fundamental role in the labor insertion of many Swiss immigrants.

Macro- and micro-analyzes are not mutually exclusive nor incompatible, but rather provide answers to different questions when studying one single social phenomenon. This in mind, the premise is that networks are not ahistorical and aspatial, as many of the strategies implemented by migrants were the product of a particular conjunctural situation.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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