

Swiss Immigration and the Emergence of a Network Linked to *Yerba Mate* in Misiones, Argentina: A Microhistorical Approach (1919-1929)

La inmigración suiza y el surgimiento de una red vinculada a la yerba mate en Misiones, Argentina: un abordaje a partir de la microhistoria (1919-1929)

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Swiss migration during the 1920s and aims to analyze the figure of Professor Andreas Sprecher von Bernegg as a fundamental link in the formation and articulation of a migratory network linked to *yerba mate*, “the green gold.” Based on a microhistorical and prosopographical approach, the methodology employed is essentially qualitative, with the analysis of sources from private and state archives, immigrants’ memories, travellers’ accounts, and interviews for the creation of oral sources and ethnographic interviews. The arrival of his students in Misiones was fundamental in transforming the local economy and promoted the transition from an extractive economy to a productive one based on the growing of *yerba mate*, with the vision that *quality rather than quantity* should prevail.

Keywords: 1. Swiss migrations, 2. yerba mate, 3. Andreas Sprecher von Bernegg, 4. Misiones, 5. Argentina.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo centra su atención en las migraciones suizas durante la década de 1920 y tiene como objetivo analizar la figura del profesor Andreas Sprecher von Bernegg como nexo fundamental para la conformación y articulación de una red migratoria vinculada a la yerba mate, “el oro verde”. A partir del abordaje microhistórico y prosopográfico, la metodología empleada es esencialmente cualitativa con análisis de fuentes obtenidas de archivos particulares y estatales, memorias de inmigrantes, relatos de viajeros y entrevistas para la creación de fuentes orales y entrevistas etnográficas. La llegada de sus alumnos al territorio de Misiones fue fundamental para transformar la economía local y propiciar el pasaje de una economía extractiva a una productiva en torno al cultivo de la yerba mate, con la visión de que prime *la calidad más que la cantidad*.

Palabras clave: 1. migraciones suizas, 2. yerba mate, 3. Andreas Sprecher von Bernegg, 4. Misiones, 5. Argentina.

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INTRODUCTION³

The time will come when planters will have to pay attention to quality rather than quantity.
(Sprecher von Bernegg, 1936)

When mass international migrations declined after the First World War, the current Argentine province of Misiones became a pole of attraction for Swiss origin mobilities. Although few people of that origin settled there at the end of the 19th century, it was between the two world wars that there were two moments of higher incomes: the first during the 1920s and the second in the mid-1930s. The migration profile of each of these waves was very different. In the first, the migration mobilities were mostly single men with university degrees and economic resources to invest in *yerba mate* (*Ilex paraguariensis* St. Hilaire); while in the second, they were family groups affected by the economic recession that Switzerland was going through.

In the process of mobility of people from Switzerland to Misiones, the relationships formed through a consolidated migratory network were of great importance during the moment of emigration as well as in the new environment in which they arrived (Zang, 2020). Understood as “sets of recurrent associations between groups of people linked by occupational, family, cultural or affective ties” (Portes, 1999, p. 12), the importance of networks in economic life lies in the fact that they are a means of strengthening resources such as capital and information, which are essential at the time of emigration. This article focuses on the first of these migratory flows and analyzes the figure of Professor Andreas Sprecher von Bernegg as a fundamental link for the formation and articulation of a migratory network linked to *yerba mate*, the “green gold,” and how this network was fundamental to focus on the quality rather than on quantity of this cultivation.

The article is organized in two sections. The first of these studies the general panorama of Swiss immigration at the beginning of the 20th century in Misiones. The second one deals, on the one hand, with the conformation of a migratory network around *yerba mate* during the 1920s and the actions of Professor Andreas Sprecher von Bernegg in relation to the itinerary of immigrants who played a key role in the consolidation of a network in Santo Pipó; and on the other hand, the extension of this network towards the north of Misiones with the colonization of Puerto Esperanza.

³ This article is framed within the project “Cartografía etnográfica e historia ambiental en Misiones (1881-2010)” [“Ethnographic cartography and environmental history in Misiones (1881-2010)”], whose director is Dr. Cecilia Gallero and of which Dr. Laura Zang is a researcher. The project is funded under PIP 11220200100391CO. The technical assistance of Guido Diblasi and Mariana Dimas, career support staff of the Institute of Social and Human Studies (Conicet-UNaM) is gratefully acknowledged.

METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out using a qualitative methodology and involved the use of multiple heuristic resources: private archives (archives of the Alberto Roth Foundation, the Yerba Mate Producers' Cooperative of Santo Pipó, Pindó, S. A., Swiss Evangelical Church), state archives of the ETH in Zurich, Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv [Swiss Federal Archives] in Bern, Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos [Center for Latin American Migration Studies] and the Archivo General de Gobernación de Misiones [General Archive of the Government of Misiones], immigrant memoirs, travelers' accounts and interviews for the creation of oral sources and ethnographic interviews.

The analysis of these sources was of vital importance in the reconstruction of the network of relationships that Professor Andreas Sprecher von Bernegg maintained with his students who migrated to Misiones and the links they had with each other. The microhistorical and prosopographical approach allowed the study of “the construction of plural and plastic social identities that is carried out through a dense network of relationships (of competition, solidarity, alliance, etc.)” (Revel, 2005, p. 50).

The reduction of the scale of analysis proposed by both prosopography and microhistory was contemplated as an “analytical resource applicable anywhere, regardless of the dimensions of the object being analyzed” (Levi, 1996, p. 122). This made it possible to delve into the complexity and “density”—in Grendi's terms (Grendi, 1996)—of the networks formed and the role played by individuals in these processes. In this sense, as a method that seeks an approach to social reality, prosopography was closely linked to microhistory insofar as it analyzed the role of individuals vis-à-vis the social structure (Martínez Esquivel, 2016). An approach of this type, therefore, facilitated an approach to the relationships and social dynamics of migrants, and at the same time to understand the historical context in which these subjects were inserted.

MISSIONS AND SWISS IMMIGRATION

In Argentina, after the fall of the government of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1852) and the sanctioning of the national Constitution (1853) of “Alberdian inspiration”⁴, a change in the role of the State took place that meant a substantial turn in the history of migration, since under the motto of “to govern is to populate” (Mayer, 1969, p. 409), the following decades saw the consolidation of the phenomenon of mass migrations “corroborated by the beginning, in 1857, of the records of the entry of foreigners in the port of Buenos Aires” (Sassone, 2021, p. 47). Thus, since the mid-19th century, Argentina became, along with the United States and Brazil, a destination of choice for the

⁴ The political project of the National Constitution of Argentina followed the guidelines proposed by Juan Bautista Alberdi in his work *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la nación Argentina* [*Bases and starting points for the political organization of the Argentine nation*]. “Alberdi is undoubtedly the main architect of the Argentine State” and who proposed “the political formula of the Argentine Constitutional State” (Santiago, 2003, p. 238), within which one idea was “to govern is to populate.”

Swiss (Andrian-Werburg von, 2007) with the founding of the first colonies in Buenos Aires and Santa Fe (Schobinger, 1957; Mauron, 2006).

The first contacts that the Swiss had with Misiones can be traced back to the end of the 19th century, when in 1881, thanks to the fact that it became a national territory, it motivated the arrival of travelers and naturalists who made exploratory trips for scientific purposes to gather information. Within this framework, the renowned botanist and naturalist Moisés Bertoni, who arrived in Santa Ana and, due to political problems, migrated back to Paraguay, stood out (Baratti, 1999; Ortiz, 2004). The evangelical pastor Louis Constant Lagier and his son Eugenio—who arrived in Argentina a few years later—, as well as the doctor Francisco Machon and the businessman Julio Ulyses Martin also stand out.

At the beginning of the 20th century, most of Argentina's cereal-producing provinces—including Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Entre Ríos and a large part of La Pampa—had no land available for the settlement of immigrants who had recently arrived from Europe as landowners (Barsky & Gelman, 2009). However, the more distant areas from the main national productive center, such as the national territory of Misiones, from the time, not only represented a refuge for many immigrants fleeing from a shattered Europe after World War I, but also meant the possibility of consolidating themselves as landowners. After the end of the war conflict, Switzerland's economic situation was extremely critical (Zang, 2017).

Although the country did not participate in the war, since it did not have access to the sea, there was a shortage of primary products⁵. In this context, emigration represented access to better opportunities. While international migration declined at that time, the situation was different for the Swiss. Indeed, by the end of 1918, the number of emigrants moving to Misiones exceeded the inflows of previous decades; and after the crisis of 1929, the percentage of Swiss emigrants increased, so that by 1938 approximately 70% of Swiss emigrants were located in six of the main private colonies of Misiones (Santo Pipó, Puerto Rico, Puerto Esperanza, Oro Verde, Montecarlo and Eldorado) (Glatz, 1997).

Thus, Misiones was the main destination chosen by Swiss immigrants during the first half of the 20th century. Within this time frame, two sub-stages can be recognized: the first took shape during the 1920s with the arrival of around 800 people from Switzerland, while the second was consolidated in the mid-1930s with slightly more than 2 000 new arrivals (Glatz, 1997).

In spite of the fact that the mobilities of Swiss origin did not reach massive proportions—they represent only 0.2 percent of the total migration (República Argentina, 1914, p. 399)—, Argentina was the destination of the largest Swiss community in Latin America. In this scenario, Misiones played a prominent role by receiving more than two thirds of the immigrants of this origin between 1900 and 1939 and being the place where three quarters of the “subsidized” immigrants who

⁵ Switzerland was a highly industrialized country and its economy was centered on the export of manufactured goods; on the other hand, it was an importer of raw materials with a strong dependence on foodstuffs from other neighboring countries such as Germany.

arrived within the framework of the Swiss-Argentine Treaty of Emigration and Colonization, signed in 1937, settled (Gallero, 2009, p. 38).

The migratory profiles of both groups were very different due to the regional origins of provenance and the historical context of arrival, since the possibility or not to carry out yerba mate plantations was a central element, as well as the mechanisms for the execution of the migratory projects and the socioeconomic contrasts of the migratory waves.

The colonizing ventures of Eugenio Lagier in Santo Pipó (1919), of Julio Ulyses Martin in Oro Verde (1925), and of Gustavo Keller in Puerto Esperanza (1926) were fundamental for the beginning of a new period within the Swiss mobilities to Misiones. Yerba mate was a key element in this context because, until the late 1920s, it was a product of great economic value. Thus, the spread of the yerba mate plantations generated changes in all spheres of society, as it was one of the main driving forces for the settlement of future settlers.

In the migration trajectory there were truncated projects. For example, Ferdinand Fuchs, a lawyer from St. Gallen, promoted between 1926 and 1934 the migration of people in a planned manner by the Swiss state as a mechanism to cope with the social instability caused by increasing unemployment. As a result of this project, a colony named Colón would be created for Swiss immigrants and would be located to the north of Eldorado. However, the Swiss Federal Council did not support this initiative and Fuchs' plan did not prosper⁶. The projects carried out by Pablo Hasselbach—Fuchs' brother-in-law—and Enrique Bucher had a similar purpose⁷.

On the other hand, *yerba* was the crop that opened the territory to colonization, and continues to be the driving force of the provincial economy. In this process, politics became a major factor, as evidenced by the decree of March 15, 1926, which made it compulsory to plant and cultivate with yerba mate a certain part of the area granted to those who were awarded fiscal agricultural plots (Billard, 1944).

Emergence of the Migratory Network Linked to Yerba Mate

The yerba mate *Ilex paraguariensis* St. Hilaire has the particularity of being a natural specimen of the Paranaense rainforest—also known as *mata atlantica*—. For a long time consumed and harvested from natural yerba mate by the Guarani populations, with some cultivation experiences in the *período reduccional jesuítico* [Jesuit reduction period] (1610-1768); it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that large plantations materialized. The initiative started with Julio Ulyses Martin, a Swiss immigrant from Vaud, who established the first large-scale yerba mate plantations in San Ignacio. Other Swiss immigrants, such as Ernesto Addor, joined this impulse and new undertaking in the cultivation of yerba mate —compatriot of the canton of Vaud—, who

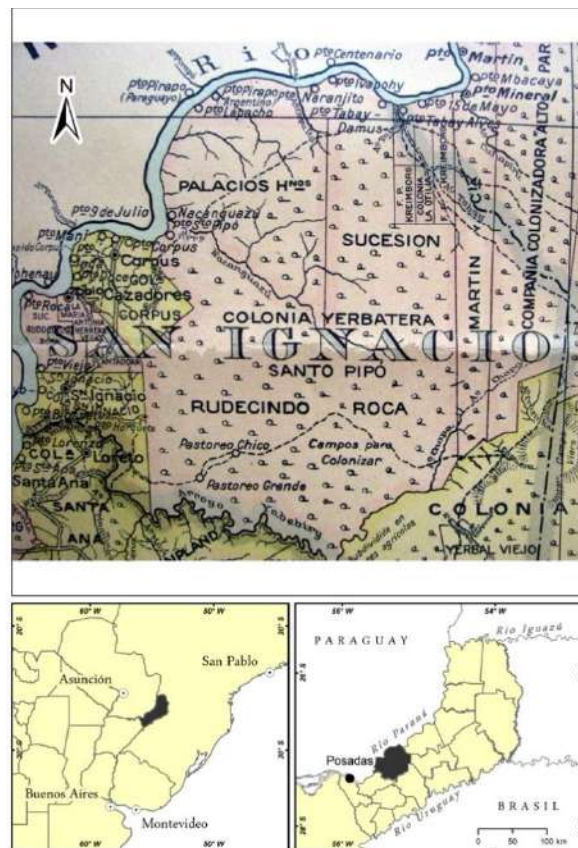
⁶ Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv [Swiss Federal Archives], Bern, Switzerland, E 2175, Paper 1000/132_36. Kolonisation Eldorado Dr. Fuchs & Projekt Colon.

⁷ Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv [Swiss Federal Archives], Bern, Switzerland, E 2175, Paper 1000/132_37. Kolonisationsprojekt Bucher in Misiones. [The Bucher colonization project in Misiones.] Kolonisationsprojekt Haselbach-Misiones [Haselbach-Misiones colonization project.].

arrived in San Ignacio from Paraguay to manage the yerba mate drying plant of Martin y Cía. He was replaced by his brother-in-law Roberto Deccopet. Later, Allain and Addor established large yerba mate plantations in the Sociedad Auxiliar Fabril, Agrícola y Comercial (SAFAC) [Auxiliary Manufacturing, Agricultural and Commercial Company] in Puerto Bemberg, north of Misiones.

In the first decades of the 20th century, San Ignacio became the area with the highest concentration of cultivated yerba mate plantations in the National Territory under the leadership of two large companies: Martin y Cía. and La Plantadora, S. A. Soon, Santo Pipó became a paradigmatic case due to the increase in planted yerba mate plantations. Indeed, from being a labor center exploited by the Damus brothers, with a working population of 130 men (Niklison, 1914), it became a private colony for Swiss immigrants and dedicated to the cultivation of yerba mate, as can be seen in map 1. In this sense, the network of Swiss immigrants was fundamental in achieving the transition from an extractive to a productive economy.

Map 1. Central Section of the Map of Misiones



Source: Reworked by Humberto Smichowski (2023) from the original maps of Muello (1930, n. p.).

The yerba mate business had interested the Swiss-French Eugenio Lagier, who first settled in Candelaria and later ventured into the colonization business. However, because he was a foreigner,

the lands destined for colonization were acquired by Luciano Leiva⁸, a family friend from Santa Fe. The subdivision of lots in the colony was 100 hectares—almost four times the size of what was usually done until then in other settlements—, which shows that the socioeconomic profile of those who settled there corresponded more to that of capital investors than to the typical impoverished European immigrants of the end of the 19th century.

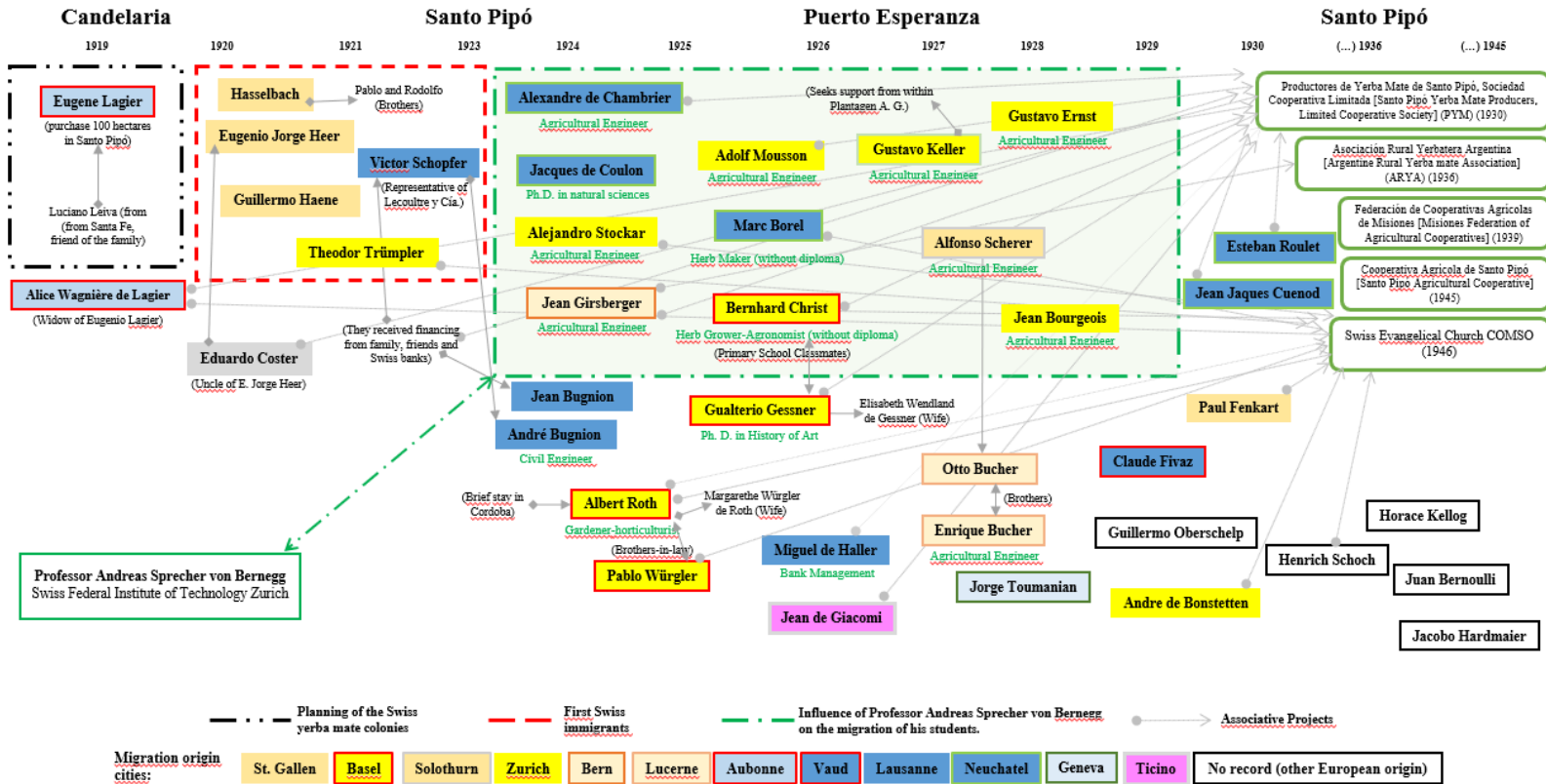
A yerba mate planter needed a good budget to start the plantations, even more so considering that the *yerbales* could start to be harvested four years after planting. Thus, Machon estimated:

that a settler must have a capital of at least 20,000 to 25,000 Swiss francs. Half of this is to buy the land which can be paid in several installments, the rest will allow him to live for four years, which he will need to obtain the first harvest, that is to say, for his lodging, for the necessary tools, etc. [own translation] (Machon, 1926, n.p.).

The first immigrants to arrive in Santo Pipó were the brothers Pablo and Rodolfo Hasselbach, Eugenio Jorge Heer and Guillermo Haene, from San Gall, among others; and soon after, Victor Schopfer arrived from Lausanne, who had begun “work in the middle of the virgin forest in 1921, demonstrating great courage and endurance” [own translation] (Machon, 1926, n.p.) (Figure 1).

⁸ Luciano Leiva—son of the former governor of Santa Fe between 1894 and 1898—was also a partner of Adolfo Schwelm in Colonia Victoria, north of Eldorado. However, he was not able to take charge of any colonizing feat since he died in 1921.

Figure 1. Migratory Network Scheme⁹



Source: Personal elaboration from interviews and memories.

⁹Note that in the body of the figure the regional origin of the migrants has been distinguished: Swiss-Germans in shades of yellow, Swiss-French in shades of blue and the only case of Swiss-Italian origin in pink. White is used to distinguish immigrants whose origin is unknown or who come from other European countries, mostly from Germany.

With the beginning of the colonizing enterprise, Lagier not only communicated to the Swiss government about the agricultural aptitudes of the missionary lands but also urged other young compatriots to follow him in the cultivation of *Ilex paraguariensis* St. Hilaire. In this sense, Professor Andreas Sprecher von Bernegg was the link between many immigrants who formed a solid migratory network with the aim of cultivating green gold. According to Ladislao Ziman and Alfonso Scherer, most of the Swiss settlers in Santo Pipó and Alto Paraná had their first contact with yerba mate and Misiones exactly in the house of this professor, in Susenbergstrasse, Zurich. These authors point out that he was one of the world's leading scientists specializing in tropical and subtropical crops, who strongly recommended to his students to plant yerba mate in South America instead of rubber or oil palms in Africa or Asia (Ziman & Scherer, 1976).

Professor Sprecher von Bernegg, a specialist in botany, worked at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich [ETH]). He had completed a thesis on ginkgo biloba in 1907, and from 1912 he worked at the newly established tobacco and rubber experimental station on Java's Besuki Island. In 1916, upon his return to Switzerland, he was a collaborator in plant physiology at the ETH. From 1923 he was professor with teaching assignment, and from 1926, full professor in the Department of Agriculture at the University of Zurich. He later served as director of the laboratory for the economic development of tropical and subtropical plants until his retirement in 1941¹⁰. Between 1926 and 1928 he made a study trip to South America to investigate subtropical crops, which later allowed him to publish a fundamental work on tea and yerba as economic crops worldwide (Sprecher von Bernegg, 1936).

The importance of a prosopographical analysis is based on this type of protagonism. In this connection, Wolfgang Reinhard emphasizes the usefulness of this method for making so-called sets, i.e., the relationships of a whole network of individuals, always polarized in one person, in one ego; these were very varied relationships that the person in question could set in motion if necessary (Vones-Liebenstein, 2005, p. 355).

As a resource in relationships, Professor Sprecher von Bernegg's linkage with his students, potential migrants, and the information shared by them were mechanisms that facilitated social action, which in this case resulted in migration. In this regard, inquiries at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich¹¹ revealed that they graduated as agricultural engineers: Alejandro de Chambrier in July 1921; Alejandro Stockar in July 1923 and, in October of the same year, Santiago de Coulon as doctor in natural sciences; Juan Girsberger and Adolfo Mousson in July 1924, and Alfonso Scherer in 1926. Marcos Borel and Bernardo Christ graduated without diplomas in July 1923 and 1924, respectively. All of them, with the exception of Alejandro de Chambrier and Gustavo Keller, studied the following subjects with Professor Sprecher von

¹⁰ He died at the age of 80 in Zurich on August 13, 1951 (Sprecher, A. [n. d.]. ETH Archive [H5 446-6]. Zurich).

¹¹ Thanks are due to Ursula Steinhauser of the library of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, for the information provided.

Bernegg: useful tropical plants and their cultivation (*Tropische Nutzpflanzen und ihre Kultur*), Exercise in merchandise knowledge (*Übung in Warenkunde*), influence of the tropical climate on plants, animals and humans (*Einfluss des Tropenklimas auf Pflanze, Tier und Mensch*). At his study meetings, the professor “served his students and listeners cooked mate and with bombilla” (Ziman & Scherer, 1976, p. 168), as a way of bringing the distant lands closer together and encouraging them to become planters.

At that time, higher education was a minority and forged a very strong bond between those who had the possibility of pursuing it. In this case, the university ties were strengthened by emigration; that is, in addition to having a common memory of lived experiences, they had shared the same professors and the reading of books required for their studies, but, above all, they established a friendship that crossed the ocean and that was consolidated in the red earth stings. Even if they had not studied at the same university, it was enough to have attended primary school together, as was the case of Gualterio Gessner, who was Bernardo Christ’s bankmate, and on a trip to Switzerland, Christ told him that Misiones was paradise. Don Gualterio had completed a doctorate in art history and the chances of getting a job at the University of Basel were still a long way off. Gressner, after marrying Elisabeth Wendland, set out for Santo Pipó.

The colonizing impulse had different tributaries, among which the installation of offices destined to promote the new colonies favored the arrival of new immigrants. Jacques de Chambrier, for example, offered 100 hectare lots in Santo Pipó through an office based in Posadas and advertised in Europe and the United States (Gallero, 2011).

Consolidation of the Yerba Mate Network in Santo Pipó

Many other immigrants who arrived shared a common culture and the same nostalgia, but, above all, an adventurous spirit, which led them to seek new opportunities in Misiones.

By 1924 they were arriving as yerba mate producers: Alejandro de Chambrier, Jacques de Coulon, Marcos Borel, Juan Girsberger, Adolfo Mousson, Bernardo Christ, Alejandro Stockar, Jean Bugnion, Miguel Alberto de Haller, and Gualterio Gessner. Later, Alberto Roth arrived with his wife Margarita Würigler de Roth -after a brief stay in Córdoba-, and the Genevan Armenian Jorge Toumanian.

Table 1 shows the chronological order of the arrival in the port of Buenos Aires of the main immigrants who arrived in Santo Pipó at the beginning of the 20th century. Data retrieved from the Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos (CEMLA) (Center for Latin American Migration Studies). In all cases, only the date of the first trip shown therein was taken. The picture provides an interesting overview of nationality, place of birth and profession; regarding the latter, it is interesting to note that some of them, upon arrival, were already called herb growers or planters, showing from very early on the idea that they were coming to realize.

Table 1. Data on the Arrival of Swiss Immigrants to Santo Pipó (1909-1939)¹²

Last name and first name	Age	Nationality	Occupation	Vessel	Date of arrival	Place of birth
Lagier Eugene	42	Switzerland /Helvetia	Agronomist	France	10/23/1909	Unknown
Wagnière de Lagier Alice	40	Switzerland /Helvetia	No profession	France	10/23/1909	Aubonne
Heer Eugenio (son)	31	Argentina	Merchant	Andes	11/29/191	Unknown
Heer Eugenio (father)	62	Switzerland /Helvetia	Trader	Andes	11/29/1919	St. Gallen
Coster Edouard	54	Luxemburguesa	Merchant	Lipari	8/17/1922	Diekirch
Cuenod Jean Jaques	28	Switzerland /Helvetia	Farmer	Desirade	3/12/19223	Vaud
De Chambrier Alexandre	24	Switzerland /Helvetia	Engineer	Principe di Udine	5/18/1923	Neuchatel
Roth Albert	23	Switzerland /Helvetia	Gardener	Baden	3/18/1924	Basel
Würgler de Roth Margarethe	28	Switzerland /Helvetia	Housewife	Baden	3/18/1924	Basel
De Haller Michel Albert	24	Switzerland /Helvetia	Employee in commerce	Tomaso di Savoia	5/22/1924	Tour de Peil
Oberschelp Gustav	30	German	School teacher	Wuttemberg	8/5/1924	Unknown
Schopfer Victor	25	Switzerland /Helvetia	Farmer	Cap. Norge	11/23/1924	Gimel
De Bonstetten Andre	22	Switzerland /Helvetia	Farmer	Valdivia	2/9/1925	Berna
Haene Victor	33	Switzerland /Helvetia	Farmer	Monte Olivia	10/19/1925	St. Gallen
Haene Annie	30	Switzerland /Helvetia	Housewife	Monte Olivia	10/19/1925	St. Gallen
Mousson Adolf	23	Switzerland /Helvetia	Engineer	Monte Olivia	12/16/1925	Zurich

(continues)

¹² The names of the migrants in the table appear as in the CEMLA database, but not in the body of the article, where they have been Spanishified.

(continuation)

Christ Bernhard	24	Switzerland /Helvetia	Hierbatero	Monte Olivia	16/12/192 5	Zurich
Kellog Horace	38	Switzerland /Helvetia	No profession	Formosa	4/12/1926	Unknown
Bugnion André	24	Switzerland	Engineer	Alsina	5/29/1926	Lausanne
Pigerl André	21	German	Electro technician	Bayern	7/3/1926	Regensburg
Pigerl Otto	27	German	Engineer	Bayern	7/3/1926	Regensburg
Ha[e]ne Guillermo	32	Switzerland /Helvetia	Planter	Baden	9/6/1926	St. Gallen
Ha[e]ne Gertrud	25	Switzerland /Helvetia	Household chores	Baden	9/6/1926	St. Gallen
Ha[e]ne Otto	3	Switzerland /Helvetia	Minor	Baden	9/6/1926	St. Gallen
Schoch Henrich	26	Switzerland /Helvetia	Engineer	Weser	9/19/1926	Welfingen
Fenkart Paul	25	Switzerland /Helvetia	Engineer	Weser	9/19/1926	St. Gallen
Fenkart Hanny	27	Switzerland /Helvetia	No profession	Weser	9/19/1926	Zurich
Bourgeois Jean	28	Switzerland /Helvetia	Agricultural Engineer	Florida	12/8/1926	Zurich
Borel Marc	28	Switzerland /Helvetia	Engineer	Florida	12/8/1926	Neuchatel
De Coulon Jacques	28	Switzerland /Helvetia	Trader	Conte Verde	3/3/1927	Neuchatel
Bugnion Daniele	23	Switzerland /Helvetia	No profession	Alcantara	5/23/1927	Burtigni
Schreiner Rosa	33	German	No profession	Gotha	11/28/192 7	Hochwurden
Trümpler Theodor	23	Switzerland /Helvetia	Farmer	Monte Olivia	3/4/1928	Zurich
Roulet Jean Pierre	30	Switzerland /Helvetia	Engineer	Augustus	6/8/1928	Neuchatel

(continues)

(continuation)

Schreiner Paul	42	Austrian	Blacksmith	Mendoza	9/30/1928	Nebersdorf
Girsberger Jean	30	Switzerland /Helvetia	Engineer	Monte Olivia	2/10/1930	Berna
Hardmeier Jacobo Enrique	31	Switzerland /Helvetia	Technician	Monte Rosa	10/9/1931	Zurich
Fivaz Edmond	32	Switzerland /Helvetia	Merchant	Giulio Cesare	2/24/1933	Vaud
Fivaz Helena	31	Switzerland /Helvetia	Household chores	Giulio Cesare	2/24/1933	Vaud
Fivaz Claude	3	Argentina	Student	Giulio Cesare	2/24/1933	Unknown
Wendland de Gessner Elisabeth	33	Switzerland /Helvetia	Housewife	Neptunia	4/22/1935	Zurich
Gessner de Bally María Theresa	6	Argentina	No profession	Neptunia	4/22/1935	Unknown
De Giacomi Jean	40	Switzerland /Helvetia	Industrial	Mar del Plata	5/27/1939	Bonaduz

Source: Own elaboration based on information extracted from CEMLA.

Most of the immigrants from the French cantons came to the colony of Santo Pipó, while those from the Germanic cantons arrived later. Graduate students as agronomists from the ETH Zurich, the profile of the Swiss settlers in this colony corresponded to an elite migration, even more so if one considers the availability of capital with which they arrived to invest in large-scale yerba mate plantations, which later had an impact on the increase in the price of land. The network that developed among these immigrants was transformed into social capital through a set of relationships based on mutual aid, information channels, trust and various forms of reciprocity that made possible actions that would not otherwise have been possible. Thus, any network that is consolidated is closely related to the degree of trust and solidarity shared by its members (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). Indeed, these prior links enabled migrants to access “knowledge, assistance and other resources that facilitated their movement” (Massey et al., 2000, pp. 24-25).

These agronomists, from now on *yerbateros*, came prepared to achieve large-scale model plantations. In some cases, they were representatives of Swiss firms that made investments, such as Víctor Schöpfer, who worked for Lecoultré y Cía. —an important watch factory—; in other cases, they represented friends or relatives who sent capital, such as Andrés Bugnion or Bernardo Christ, who concentrated shares of uncles and brothers, among them members of Swiss banks; or like Gualterio Gessner, who had his schoolmate Rolf Bally as a financier (Gallero, 2011).

The ties of friendship and kinship forged in this way created a social mechanism that made it possible to channel information and reduce the risks involved not only in moving to a new environment but also in the post-migration context. This situation is identified in the case of Bernardo Christ, who arrived at the port of Buenos Aires declaring himself to be a *hierbatero*, although he initially dedicated himself to managing the property of the Bugnion family. In these bonds of friendship that were forged, it can be seen that Christ became acquainted with Alberto Roth, who came from the same canton, and when seeking advice on how to start the yerba mate plantation acknowledged that “it was a pleasure to speak the Basel dialect again” (Gallero, 2014, p. 161). The motivation to undertake the journey, the knowledge, the shared economic resources and the different mechanisms of containment of the migrant used for the consolidation of mobility allowed the consolidation of a “migratory culture,” which was strengthened “through reciprocal exchange relationships, among which the favors are extended to relatives, friends and neighbors” (Pedone, 2003, pp. 224-229).

In the case of Santo Pipó, which was a private colonization, the plantations were encouraged to be carried out in an organized manner so that it could soon be catalogued as a model yerba mate colony. In a short time, nurseries were established for the careful production of seedlings, which in due course were transplanted on land cleared for this purpose. In an old account book, among other things, the cost of planting the yerba mate of Alejandro de Chambrier in 1925 is detailed, in which we can see the price of the seedlings, the replanting, the nursery, the shed, the wire fences, and the labor (in this case the laborer, the sentry who took care of the plantation, and the cost of dismantling)¹³.

All of these *new yerbateros* had similar beginnings. The exchange between the students and Professor Sprecher von Bernegg was noted in the special care required for the final planting in the field to achieve not only a more profitable production but also a better quality. *Yerba*, being an understory species, is very delicate in relation to the soil, besides being a very sensitive plant to temperatures and with extreme sensitivity to sun exposure. This means that new plantations require special care, such as *ponchos* or screens to protect the young yerba mate seedlings (Figure 2). Likewise, in his book the professor clearly establishes the planting frames and the distance between the plants, as well as the pruning (Sprecher von Bernegg, 1936).

¹³ Account book, courtesy of Martha de Haller de De Coulon.

Figure 2. Seedling Protection



Source: Private archive Maria Theresa Gessner de Bally, ca. 1927.

At the beginning, although the plantations suffered setbacks, such as drought or locust invasions, they yielded their first fruits between four and five years after they were started. This incipient production required processing, which meant that three operations had to be carried out: *sapecado*, drying, and *canchado*, at the end of which the leaves in their natural state became raw material for milling.

François Machon considers that surely the colonists established “under the cooperative form, central factories where they will go with their *yerba sapecada*, as at home the peasants go to the communal place to separate the wheat grains” [own translation] (Machon, 1927, n.p.). In the early 1930s, the migratory network was transformed into a cooperative network and gave rise to the first specialized cooperative dedicated to the production, processing and marketing of yerba mate. This association was named Productores de Yerba Mate de Santo Pipó, Sociedad Cooperativa Limitada (hereinafter PYM).

Among the founders of the cooperative were three former students of Professor Sprecher von Bernegg: Juan Girsberger,¹⁴ Adolfo Mousson,¹⁵ and Bernardo Christ.¹⁶ Other members of this core group were Miguel Alberto de Haller, who studied banking administration in Switzerland; Andrés Bugnion, a civil engineer who continued the work started by his brother Jean, after his untimely death in Santo Pipó; Gualterio Gessner; Juan de Giacomi and the Luxemburg merchant Eduardo Coster, who was later represented by his nephew Jorge Heer.

The initial goal was to join forces to dry the yerba mate produced by the associates. Shortly thereafter, new members joined the group: Esteban Roulet, Alice Wagnière (Eugenio Lagier's widow), Eugenio Jorge Heer, Juan Cuenod, and Alejandro de Chambrier, while Willian Fitting and David Lecoultre were represented by a proxy, who later became Andrés Bugnion.¹⁷ One point to note is that the dryer was operating before the cooperative's constitution was formalized, which demonstrates both previous friendship ties and regional solidarity (see Figure 1).

From the beginning, the intention was to technify the processes for the elaboration of yerba mate and, in this sense, the inventions developed by the Swiss Esteban Roulet were introduced: the mechanical *sapecadora* and a cot-type dryer, which years later was perfected towards the belt dryer. This sapecador was perfected in 1928 and from then on it was used by almost all the dryers, as can be seen in Photograph 1. The image shows a rotating wire mesh *sapecador*, under which a fire was lit. This device was used in Puerto Esperanza and was owned by Enrique Bucher, who was a key link and is analyzed in the following section.

¹⁴ Juan Girsberger: He was born on September 1, 1901 in the city of Zurich, where he died at the age of 94. He graduated from agricultural engineering from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. He was known as *Juan Pirú* because of his thinness, but also as a gray eminence for being in everything and always acting in the background or behind the scenes. He remained single. He was very business savvy and very entrepreneurial. His last years were a pendulum swing back and forth between Switzerland and Misiones. Of vast culture, permanent reading and travels all over the world, the Asociación Rural Yerbatera Argentina (ARYA), the Tungoil, S. C. L., Estancia Yohasá, Regional Máquinas, Sociedad Comercial Santo Pipó, Ivoty and Papel Misionero.

¹⁵ Adolfo Mousson, also known as "Chu chu," was born on February 4, 1902 and died in Santo Pipó in 1977. He graduated from agricultural engineering from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. He married Fulgencia Candia, a woman who had been widowed very young and from whom he adopted his four children: Marta, Victoria, Adolfinia, and Crescencio. He was in the beginnings of the Commercial Society of Santo Pipó, which he called "Mein boliche."

¹⁶ Bernardo Christ was born in Basel on September 29, 1901, where he died eighty years later. He studied agronomy at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. He married Sigried Rehsche, a native of Latvia, with whom he had two children: Alexandra (known as Sacha), who currently lives in Switzerland, and Manuel, who died as a child. After living for a few years in Santo Pipó, he moved his establishment to Tabay, from where he continued his relations with PYM.

¹⁷ All the aforementioned became the founding members of the cooperative, as established in article sixteen of its bylaws, which were approved by decree No. 46,634-438 of August 9, 1934. Estatutos de Productores de Yerba Mate de Santo Pipó, S. C. L.", 1934.

Photograph 1. *Sapecado* of Yerba Mate in Puerto Esperanza, ca. 1930



Source: Tell and Priamo (2020, p. 98).

The *secadero de tipo catre* [cot-type dryer] invented by Esteban Roulet replaced the *barbacuá*—the old drying system—which had been used up to that time. Technical innovations and the incorporation of new plantations allowed the small cooperative to begin to grow quite safely in a business that was losing the golden color of green gold. However, the profitability of yerba mate cultivation, the capital invested in the yerba mate fields and the absence of a structure of small landowners concerned with the supply of consumer goods, led to the subsequent stagnation of the colony (Dohmann, 1999). Many immigrants remedied this situation by looking for land in neighboring colonies, such as Ñacanguazú, Corpus, Gobernador Roca or General Urquiza (J. Würigler, personal communication, February 27, 2019).

At the same time, in this migratory network, the associative projects of its members stand out. First, the Asociación Rural Yerbatera Argentina (ARYA) in 1936 and the Federación de Cooperativas Agrícolas de Misiones in 1939, in which Juan Girsberger and Andrés Bugnion played a preeminent role. In second place, the Tungoil, S. C., L., arose in 1946 with the study commission that included Alejandro Stockar¹⁸, Eugenio Jorge Heer, Andrés Bugnion, Juan Girsberger, Carlos Dufaux, and Claudio Lagier (who continued the legacy of his father Eugenio Lagier). This cooperative, dedicated to tung oil (*Aleurites fordii*), brought together settlers from the neighboring towns of Corpus, General Roca, Gisela, Naranjito, Ñacanguazú, Puerto Mineral, and Tabay, all of which had their geographical center in the Santo Pipó colony.

Thirdly and lastly, at the end of 1945, a second cooperative was started, called Cooperativa Agrícola de Santo Pipó, whose promoters were Alejandro Stockar and Pablo Würigler. Its objective

¹⁸ Alejandro Stockar conducted the kinetic study of tung and some publications such as “Tung *Aleurites fordii* Hemsley” (Stockar, 1964).

was broader than that of the SME, since in addition to the processing and industrialization of yerba mate, it focused on tung, the citrus fruit of all the products of its partners in the region. Among the founding members were Teodoro Trümpler, Alejandro Stockar, Guillermo Oberschelp, Alberto Roth, Pablo Würgler, Margarita Würgler de Roth, Pablo Fenkart, Marcos Borel, Andrés de Bonstetten, Enrique Schoch, Horacio Kellog, Juan Bourgeois, Juan Bernoulli, and Jacobo Hardmaier. Unfortunately, over time, many of its members left Santo Pipó for other parts of the province in Argentina, or returned to Switzerland (of the above-mentioned list, Pablo Fenkart and those mentioned after him left early on) and the cooperative is no longer operating.

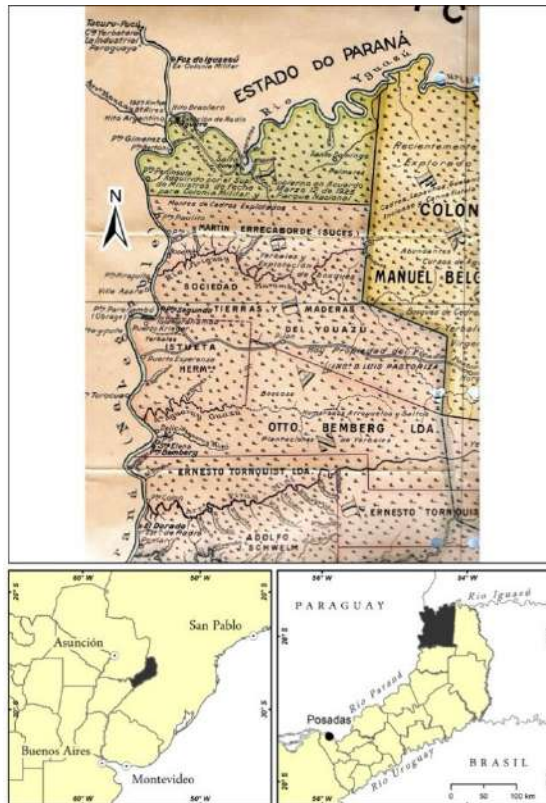
The Network Spreads: The Colonization of Puerto Esperanza

If we start from the assumption that social networks perpetuate themselves in time and space to acquire their own dynamics, we will understand that the migratory impulse around green gold reached other parts of the then national territory of Misiones. In fact, in addition to the foundation of the Oro Verde colony towards the end of 1925, Puerto Esperanza was born in the north of the territory the following year.

Until 1907, most of the lands in the northwest of Misiones were owned by Sociedad Martín Errecaborde y Cía. The dissolution of this company led to the auction of 100 square leagues of land divided into four large lots¹⁹. The Istueta brothers were the purchasers of lot D, of 42 500 hectares, land that years later would become Puerto Esperanza. The Núñez y Gibaja company, dedicated to importing yerba mate from Brazil, was also established there (Rojas & Gherardi, 2003). Until 1926, the Istueta heirs' society was dedicated to the exploitation of the forests and the leasing of land, but it did not have a colonizing action until the intervention of the society Yerba Mate Aktiengesellschaft (hereinafter Yerba Mate A. G.) based in Switzerland. Thus, the roots of Puerto Esperanza's colonization "lie, in large part, thousands of miles away, across the Atlantic" (Ziman & Scherer, 1976, pp. 167) (Map 2).

¹⁹ The survey of the Istueta heirs' property was later carried out by surveyor Francisco Foulliand, who found that about 8 000 hectares were missing from lot D, so the Compañía Tierras y Maderas de Iguazú—at the time the purchaser of lot C from the auction carried out by Sociedad Martín Errecaborde y Cía—. By 1913, the Istueta heirs also leased the Núñez and Gibaja property in Puerto Esperanza (Ziman & Scherer, 1976).

Map 2. Northern Section of the Map of Misiones



Source: Reworked by Humberto Smichowski (2023) from the original maps of Muello (1930, n.p.).

Gustavo Keller²⁰, the main promoter of this colony—who also studied at the ETH Zurich—, after a stay in Misiones and Brazil, returned to Zurich to seek support within the Plantagen A society. G., a company whose main objective at that time was the exploitation and management of rubber plantations in Sumatra, tea, and coffee in Java. After the founding of the company Yerba Mate A. G., a company that arose from the investment made by 30 Swiss shareholders, Gustavo Keller raised half a million francs to invest in the yerba mate plantation and promote colonization in the north of Misiones (Ziman & Scherer, 1976). According to Pedro Scherer, this company owned shares of great importance at the time, and was even listed on the stock exchange (P. Scherer, personal communication, September 26, 2021). After obtaining the economic resources, Keller acquired land and, after obtaining the title to it, he left Posadas for Puerto Esperanza accompanied by Paraguayan laborers who oversaw opening the *picadas* in the jungle. Months later, with the encouragement of Professor Sprecher von Bernegg, agronomists Alfonso Scherer²¹ and

²⁰ Gustavo Keller was born in Switzerland on March 30, 1890. In October 1913 he entered the ETH Zurich and graduated in March 1917 with a diploma in agriculture.

²¹ Alfonso Scherer was born in Soleure (Switzerland) on April 7, 1904. Son of Hermann Scherer and Leontine Maire, he married Matilde Elmiger and they had four children: Pedro, Monica, Isabel, and Doris. He graduated as an agronomist from the Federal Polytechnic School of Zurich (Switzerland) and arrived in Misiones in 1926.

Gustavo Ernst²² arrived (see Figure 1). According to Pedro Scherer, Gustavo Keller was a person “with a lot of experience in agriculture,” although he clarifies that “yerba is not agriculture. Actually, it is tropical arboriculture” (P. Scherer, personal communication, September 26, 2021).

For his part, Enrique Bucher²³, who had arrived in Argentina in 1913, after traveling through the south of the country, “became linked to the old oligarchy of ranchers. And they hired him as a teacher for the children in the *estancias*,” among them with Bunge and later with the Istueta family (P. Scherer, personal communication, September 26, 2021). It was with Mr. Bunge with whom he arrived in Misiones and worked for several years in Puerto Gisela, very close to Santo Pipó. However, the desire to acquire his own land linked him to Gustavo Keller, with whom he headed north to settle in Puerto Carolina (Bucher, 2003). In turn, Otto Bucher—Enrique’s brother—brought in as assistant to his compatriot, agronomist Alfonso Scherer, a graduate of the ETH Zurich. According to Pedro Scherer—his father—, Alfonso had already arrived shortly before in Argentina and “went around the Swiss colony in Buenos Aires,” where he met Bucher, who “had the mission of the Istueta family to go to [Puerto] Esperanza and make the first [yerba] plantation” (Fr. Scherer, personal communication, September 26, 2021).

By 1927, the company Yerba Mate A. G. made new capital investments to acquire more land. In fact, that year, with funds from the company Plantagen A. G., bought 200 hectares in Puerto Esperanza to be cleared and planted with yerba mate. With this objective in mind, the owners of El Tupi founded the Ernst and Scherer company (Ziman & Scherer, 1976; Tschumi, 1948). By 1931, this establishment already had its own dryer with a capacity to process one million kilograms of *yerba canchada*. In 1935 they founded a new company, Ernst, Scherer & Cía. Plantaciones Carolina, which operated independently from El Tupi, with approximately 800 hectares of land planted with yerba mate and tung. Scherer and Ernst were also in charge as attorneys-in-fact of Colonia Istueta, S. A. in order to encourage colonization (Tschumi, 1948).

In 1929, Colonia Istueta, S. A.²⁴, allocated part of its land located to the north of the Yerba Mate A. property. G. for a “colonization agreement on commission” together with the Swiss Jacques de Chambrier and the German scientist Federico Mayntzhusen, oriented towards German-Brazilian immigrants (Rojas & Gherardi, 2003). In the following years, the sale of lots did not prosper as expected, as few settlers arrived (Ziman & Scherer, 1976). In 1936, Enrique Bucher—who participated in Colonia Istueta as a yerba mate planter—proposed to allocate land for a new colonizing front composed of Swiss immigrants who were leaving due to the difficult economic situation in their country of origin. To achieve this purpose, Bucher traveled to Switzerland, where

²² Gustavo Ernst was born in Winterthur (Switzerland) on September 10, 1903, to Ricardo Ernst and Elisabeth Sulzer. He graduated as an agricultural engineer at the Federal Polytechnic School of Zurich (Switzerland). He arrived in Misiones in 1926.

²³ Henry Bucher was born on August 21, 1889 in Lucerne, Switzerland. Although he studied between 1909 and 1910 at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, he graduated as an agricultural engineer from the University of Leipzig in Germany.

²⁴ It was incorporated as such on August 11, 1928 with the purpose of exploiting 5 000 hectares of land for yerba mate plantations and to promote colonization.

he carried out an intense propaganda campaign to attract potential settlers and thus succeeded in attracting 15 families.

Towards the end of the 1930s, Luis A. Ferrari had been appointed Swiss emigration commissioner after the signing of the Immigration and Colonization Treaty between Switzerland and Argentina on July 6, 1937. In 1942 he wrote *En misión a Misiones*, a book in which he recounted the experiences of the trip he made between July and August 1937 through the main settlements with immigrants of Swiss origin. In the narrative, the precarious housing conditions and the poverty in which the settlers were immersed after several months of settling in Colonia Istueta stand out:

And I am painfully surprised, because I did not expect this. Bürki is one of the first settlers I have received in Buenos Aires and directed to Misiones. And I see him here, occupying with his large family, a very primitive ranch, on the banks of a dirty stream (Ferrari, 1942, pp. 133-134).

Here it is already possible to glimpse substantial differences between the migrants who arrived during the 1920s and those who settled in Misiones after 1935. In the latter case, they could not carry out new yerba mate plantations because the whole yerba mate sector was going through a strong crisis that led to their intervention after the creation of the Yerba Mate Regulatory Commission -CRYM- on October 4, 1935 by means of Law 12236 of 1935. The main objective of this agency was the regulation of new yerba mate plantations and the regulation of pruning of existing plantations.

The critical situation of many settlers motivated Switzerland to send a shepherd, who was sent specially to attend to the settlers who showed hardships and suffering in their adaptation to the red land. This is how the Swiss Evangelical Church was created at the end of World War II with the arrival of Gotfried Rohner in 1944. The year after his arrival, he made a report on the situation of the settlers in which he differentiated between the large yerba mate *growers*, who stood out for having extensive properties with yerba mate, and the yerba mate *settlers*, who lived a more deprived life. At the same time, he made a distinction between immigrants who were not yerba mate owners—among whom he placed a few old immigrants established in the 1920s—and the new settlers who arrived after 1936²⁵. This distinction shows, on the one hand, the migratory profiles of those who arrived with capital and resources to invest, and on the other hand, those who were affected by the Swiss economic crisis and came subsidized at a time when they could no longer grow yerba mate due to the regulation of the crop. On the other hand, it is interesting to take into account this differentiation because it gives a glimpse of a social network of assistance and reciprocity, such as the creation of the Comisión de la Ayuda Social (COMSO) (Commission for Social Assistance), a “Swiss commission for the promotion of Swiss people in Misiones.”²⁶ This association, whose main promoters were Alberto Roth and Bernardo Christ, spread ideas of help and solidarity through circular letters, Rundbriefe, between 1946 and 1963, in which advice was

²⁵ Archives of the Swiss Evangelical Church, Ruiz de Montoya.

²⁶ Alberto Roth Foundation Archives, COMSO Minutes Book, pp. 1 and 2.

given on various topics, especially in agriculture: how to deal with some crop problems, how to take care of the soil, what to do with locust attacks. He also reflected on Christmas (*Rundbrief* 16 [December, 1951]) or the Swiss National Day on August 1st²⁷. Another of the main topics or concerns addressed in these letters was the education of youth²⁸. Finally, the Swiss Evangelical Church centralized its activities in Línea Cuchilla, where it ended up developing its main diaconal work: the Instituto Línea Cuchilla (ILC). COMSO, which had emerged among the members of the first wave church settled in Santo Pipó in 1946, had as its main concern the education of young people. Once he saw that this work was consolidated, he left his legacy to the Commission of the Board of Directors of the Colegio Instituto Línea Cuchilla, currently a secondary school with technical, agronomic and tourism orientation, which is recognized in the province, in the country and in Switzerland (Gallero, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

Within the context of Swiss migrations to Argentina, this article analyzes the gestation and consolidation of a migratory network around yerba mate in the national territory of Misiones. In this area, although there were several antecedents of Swiss immigrants, it was only in the period between the two world wars that the entries were more numerous and organized. Two sub-periods were highlighted here: throughout 1920 and after 1935. In the first of these stages, the migration process can be attributed mainly to the yerba mate *boom*.

The contributions of prosopography and the theory of social networks made it possible to analyze the role of certain subjects within the migratory context and to study the web of social relations between the actors that consolidated the mobilities and prolonged them over time with the arrival of new migrants. This situation was reflected in the call of the green gold: the spread of news about yerba mate in Switzerland encouraged migrations to Misiones in the early 1920s. The link between the migrants in this period was Professor Andreas Sprecher von Bernegg of the Zurich School of Advanced Polytechnic Studies (ETH), who recommended the transfer of his students to Misiones and advised them on the cultivation of yerba mate. Thus, the backbone was its cultivation and how the network of agronomists influenced the way in which the cultivated *yerbales* were carried out with a long-term repercussion, as it made it possible to achieve an increase in the productivity of the plantations and the quality of the crop.

²⁷ The “circular letters” (*Rundbrief*) are in the private archive of the Alberto Roth Foundation. The following are cited: *Rundbrief* 5 (October, 1946) and *Rundbrief* 10 (November, 1947) (devoted to the locust problem especially); *Rundbrief* 16 (December, 1951), *Rundbrief* 20 (August, 1954); *Rundbrief* 22 (August, 1956), *Rundbrief* 23 (August, 1957), *Rundbrief* 24 (August, 1958), *Rundbrief* 25 (August, 1959), *Rundbrief* 26 (August, 1961), *Rundbrief* 27 (August, 1962) and *Rundbrief* 28 (August, 1963).

²⁸ In the first place, because elementary school went up to sixth grade—it was finished at about 12 years of age—and there were no secondary schools nearby to attend. Some Swiss chose to send their sons or daughters to Posadas, as boarders in the Roque González or Santa María schools; others to Buenos Aires, living in family homes and attending different educational establishments in the federal capital. Only a few sent them to Switzerland, and the great majority left them working on the family farm.

On the other hand, with the contribution of his students and the exchange of letters, in addition to his visit to Misiones, this professor carried out an academic work that had worldwide repercussions on yerba mate. From his person we reconstructed a migratory network that through prosopography allowed us to analyze the social action of its members, which was reflected in the founding of cooperatives (Productores de Yerba Mate, S. C. L.; Cooperativa Agrícola de Santo Pipó, S. C. L., and Tungal, S. C. L.), participation in the Swiss Evangelical Church and the Social Commission among the Swiss (with repercussions at the educational level in the Instituto Línea Cuchilla), and in groups such as the Asociación Rural Yerbatera Argentina (ARYA) and the Federación de Cooperativas Agrícolas de Misiones (Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives of Misiones). These institutions at the local level represent a complexity of relationships that exceeds the scope of this article, so it is hoped that further research will be promoted in the future.

During most of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, the inadequate harvesting practices of the native yerba mate plantations of Misiones made it necessary to recover the techniques for the reproduction of seedlings by planting in seedbeds and made possible the progressive increase of cultivated yerba mate as opposed to wild yerba mate. In the 1920s, the Swiss arrived in the towns of Santo Pipó and Puerto Esperanza with capital to invest in yerba mate plantations, the green gold that would allow the transition from an extractive economy to a productive one in Misiones, among other activities that arose later on. In the 1930s, the economic crisis that had repercussions worldwide motivated the Swiss State to promote an organized emigration, in which the connections between the immigrants who were already settled in Misiones were the key for the main contingent to arrive at Línea Cuchilla, and for another part to spread to other colonies, such as Eldorado, Helvecia, Puerto Esperanza, and Oberá.

The difference between one wave and the other, and especially the difficulties encountered by the Swiss who arrived in the second wave—partly because they were unable to grow yerba mate, partly because they were unable to acquire large extensions, but mainly because they were not prepared to live in the “bush”—motivated the Federation of Swiss Evangelical Churches to send a pastor. Within this framework, solidarity networks were created among those who had arrived at different times and circumstances to the current province of Misiones, and in which the migratory network studied around Professor Andreas Sprecher von Bernegg was key to its connections and its development.

Translation: Berenice Martínez.

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