

Mapping *Mate* from Colonial to Consumer Society

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ABSTRACT

Mate, the beverage made of the infusion of *yerba mate*'s leaves, was originally drunk by the Guaraní indigenous people in the Parana region. During the conquest of South America, *mate* consumption quickly spread throughout the whole of colonial society, and doing so by remaining embedded in its traditional collective mode of consumption. While *yerba mate*, known as the "green gold" became a key pillar of the colonial economy, *mate*, as a beverage, somehow avoided commercialization and hardly penetrated western markets the way other stimulant drinks did. The practice of drinking *mate* collectively, passing the gourd around and sipping the beverage from the same straw, established itself in the Middle East thanks to returning migrants from the Syrian and Lebanese communities who had grown accustomed to *mate* in Argentina. In both South America and the Middle East, *mate* is synonymous with hospitality and sociability, it is always shared, and does not appear on restaurant menus. More recently, in parallel to the popularity of so-called 'ancient grains', *mate* has been re-branded an "indigenous magic potion" to appeal to western consumers seeking a health food 'salvation' through the consumption of authenticity. Whilst *yerba mate* has been studied from economical and historical perspectives, there are no current studies about *mate* tea drinking habits. My research will fill that gap by tracing the routes that *mate* followed as a social practice and as a beverage and by exploring the various spaces and meaning of *mate*'s consumption at a time in which the collective ritual of drinking *mate* is not only under attack by recent efforts to commodify and market it, but also as a result of Covid 19 and the global injunction for contactless interactions.

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«Y es que el mate tiene algo de pipa de paz, que circula de boca en boca, en intimidad colectivista, eje de un círculo que siempre es de amistad fraterna »¹

¹ Translation of the author: “*Mate* somehow recalls the peace pipe, passing from mouth to mouth and fomenting a collective intimacy. It represents the axis of a fraternal and friendly circle”. Seoane, M. quoted in Lurán del Campo. 1942. *Cancionero del mate* , p.26

INTRODUCTION

Mate is both a beverage and a cup². Joined with the word *yerba*, it is the name of a plant, and when passed around in the course of its shared consumption, it constitutes a vector of belonging³. *Mate* is an infusion, a dried calabash and a ritual. A quasi-object and a stimulant drink. *Mate* is an Argentinian national symbol and a cultural identity in South America, it is a rite of sociability associated with Druze and Alawite people in Syria and Lebanon, as well as being the “magic potion” of professional football players throughout the western world⁴. *Mate* is both an enhancer of togetherness and an energizing boost, it is a collective performance and an individual experience. *Mate* is a leaf, a shared moment, and a jar. It is a polysemic word and a ceaselessly refilled content.

I encountered *mate* for the first time in 2018 when traveling in Argentina. I remember noticing the calabash as soon as I entered the kitchen of the artistic residency I had just settled in. I was intrigued. Intrigued by this object and by the pack of herb that was leaning on it. I smelled the herb. Strong smell. It reminded me of dry hay. I left the kitchen and went for a walk in the paved streets of la Plata. Five, maybe fifteen minutes after leaving the house, I saw another calabash, this time on a street corner. It was identical to the one in the kitchen, except that a metal straw had been put in it. Five people were chatting at the street corner, around the calabash. I observed them for a while. They were all drinking from the same straw. I observed the *mate* cup circulating from one person to another and could not resist approaching the group. “What are you having?” I asked. They made no reply but just stared at me as if I was talking nonsense. “Seriously, you don’t know *mate*?” I was answered. “Try it”. I was invited to take the calabash, sipped the beverage and then made the mistake of saying “Gracias” when giving back the gourd to the person who had offered it to me, not understanding that my “thank you” would indicate that I had had enough. Indeed, on the next round, I was not offered the gourd. I spent half-an-hour chatting with the group, asking them more information on the drink and on its peculiar collective consumption. I learned that to prepare a *mate*, the *cebador* - the person in charge of making the gourd circulate among the participants- fills two-thirds of the *mate* cup with *yerba mate*. They then place the *bombilla* (metal straw) in the calabash and infuses the leaves of *yerba mate*, which have been roasted and ground, in hot water. The

² Oberti F. 1979. *Historia y Folklore del mate*.

³ Barretto M. 2006. *El mate, su historia y cultura*.

⁴ Folch C. 2010. “Stimulating Consumption: *Yerba Mate* Myths, Markets and Meanings from Conquest to Present”; Plunkett-Hogge K. 2018. “Fancy a brew? Why England’s footballers are hooked on *mate*”. *The Guardian*

cebador always sips the beverage first, before topping up the calabash again and passing it around. I was also told that the cup generally moves counterclockwise, regardless of the age, gender or status of the persons who gather together in the circle. As for the reason why *mate* was consumed in that way, I was basically replied that “*mate* is drunk like that because it is the way we drink *mate*. It has always been so.”

A few months later, I became *cebador* myself. I was staying at the Lombardo's place in Mendoza, in the North of Argentina. I remember how honored I felt when they invited me to serve the *mate*. I carefully tried to reproduce the gestures I had observed every day since my arrival. I put the *yerba mate* in the jar, took out the extra powder, warmed the water without boiling it, filled the calabash with it, took the first sips, and passed the *mate* cup on to the Lombardo's grandmother who sat next to me. Soon after, she gave me back the calabash, I poured more hot water in and intuitively I automatically offered it to her husband who was in front of me. “No! Don't do that! You can't break the circle.” Guided by my own internalized codes, I spontaneously thought of serving the oldest person first, but was immediately reminded that I needed to follow the rules of *mate*, that is, to put everyone on the same level. Indeed, in Argentina as well as in Uruguay, Paraguay, and Southern Brazil, people are all symbolically equal when drinking *mate*, there is nobody to be grateful to, nobody to feel indebted to. People simply gather around *mate*, and it is *mate*, not them, that leads the gathering. *Mate* is not merely a shared beverage, it is rather an agent, a quasi-object which is an “astonishing constructor of intersubjectivity”.⁵ *Mate* is a collective practice that erases hierarchy to promote togetherness and a shared feeling of belonging. Drunk in the domestic sphere as much as in public spaces such as parks, streets or public transports, *mate* can be found everywhere, except on restaurant menus. Indeed, in South America, *mate* has somehow avoided commercialization as a drink. One can buy a calabash and a pack of *yerba mate* but cannot order the drink in a coffeeshop-like place. *Mate* consumption often takes place outdoors, and instead of being confined to any specific venue, it occupies and reconfigures the public space. Indeed, by bringing people together in the streets of capital cities such as Buenos Aires, *mate* ephemerally countermaps the public space by diverting the streets from their commonly designated functions. By establishing pauses in avenues that are to be crossed, *mate* ceremonies “misuse” space and momentarily slow down the frantic pace of capitalism. They foment inertia rather than productiveness, as if streets were suddenly no longer just a place to move through. When people share a *mate*, the streets shift from being a transit zone to a site of encounters.

⁵ Serres, M. 1982. *The Parasite*. p. 47.

After six months roaming around Argentina, I came back to France with lots of notes and informal records that I had collected here and there when sharing *mate* with people. I did not have any specific plan for what I would do with these observations. I originally only wished to keep a memory of an encounter that had fascinated me. Having never experienced anything like that in France, where I grew up, I archived my initial naïve fascination for a collective practice that primarily led me to question myself and my own conditioning. I could not hide my enthusiasm about *mate*, and I shared it with my relatives. What I had not expected was that a lot of people actually knew about *mate*, although from a completely different context. Indeed, in France, people tended to directly connect it to football or to the health industry. “Of course, I know *mate*, it is the drink of Messi and Griezmann” I was told. I also heard on many occasions that *mate* was an amazing healthy stimulant beverage that helped improve one’s physical and mental performances. The contrast between the meanings of *mate* consumption in different parts of the world, as well as the curious dearth of scholarship on *mate* drinking habits, made me eager to start investigating it further. Associated in turn with inertia and sociability, sport, and healthiness, consumed collectively or ingested individually, vector of belonging or of productivity, *mate* perfectly embodies how “meaning arises out of use, as people use substances in social relationships”⁶ and reveals how “material qualities” of a commodity are “inextricably linked to economic structures and symbolic interpretations”.⁷

I started my PhD in September 2019 with the aim of mapping the various spaces and meanings of *mate* consumption as well as the site of *yerba mate* production, as I wanted my research to fully embrace *mate*’s polysemy. Indeed, *mate*, as a word, designates at the same time a beverage, an object and a plant and I wished my thesis to gather together those three dimensions in the way the word *mate* does. Moreover, I agree with Mintz when he argues that “the relationships between production and consumption may even be paralleled by the relationship between use and meaning” and “each may be said partly to have determined the other”.⁸ As with sugar, one cannot fully understand the itinerary *mate* followed as a beverage without questioning the conditions of the plant’s production. As hardly any research on *mate* consumption had been carried out, I wanted to document *mate* while also letting it speak for itself. To do so, I originally planned to do extensive fieldwork in order to immerse myself in *mate* sessions in different cultural contexts. I even thought of doing practice-based research and using the podcast format to articulate my findings rather than the written word. I indeed considered that podcasts would have been the best way to translate the agency *mate* has to gather people together without hierarchizing them. By mixing my researcher voice and interpretations with informal conversations and more formal interviews, I would have also tried

⁶ Mintz S. W. 1985. *Sweetness and Power*, introduction xxix

⁷ Folch C. 2010. « Stimulating consumption... » p. 20

⁸ Mintz, S. W. 1985. *Sweetness and Power*, introduction xxix

to “de-monumentalise written knowledge”. In “Epistemologies of the South”, de Sousa calls for new “non-extractive methodologies” which, instead of “transforming alternative knowledge (vernacular, popular knowledges generated and owned by various social groups) into raw material for the production of scientific knowledge” would privilege a dialogue “between academic knowledge and popular knowledge”⁹. “When we talk” she adds, “we hesitate, repeat ourselves, there are no footnotes. By being oralised, so to speak, written knowledge becomes de-monumentalised and allows for horizontal exchanges”.¹⁰ I would have loved the first research on *mate* consumption to open a space for horizontal dialogues and to result in a series of podcasts which would have pay tribute to *mate* which is, in itself an incubator of conversations. But then Covid19 paralyzed the world and only a few months after starting my PhD, I had to respect the social distancing regulations and conduct my research from France, under partial lockdown. I obviously had to drastically reconfigure my initial plan.

Distanced from the social practice I was studying, I found myself in a difficult position. On the one hand, I could not observe what I wanted to document, and on the other hand I struggled with many ethical questions. Although research is always situated, Covid19 exacerbated the distance I wanted to erase. Behind a screen, I could be nothing but a researcher, while my original goal was to precisely collect live testimonies without deliberately imposing an academic point of view. I did not aim to conduct social science-style interview work, but rather wished to give importance to small scatterings of “local colour”. However, lockdowns constrained me to conduct virtual interviews and the mediation of a screen as well as the need to plan a specific time to meet the people I contacted though word of mouth or social media, worked against the spontaneity I was seeking to grasp. None of the informal online interviews were integrated into the thesis. Without intimacy and physical proximity, people did not share personal anecdotes about their relationship to *mate*. Answers were polished and generic. This is what made me listen back to the recordings made in Mendoza before starting my PhD. These were “horizontal dialogues”. Faced with the impossibility to travelling back to Argentina, I decided to insert extracts from the conversations I had with the Lombardo family which, although conducted prior to my research, turned out to be more relevant for my purposes. I could not imagine myself writing a piece without integrating some of the conversations that, on many occasions, constituted fruitful avenues of research. And although Covid19 restrictions prevented me from letting *mate* speak as much as I would have liked, I however worked to render my thesis polyphonic. Hence the choice to integrate casual conversations (with the Lombardo as well as people I later met in France or in England) in order to try to overcome the disruptions caused by the pandemic. This approach was also

⁹ Sousa Santos de. Boaventura. 2016. “Epistemologies of the South and the future.” p. 27

¹⁰ Ibid

influence by Tsing's idea that "to listen and to tell a rush of stories is a method" whose "unit of analysis is the indeterminate encounter."¹¹ From my own unpredictable discovery of *mate* to the various questions raised by spontaneous discussions, "indeterminate encounters" indeed widely participated in tracing back *mate*'s itinerary from colonial to consumer society. Another notion of Tsing that was key to my research is the idea of "assemblage". According to the author of *The Mushroom at the end of the World*, "assemblages are open-ended gatherings (...) that urge us to ask: how do gatherings sometimes become a "happening", that is, greater than the sum of their parts?". Patching together the routes *mate* followed as a social practice and as a commodity with an investigation of the cultivation of the plant, my research aims to mimic the hybridity of its object by juxtaposing heterogeneous materials, ranging from colonial archives to non-directed interviews, from herbarium to social media, from academic papers to folkloric poetry or from migratory surveys to family photographs¹². I want this "assemblage" to transmit the mingling *mate* has been carrying as a word and as a social drink.

Originally drunk by the Guaraní people in the Alto Parana region, *mate* is nowadays an integral part of the Southern Cone identity and is consumed daily by millions of Argentinians, Paraguayans, Uruguayans, and Southern Brazilians. Highly ritualised although routinised, *mate* has remained embedded in its collective consumption and might carry the trace of an indigenous practice in a widely Europeanized region. Moreover, until now, *mate* consumption has shown the peculiarity of not having entered the circumscribed space of the coffeeshop in South America. Contrary to the *yerba* and to the calabash, *mate*, as a beverage, has not been commercialized, neither has it been linked to any venue specially devoted to its consumption.¹³ Moreover, contrary to other stimulant drinks such as tea or coffee, *mate* has yet to conquer western markets, though has established itself, in less commercialized forms, in the Middle East. Following in the footsteps of returning migrants, who had grown accustomed to the habit of drinking *mate* after settling in Argentina in the nineteenth century, *mate* gained popularity in the Middle East throughout the twentieth century¹⁴. In Syria and Lebanon especially, *mate* is shared in the same way as it is in South America. Here and there, *mate* is consumed collectively and not sold as a beverage. In both regions, it is synonymous with hospitality and sociability, and it foments various identifications. Indeed, while *mate* has been officially recognized as an Argentinian national symbol and is also claimed as a marker of cultural

¹¹ Tsing A. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. p. 37

¹² Note that I resorted to a wide range of Spanish sources, and although I first thought to quote the books and interviews in their original language, I finally decided to rather translate them before integrating them to my dissertation in order to make it easier to read. However, when it comes to poetry, I both quote the Spanish version of the poem and its English translation. All translations are my own.

¹³ One cannot order a *mate* in a restaurant or in a coffeeshop, it is just not part of their menus.

¹⁴ Balloffet L. 2020. *Argentina in the Global Middle East*.

identity by Paraguayans, Uruguayans, and Southern Brazilians, it now tends to be mainly associated with the Druze and Alawite people in Syria and Lebanon. And although *mate* shows the propensity to be a similar vector of belonging in two culturally and geographically distant regions, it has also been recently re-signified into a new superfood in western markets. Being a collective practice providing a pause for egalitarian social interaction in South America and in the Middle East, *mate*, like energy drinks containing guarana, is fast becoming marketed as an individual boost enhancer of productivity in the Western world.

At a time in which consumers in the Global North seek individual salvation through the consumption of anything branded “traditional”, marketing stresses the properties of *yerba mate* in order to present the drink as a twofold source of improved physical and mental performance. The commodification of *mate* also relies on its branded authenticity, and the advertising world not only publicized the recent adoption of the drink by famous international football players, but also the “organic” and “pure” aspect of the calabash, bringing exoticism and value to the new best alternative to coffee. Thus, *mate* is reinvented into a natural boost that one should adopt to maximize one’s productivity. It is worth noting that the re-presentation of *mate* as a healthy energizing product goes hand in hand with both the individualization of *mate* consumption and the commercialization of the drink, culminating in the opening of the first *mate* bar in Brooklyn, NYC in 2019. There is a surprising lack of academic research regarding the collective practice of drinking *mate* in South America as well as in the Middle East, and I consider the investigation of the origins and various appropriations of *mate* to be necessary as neoliberalism and Covid 19 now both participate in individualizing its consumption. Indeed, while *mate* is being commodified in western markets, it has also been sanitized in regions where the practice has remained collective for centuries due to the Covid19 pandemic and the new imperative for social distancing.¹⁵

My research will trace *mate*’s itinerary from colonial to consumer society. And I will not only map the spaces of *mate* consumption but also the site of *yerba mate* production as I consider that one needs to interrogate the circumscribed site of the *yerbales*¹⁶, to better understand why *mate* travelled to certain places and not to others. The site of *yerba mate* production has remained the same since the pre-colonial era. Confined to a region straddling Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, the zone where *yerba mate* grows has on several occasions constituted a geopolitical “hotspot”. During the colonial era *yerba mate*, also known as the “green gold”, constituted a key pillar of the internal market and was almost exclusively extracted growing

¹⁵ The first (and still only) book investigating the consumption of *mate* in Argentina from the precolonial period to the present was published in January 2023. See Sarreal J. 2023. *Yerba Mate: The Drink that Shaped a Nation*.

¹⁶ *yerba mate* forests

wild by indigenous people whose labor force was inhumanely exploited.¹⁷ With the exception of the Jesuits, who successfully implemented *yerba mate* plantations in their missions during the seventeenth century, there were no well-established plantations before the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁸ *Yerba mate* was not only difficult to domesticate but also impossible to transplant. *Yerba mate* could not and even today still cannot grow anywhere other than on its native terrain.¹⁹ This fact made the region all the more coveted. At the time of the wars of independence, control of what was called the region of Misiones, provoked one of the bloodiest conflicts in the history of South America: the Triple alliance war (1865-1870).²⁰ Furthermore, the exportation of *yerba mate*, unlike that of coffee which could be easily transplanted, was complicated by the fact that it could not be cultivated in regions more accessible to western markets.²¹ I argue that *mate's* failure to reach Europe might have partially resided in *yerba mate* complex domestication, and I therefore consider that the route of *mate* as a social beverage cannot be detached from the roots of *mate* as a plant.

Covering three distinct geographical areas- South America, the Middle East and the Western world-, my dissertation will track the routes that *mate* followed in connecting those spaces. Resorting to a transdisciplinary and hybrid methodology in order to approach *mate's* polysemy, my research aims to raise questions about what *mate* was, is and might be. I don't claim to be exhaustive but rather consider this PhD as providing contributions for further research in a wide range of disciplines ranging from politics, food studies, history, anthropology, sociology, or botanic. I could have decided to focus on *mate's* vegetable aspect, or on its agency as an object, or on its function as a beverage, but I would have in this case failed in transcribing the unusual and paradigm-breaking nature of *mate*. Thus, I rather decided to observe *mate* as a hybrid object-practice-plant, and will have my research juxtapose the spaces of its consumption and the site of its production, the aesthetics of the cup and the symbolism of its sharing, the meanings of the practice and the taste of the plant, in order to map out an assemblage that would answer the following key questions:

- 1- How did the Guaraní practice of drinking *mate* become an integral part of the Southern cone identity and has remained to this day embedded in its ritualized collective consumption?

¹⁷ Garavaglia J. C. [1983], 2008. *Mercado interno y economía colonial, Tres siglos de historia de la yerba mate*.

¹⁸ Furlong G. 1962. *Misiones y sus pueblos guaraníes*.

¹⁹ Oberti F. 1979 *Historia y folklore del mate*.

²⁰ Lagier J. 2008. *La aventura de la yerba mate, más de cuatro siglos de historia*.

²¹ Pendergrast M. 2010. *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How it Transformed our World*.

2- Why did *mate* not follow the same route as other stimulant drinks such as tea, coffee or cacao? To what extent does the diffusion of *mate* lie at the junction of economic forces and individual choices?

3- How could *mate*, as a beverage, avoid commercialization when the *yerba mate* it is made from was a key product of the Latin American colonies' internal economy?

4- What role did the "green gold" play in the colonial internal market and in the independence processes?

5- Why did Syrian and Lebanese migrants adopt *mate* to the point of bringing it back to their home countries?

6- What is *mate's* agency beyond its propensity to help shape national and regional identities?

7- What is the current commodification of *mate* having on its social function?

8- How might Covid19 impact on the age-old collective consumption of *mate*?

Exploring the geopolitical and cultural history of the *yerba mate* plant and the beverage that is made from it from conquest to present, my thesis aims to shed light on the peculiar trajectory that *mate* followed as a beverage which, contrary to other stimulant drinks such as tea or coffee, has had minimal penetration into western markets. Divided into three parts: *Mate* in South America, *Mate* in the Middle East, and *Mate* in the Western World, my research will, in a first chapter, frame the context in which a plant, a beverage and a cup were fused in a single word by resorting to the lens of postcolonial botany and linguistics. Chapter 2 will then document the diffusion of *mate* in colonial Latin America by tracing the historical and geographical lineage of the consumption of *mate* and analyze how its use and meaning evolved from a Guaraní sacred ritual to a cross-class social rite. Using transculturation as an interpretative framework, I will demonstrate how "cross cultural contact flourished in intimate setting" and question the role Guaraní women played in diffusing *mate* use. This chapter will also investigate to what extent *mate*, as an object, served to reinscribe class distinction in colonial society. Chapter 3 will investigate how *yerba mate*, also called the "green gold"²², became the most sought-after product of the Spanish Empire and to what extent the extraction

²² Garavaglia, J. C. [1983] 2008. *Mercado interno y economía colonial, Tres siglos de historia de la yerba mate*.

of *yerba mate* not only constituted the key pillar of the colonial economy but also financed the development of what later became Brazil, North Argentina, and Paraguay. Through a geopolitical analysis of the conflicts accompanying the *yerbales'* appropriation at a time of independence, Chapter 4 aims to shed light on the way *yerba mate's* growing region played an important role in defining the borders of the emerging nations. Moreover it will investigate the political economy of death that was at work in the *yerba* extractivist industry before the development of the first wide-scale plantations at the turn of the twentieth century.²³ Finally, chapter 5 will examine *mate's* identities in Latin America, paying particular attention to the role *mate* played in the invention of the Argentinian nation and of its "imagined community."²⁴ It will then also analyze the social practice of drinking *mate* from a philosophical perspective. By approaching *mate's* collective consumption in light of Michel Serres' notion of "quasi-object" and Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology²⁵, my thesis will question how *mate* foments belonging and might work shaping various instances of felt and/or performed identities, ranging from national identity to sensorial memory.

Part II focuses on *mate's* appropriations in the Middle East by mapping the diffusion of the drink in Syria and Lebanon and questioning the meaning the beverage is given there. Chapter 6 aims to recontextualize the history of the Syrian and Lebanese migrations to Argentina and explore the modalities of their integration and of their encounter with *mate*. Chapter 7 will question the Syrian and Lebanese adoption of *mate* in light of the notions of "performed identity" and "transferred nostalgia" to seize why those emigrants in particular adopted *mate* to the point of bringing back to their home countries. As for chapter 8, it will trace back the cultural conditions in which Syrian and Lebanese returned to their home countries and wonder whether return-migrant observe *mate* as a marker of their transnational past. I will also dig into the current close association of *mate* with some specific communities by searching if a link can be made between *mate's* symbolic and Druze and Alaouite's mysticism.

To end with, part III analyzes the recent rebranding of *mate* as a superfood in Western markets and draws on the consequences of such a re-signification. Detaching *mate* from its age-old social function, marketing works individualizing *mate* consumption and orients its towards ideologies of wellbeing. Chapter 9 will come back on *mate's* long non-encounter with western markets by commenting on what made *mate's* route differ from the one of other stimulant beverages such as tea or coffee and then question the new representation of *mate* as a healthy product in light of the notion of biopower.²⁶ And in a final chapter, I will analyze how the

²³ Taussig, T. M., 1987. *Shamanism, colonialism, and the wild man: a study in terror and healing*.

²⁴ Schumway N. 1991. *The invention of Argentina*; Anderson, B. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and spread of nationalism*.

²⁵ Serres M. 1982. *The Parasite*; Harman Graham. 2018. *Object-Oriented Ontology: A new theory of everything*.

²⁶ Foucault, M. [1978-1979] 2004. *Naissance de la biopolitique*.

contemporary commercial narratives *mate* is embedded in as a commodity, perfectly illustrate the politics of nutritional primitivism, and how the new discourses put on *mate* not only participate in its individualization but also its commercialization in coffee-shop like places. Finally, I will address the consequences of Covid19 which, along with neoliberalism, worked to globally reinvent *mate* as a drink to be consumed individually in 2020.

PART I
MATE IN SOUTH AMERICA

Mate amargo que naciste
En la rueda de un fogón
Derramando tradición
Entre un estilo y un triste
Mate amargo que trajiste
Entre tu *yerba* sabrosa
La suavidad primorosa
De una mano de mujer
Y el embrujo de un querer
Con que te cebó una moza

Sos el amigo sincero
Con quien a solas proseando
Pasás las horas rodando
En un galope ligero
Sos sereno consejero
Que escuchamos con halago
Y entre un trago y otro trago
Mientras la pava se queja
Nos hablás de cosas viejas
De la querencia y el pago

El más bravo se arrocina
Al paladear tu amargura
Sos sabroso como achura
Y querendó, como China
Sos alma de la cocina
Que alegra reunión sencilla
Y mientras la llama brilla
Vos vas con tierno embeleso
Como si fueras un beso
Aleteando en la bombilla²⁷

Bitter *mate* shared around the stove
And marking the pause
Between two songs
Bitter *mate* which brings
Within its earthy *yerba*
The softness of a woman's hand
Who filled the beverage with
Enchanting love

You are the faithful friend
Who accompanies my idle moments
Making the hours go by
In a delicious way
You are a peaceful guide
We all listen to carefully
And between one drink and the next
As the kettle empties
You tell us stories
Stories of love and money

Even the bravest man
Succumbs to the taste of your bitterness
And to the love it spreads
Mate, you are the soul of the kitchen
Which punctuates intimate exchanges
And holds the room in its warm embrace
It seems that kisses are attached to your
bombilla.

²⁷ "*Mate Amargo*", song by Jose Damiani : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oj5NUJgzn90>

CHAPTER 1

MATE'S ROOTS: DIGGING INTO THE PLANT AND THE BEVERAGE'S ORIGINS

I. MAPPING YERBA MATE'S SITE

Yerba mate is a native tree, growing in the subtropics of South America, present in Southern Brazil, Northeastern Argentina, Eastern Paraguay and Uruguay.²⁸ Measuring up to twenty meters in its natural state, this hermaphrodite tree is described as being generally five to seven meters in height, especially if it is exposed to the sun.²⁹ Its leaves are evergreen, alternate, oblong and irregularly toothed³⁰, its white flowers are odorless and its fruit is a drupe.³¹ Relying on a specific *climate* in order to develop well, *yerba mate* only prospers in between the parallels ten and thirty in an area of approximately 540.000 km², and especially proliferates in the region surrounding the Parana and the Paraguay rivers (latitude 20-21). The main conditions required to provide an optimal growth are a regular high humidity, a constant warm temperature and rich well-drained soil. Although multiple attempts were made in order to grow *yerba mate* in other regions sharing similar climatic conditions, none of the plantations set up in the Gulf of Mexico, the USA, the South of China, Abyssinia, Rhodesia or Northern India ever succeeded in flourishing.³² Thus, the peculiar site of *yerba mate* has remained unchanged since before the conquest, and in addition to the wild sylvatic *yerbales*³³, the tree is nowadays cultivated in numerous plantations located in the Argentinian provinces of Misiones and Corrientes as well as in the Brazilian states of Mato Grosso, Paraná, Santa Catalina and Río Grande do Sul, and in Paraguay.

The zone of *yerba mate* occurrence precisely corresponds to the Guaraní settlement area (Figure 1). Nowadays divided into three groups: Ava Chiripa, Mbya and Pa'i Tavytera, the Guaraní indigenous people are distributed between Paraguay, Northern Argentina and Southern Brazil, and have occupied the Atlantic Forest of the Alto Paraná for at least 2000 years.

²⁸ Rosovsky, R. 1983. *Contribución a la bibliografía de la yerba mate*.

²⁹ Jumelle H., 1912-1915. *Les cultures coloniales. Plantes à sucre, café, cacao, thé, maté*. P. 269

³⁰ Corrado A. J., 1908. « Contribución al estudio de la *yerba mate* ». p. 19

³¹ A drupe is a type of fruit that has a thin skin and a large stone.

³² Oberti F., 1979. *Historia y Folklore del mate*, p. 36

³³ *Yerbal* (plural *yerbales*), is a Spanish term designating an area covered with *yerba mate* trees. It can be either a wild forest or a plantation.



Figure 1: Map of the Cuenca del Plata, 1638. ³⁴

Evolving in an environment dominated by *yerba mate*, the Guaraní people came to consider it as the basis of their world, and reinforced its centrality by founding their cosmology on it. According to Lange’s work on primitive phytonymia³⁵, the oldest names given to plants are often rooted in one of their physical characteristics³⁶. The Guaraní name “*pindo*” (palm tree) for instance, well illustrates this idea since it suggests a leaf rising up to the sky, “*upi*” meaning “going up” and “*ndo*” meaning “leaf”. If names usually highlight a morphological pattern of the plant they designate, Lange asserts that they can also evoke the function they are associated with. Hence the fact that the *yvy*, being an important source of fiber, has a name that literally means “textile”. In the case of *Caá* - the Guaraní word for *yerba mate*- the

³⁴ One of the first map of the Province of the Río del Plata, attributed to the Jesuit Diego de Torres, published in Joannes Janssonius, 1638. *Nuovo Atlas*, Amsterdam.

³⁵ Phytonymia is a discipline which consists in studying the name of the plants. It is etymologically derived from the grec “*phuton*” (plant) and *onoma* (name)

³⁶ Lange, J. 1966. *Primitive Plantnavne, og deres gruppering efter motive*. København: ed.J. Jørgensen & Co Bogtrykkeri quoted in Hector A. Keller, 2013. “Trees and shrubs in guaraní myths about the origin and the end of the world: elucidation of some plant names”. p. 149

primordially of the plant is explicitly conveyed by the polysemy of its name, which both designates a singular tree and the whole vegetable world.

II. YERBA MATE: A SEMANTIC ANARCHISM

Being at the same time a specific and a generic name, *Caá* confirms the centrality of the plant for the Guaraní who perceived it as a metonymy of all flora. Since *Caá* constituted the most prolific plant in their environment, the Guaraní worshiped it as the Mother plant and basis of all life, and therefore venerated it as a sacred gift. I consider important to question the name settlers later gave to the plant in light of its indigenous name. Indeed, while *Caá* functioned as a metonymy, *yerba mate* represents a semantic anarchism.

The first question that comes to mind when approaching the name *yerba mate* is a very simple and obvious one: how could a tree become an herb? Indeed, as mentioned above, *Caá* is far from being an herbaceous species since it can grow to a height of twenty meters in the wild (Figure 2). The association of *Caá* with *yerba* testifies of the projection Spaniards made on a plant they only knew under its processed form (Figure 3). According to Amaro Villanueva, Spaniards were not aware that the leaves they were introduced to were originally collected from a tree. When they made contact with the Guaraní, who used to infuse roasted and grinded leaves of *Caá*, the settlers perceived it as an herb and therefore named it accordingly in the Spanish language. In his book *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, Father Bernabé Cobo recalls this contingent lexical transfer:

“This tree only grows on the land of brave and bellicose Indians who often sell its dried leaves to Spaniards. But since the latter never saw the tree, they came to commonly name its leaves “hierba del Paraguay”. They called a “herb” what is in fact a leaf collected from a tree”.³⁷

Naming a plant by relying on their observations rather than on a botanic investigation, Spaniards cut the plant from its roots and introduced a confusion which travelled through space and time, since the generic term “*yerba*” was not only widely accepted as the tree’s vernacular name, but also ended to exclusively designate that very plant. Indeed, American Creole came to consider *yerba* as a mere industrialized product, diverting the term “*yerba*” from its generic

³⁷ Padre Bernabé Cobo, *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, quoted in Amaro Villanueva, *El arte de cebar/ El language del mate*, p. 13

meaning of vegetation.³⁸ This slip was well described by Pablo Mantegazza who, in the course of his trip in Argentina, observed that :

“Spaniards merely associated *yerba* to the *Ilex*'s leaves, attributing the generic term “herb” to a specific plant, a phenomenon similar to association of “herb” with “haschish” in Arab language”³⁹

Accidentally converted into an herb, the leaves of *Caá* were also subjected to another approximation. Indeed, if first coined out of a misleading perception, *yerba* was then strangely affixed the term *mate* as a constitutive complement.



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Figure 2: Man harvesting *Yerba Mate*

³⁸ Alonso, Amado, 1935. « Preferencias en el habla del gaucho. » *El problema de la lengua en America*. p. 148-149

³⁹ Mantegazza, P., [1867] 1916. *Viajes por el Rio de la Plata y el interior de la confederacion argentina*. Note that all the translations of this thesis were made by the author.

⁴⁰ Man harvesting *yerba mate*, 1950. Archivo Las Marias.



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Figure 3: *Yerba mate* under its processed form

The word *mate* adjoined to *yerba* clearly illustrates the way settlers appropriated and rearticulated the languages of the people whom they had conquered. Indeed, in the course of the conquest of South America, in the XVth and XVIth centuries, Spaniards quickly incorporated element of Indigenous languages. Faced with multiple dialects, they quite often assimilated idioms which were easier to pronounce- *mati*'s hispanization and re-signification clearly illustrates this phenomenon- and also tended to create hybrid expressions borrowing words to different groups. In the case of *yerba mate*, the interactions between settlers and Natives led to a mixing of languages which generated the amalgamation of two distinct indigenous realities. By naming the Guaraní infusion of Caá out of a the Queschua word for vessel, settlers did not acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous systems and languages but rather worked for their indetermination. I consider that the word *yerba mate* in itself translates the violence of colonialism which not only resulted in Indigenous people being dispossessed of their lands and social organization but also from their languages. And since language sustains power, the

⁴¹ Picture taken by the author on December 21, 2022

appropriation and distortion of Indigenous words might have participated in strengthening domination.⁴²

The Queschua word *mati* originally signified “gourd” or “container made out of a gourd”⁴³. Designating the fruit of the *Lagenaria vulgaris* which was emptied and dried so as to constitute a calabash, *mati* was a polymorphic vessel the Quechua used on many different occasions. Indeed, central among indigenous societies, calabashes were not only used as cups but also had numerous other functions:

“Calabashes constituted the most important tool of indigenous people. They used it as a container which was attributed many different functions. The calabash could either serve as a glass, or a plate, or a spice container. Soldiers resorted to it as a water gourd or even as a war cornet.”⁴⁴

Being variously a domestic utensil and a food container, a decorative item when painted and a sacred object when used in a religious ceremony, a jar and a plate, *mati* was omnipresent and far from being limited to having a single use. According to Castellanos⁴⁵, it could even constitute a weapon in the context of a conflict:

“Vuelan los *mates*, y quebrados
Dentro se levanto gran polverada ;
Todos en esternudos son iguales
No habiendo salutíferas señales »⁴⁶

As this poem testifies, calabashes usually filled with water or food, could also be used as projectiles full of allergenic powder. How come then, that *mati*, hispanized *mate*, turned out to be most closely associated with a cup of *yerba* infusion? Identifying the generic Quechua term *mati* with the recipient containing the Guaraní infusion of *Caá*, Spaniards circumscribed the word's meaning to a single use. Although the Guaraní did have a specific name to designate

⁴² For the entanglement of language with power and colonization, see for example Damousi's work on the place of English language in Australia: Joy Damousi. 2010. *Colonial Voices: A Cultural History of English in Australia, 1840-1940*. See also Bernard S. Cohn. 1996. “The Command of Language and the Language of Command”; and Ramón Grostoguel, 2011. “Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-economy: Transmodernity, decolonial Thinking and Global Coloniality”.

⁴³ Olko J., J. Sullivan and J. Szemiński, 2018. *Dialogue with Europe, Dialogue with the past, Colonial Nahua and Queschua Elites in their own words*. P.55.

⁴⁴ Sabogal, José. 1935. *Mates burilados*. Coleccion Mar Dulce, BA, quoted by Oberti, 1979. *Historia y folklore del mate*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Castellanos de, J., 1847. *Elegías de varones ilustres de Indias*, p. 30.

⁴⁶ “*Mate* fly, spreading around the powder they had been filled with. And people end paralyzed due to uncontrollable sneezes.”

the calabash from which they drunk the infusion of *Caá*, Spanish preferred to replace it by *mate* which was easier for them to vocalize:

“The dried empty calabash in which *yerba*’s infusion was prepared, had an explicit name in Guaraní. *Mate* was indeed called *Caiguá* in Guaraní, a word composed of the adjunction of the term *Caá* (*yerba*), *I* (water) and *guá* (container), and therefore literally meaning “container for *yerba*’s water”. Spaniards rather resorted to the term *mate*, borrowed from the Quechua language, because it was more convenient to pronounce.”⁴⁷

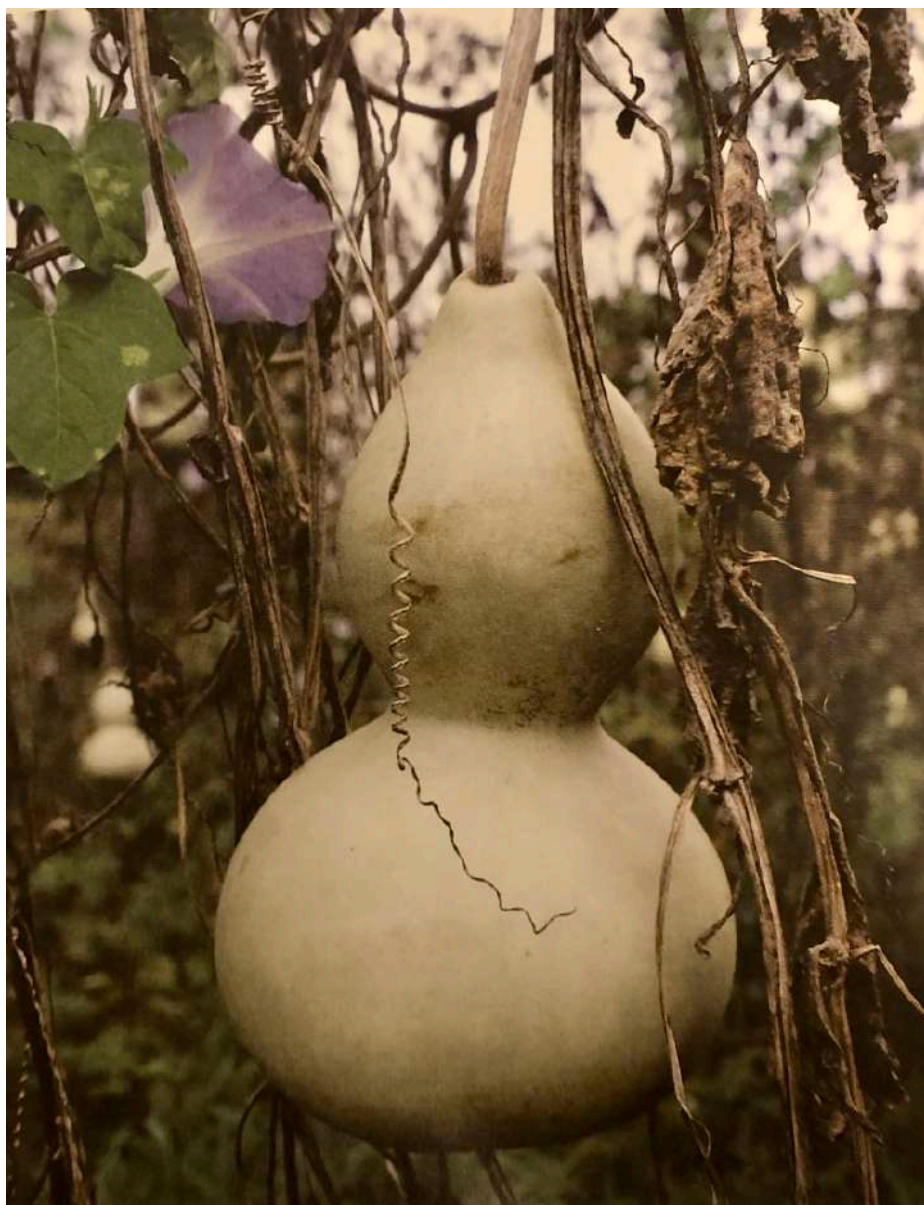
Not only did Spaniards simplify *mate*’s meaning by turning it into a word exclusively designating the recipient used to infuse the *Caá*, but they also came to transfer the name of the very container on the beverage contained in it. Thus, the infusion of *Caá*’s leaves, sipped from a straw placed within a calabash that was passed from hand to hand, came to be commonly known as “*mate*”. In other words, the beverage’s name was coined out of the eponymous cup that contained it, and until now the drink and its jar have remained welded in the same term:

“The Quechua word *mate* substituted to the Guaraní word *caiguá*, not only replaced it to designate the typical calabash from which *yerba*’s infusion was and is still drunk, but also ended defining the *yerba* itself. This semantic anarchism led European to call *mate* the very leaves of *Ilex paraguariensis*”.⁴⁸

The « semantic anarchism » orchestrated by settlers who gave the Quechua name for *Lagenaria vulgaris* (Figures 4,5) to the leaves of *Ilex paraguariensis* well illustrates how *yerba* and *mate* ended permanently cemented, something that blurred linguistically as well as physically the limits between the plant, the beverage made of the plant, and the cup from which the beverage is consumed.

⁴⁷Villanueva, A., [1960], 2018 *El Arte de Cebiar*, p. 13

⁴⁸ Ibid p. 13



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Figure 4: Fruit of *Lagenaria vulgaris*

⁴⁹ « Lagenaria Vulgaris ». Archivo Las Marias, Corrientes. Extracted from Navajas, P. 2013, *Caá Pora, el espíritu de la yerba mate*, p. 39



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Figure 5: *Mate* (cup and beverage)

⁵⁰ The pictures were taken by the author on December 21st, 2022

III. *ILEX PARAGUARIENSIS*: YERBA MATE'S BOTANIC CLASSIFICATION

Scientifically categorized as *Ilex paraguariensis* –the Paraguayan herb-, *yerba mate* was long unknown to European botanists and therefore unnamed. Indeed, the field of plant systematics- the biological classification of plants- driven by natural history and natural theology until the advent of the theory of evolution, became more holistic through the professionalization of botany in XVIIIth and XIXth century Europe. Numerous expeditions were then promoted and sponsored on all five continents in order to list and classify the world's flora. In the course of those exploration botanists have participated in the colonial expansion of imperial powers through the active contribution to the overseas collection of plants. According to Lucile H. Brockway:

“If the botanists could suggest where to find a plant that would fill a current demand; how to improve this plant through species selection, hybridization, and new methods of cultivation; where to cultivate this plant with cheap colonial labor; how to process this product for the world market; then the botanists may be said to have had a major role in making a colony a viable and profitable part of the Empire.”⁵¹

The study and naming of plants with a specific type- a type being a specimen to which the name of a taxon is permanently linked⁵²- went hand in hand with the effort to improve their scientific and economic development. I consider that the current distribution of herbaria in the world testifies of this colonial legacy. Indeed, it is common that a plant that is endemic to a particular country is known from a single collection that is kept in a European country. According to *Index Herbariorum*, 60% of the world's herbaria and 70% of the specimens are located in developed countries with colonial histories⁵³.

In the case of *yerba mate*, its specimen was sent to the Natural History Museum of Paris in 1822 by the French botanist Auguste de Saint-Hilaire. Categorized as part of the gender *Ilex*, belonging to the *Aquifoliaceae* family, *yerba mate* was given the scientific name of *Ilex Paraguariensis*.

⁵¹ Brockway, L.H.. “Science and colonial expansion: the role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens”, in Sandra Harding (ed.), 2011. *The Postcolonial science and Technology Studies Reader*, p. 128.

⁵² Figueiredo E., Gideon F. Smith, 2010. “The colonial legacy in African Plant Taxonomy”, p. 1.

⁵³ Thiers, B. M., 2021. *The world's herbaria 2020: A summary report based on data from index Herbariorum. Issus 5.0.*

In order to better understand the circumstances in which *yerba mate* was first given classified, I went into the archives of Natural History Museum of Paris, in order to consult its herbarium (Figures 6,7).

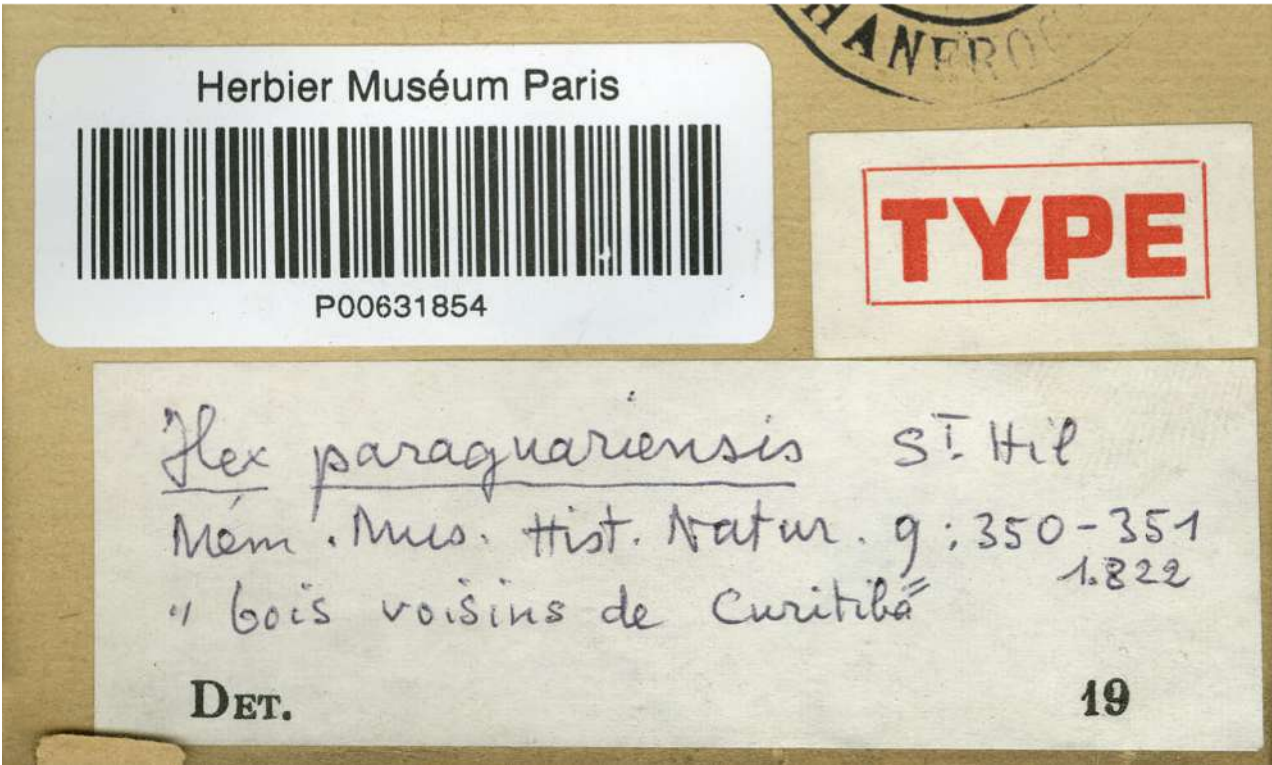


Figure 6: A detail from *Yerba mate*'s herbarium, Natural History Museum of Paris.



Figure 7: Yerba mate's leaves and seeds. Board made by Auguste de Saint Hilaire in 1822

⁵⁴ <http://coldb.mnhn.fr/catalognumber/mnhn/p/p00631854>

There, I was able to observe the original board made by Auguste de Saint-Hilaire (figure 5) and with the assistance of the archives' supervisor, I deciphered the botanist's nomenclature:

Family: Aquifoliaceae

Gender: Ilex

Species: *Ilex paraguariensis*

Name: *Ilex paraguariensis* A. St.-Hil

Country: Brazil

Locality: Saint-Paul province

Gatherer: A. de Saint-Hilaire

Harvest number: C2 1631 bis

Collected in a wood close to Curitiba, the specimen observable on the herbarium was sent to the Natural History Museum of Paris as a sample of a new species discovered by Auguste de Saint-Hilaire during his journey in Brazil. According to the board, the botanist spent the five years from 1816 to 1821 travelling, before sending his discoveries to France and proposing a classification for *yerba mate*, until then uncatalogued.

I consider that *yerba mate*'s herbarium, like herbaria in general, explicitly embody the violence of colonial botany in that they condense both the process of extraction and of erasure involved by scientific classification. Indeed, colonial botany on the one hand implied the extraction of local plants and information, and on the other hand participated in the erasure of Indigenous knowledge⁵⁵. When reaching the Natural History Museum of Paris, *Caá* was given a Latin Name *Ilex Paraguariensis* and in this process, the Guaraní knowledge that existed about the tree was extracted and the source of the knowledge erased. Moreover, contrary to the Guaraní language which clearly differentiates *Caá* from other *Ilex* species, *yerba mate*'s Latin name gathers various species together. Indeed, there are no recognized varieties of *Ilex Paraguariensis*, despite wide phenotypical differences,⁵⁶ and during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the leaves of *Ilex Paraguariensis* were often mixed with the leaves of other

⁵⁵ See Schiebinger L. 2004. *Plants and empire: colonial bioprospecting in the Atlantic world.* ; Gray, R. and S. Sheikh. 2021. "The coloniality of Planting". See also "The coloniality of Planting", a Camden Art audio podcast with Ros Gray and Shela Sheikh, part of The Botanical Mind podcast series by Camden Art Centre. www.botanicalmind.online/podcasts

⁵⁶ Species include for instance *I. breviscupis*, *I. dunosa*, *I. kleinii*, or *I. microdouta*. See Nimmo, Evelyne R., and João Francisco Miró Medeiros Nogueira. 2019 "Creating hybrid scientific knowledge and practice: the Jesuit and Guaraní cultivation of *yerba mate*", p. 349

Ilex species to increase the yields of *yerba mate* production⁵⁷. By supplanting the Guaraní name of the plant, Auguste de Saint-Hilaire also rendered invisible *Caá*'s singularity. While the Spanish settlers amalgamated Guaraní and Queschua culture by colloquially naming the plant *yerba mate*, botanists went even further in the process of dispossession by "scientifically" erasing the Indigenous knowledge of the plant.

Moreover, when digging deeper into the various documents kept in the museum's collection, one can realize that although Auguste de Saint-Hilaire was the first to name the plant, he did not investigate it properly. Having succeeded in imposing his classification more quickly than Aimé Bonpland, he won the recognition of posterity without having ever explored the Paraguayan *yerbales* the way his peer did. Indeed, according to a letter Aimé Bonpland addressed to Humboldt on the 12th of July 1832, Auguste de Saint-Hilaire barely knew what he was talking about:

"I was very disappointed by Auguste de Saint-Hilaire's work. I was given the two volumes book he wrote about his journey in Brazil⁵⁸. I read its preface and the first two chapters and I will try to find the patience to keep browsing through the book. I must say that I am not sure to succeed in finishing it if his style does not change in the following chapters (something which I doubt of), and I am sad to realize that I was wrong to highly *estimate* him. (...) I admire the way Auguste de Saint-Hilaire, who had never been to Paraguay, dared to publish papers on the most interesting plants of that country, relying for sure on Mr. Rengger⁵⁹ and Mr. Lonchamp's observations."⁶⁰

Already known for his previous expeditions, especially the one ran with Alexander von Humboldt in the Amazonian Forest, Aimé Bonpland reached Buenos Aires in 1817, with the mission of establishing the first South American botanical garden.⁶¹ The French naturalist conducted numerous expeditions into the Parana delta in order to note down observations and collect plants he then sent to Paris. In the course of those explorations Bonpland's interest for *yerba mate* increased and he was actually the first person to scientifically describe and

⁵⁷ The falsification of *yerba mate* resulting of the addition of other species' leaves was denounced in 1829, 1868 and 1931. But it is only in the 1990's that legal restriction could eliminated the mixture of other species in *yerba mate* in Southern Brazil. Thomé N., 2011. "Da *Caá*-í, Congõi ou Kukuai ao Chimarrão: a erva-mate do Contestado na História".

⁵⁸ Aimé Bonpland here alludes to Saint-Hilaire A., *Voyage dans les provinces de Rio-Janeiro et de Minas Geraes*, two volumes book published in 1830.

⁵⁹ Rengger J.-R. 1830. *Naturgeschichte der Saeugethiere von Paraguay*. Bâle. ; *Reise nach Paraguay in den Jahren 1818 bis 1826*, 1835. Aarau. ; J.-R. Rengger and Longchamp. 1827. *Essai historique sur la révolution du Paraguay et le gouvernement dictatorial du docteur Francia..*

⁶⁰ Extract from a letter written by Bonpland to Humboldt on July 12th, 1932, in Hamy, E.T., 1906. *Aimé Bonpland, médecin naturaliste, explorateur de l'Amérique du Sud: sa vie, son œuvre, sa correspondance, avec un choix de pièces relatives à sa biographie, un portrait et une carte*, p. 87

⁶¹ Navajas, P. 2013. *Caá Pora...*, p. 141.

catalogue it. Indeed, as early as in 1821, he placed the plant into the gender *Ilex* naming it more precisely "*Ilex theezans mihl*"-Ilex for my tea⁶². But although Bonpland was the first botanist to propose a classification, he was not the fastest to communicate his observations to the Science Academy of Paris. Saint Hilaire beat him to it, and the name he chose, *Ilex paraguariensis*, was therefore officially retained, in 1822.

This did not divert Bonpland from his research on *yerba mate* which he perceived as a great substitute for coffee, and the botanist spent more and more time investigating the plant's germination in order to find a way to cultivate *yerba mate* in the same way as tea in order to improve its trade.⁶³ It is worth noting that although *yerba mate* represented a key pillar of the colonial economy- the plant was known as the "green gold" in the whole region of the Rio de la Plata in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries- it was almost entirely extracted from the wild. With the exception of the Jesuits who managed to establish *yerba mate* plantations in their Reduction towns in the 17th century, no one ever succeeded in domesticating the plant before the turn of the 20th century. Eager to promote *yerba mate* in Europe, Bonpland established a colony in Santa Ana, close to the Paraná river, where the Jesuit Missions used to be, and finally discovered the secret of the plant's germination. He was however prevented from developing its plantation by Francia, dictator of Paraguay who, willing to keep his monopoly on *yerba mate* extraction, had the botanist kidnapped and imprisoned for ten years, from 1821 and 1831. Although Bonpland's project did not take place, I consider that the way he envisioned *yerba mate*, well illustrates how botanists not only classified plants but were also keen to make them profitable.

The botanic classification of *yerba mate* was accompanied by a scientific analysis of its composition, and yet in the 19th century, numerous pharmacological studies investigated its benefits.⁶⁴ From the point of view of its chemical composition, *yerba mate* contains xanthines, caffeoyl derivatives, saponins, minerals and polyphenols that are considered its major bioactive compounds.⁶⁵ Caffeoyl derivatives account for approximately 10% of *yerba mate* dry

⁶² Navajas, P. 2013. *Caá Pora...* p. 148

⁶³See Aimé Bonpland's letters gathered in Hamy, Ernest Théodore. 1906. *Aimé Bonpland, médecin et naturaliste (...)* notably Letter LXXX sent to Alfred Demersay On June 10th, 1849 (pp. 146-149) and Letter XCVI sent to D. Juan Pujol on October 27th, 1854 (pp. 192-194).

⁶⁴ Without being exhaustive, see for instance: Arata, Pedro N., 1877. *Apuntes sobre la cera contenida en las hojas de la Yerba Mate*. p. 132-136 and *Contribución al estudio del tanino contenido en la Yerba Mate. Ilex Paraguariensis St.-Hil.*, p. 257-268 ; Astrada, Ismael. 1925. « Progreso de la industria de la Yerba Mate » p. 5-12, 59-61 ; Bertrand, G et Devuyt, T. 1910. « La composition du maté du Brésil et de l'infusion du maté. » p. 249-253 ; Bialek y Massé, J., 1876. « *Mate* or Paraguayan tea. » ; Collin, 1891, "*Mate* oder Paraguaythee", p. 120 ; Lenoble, O. 1850, « De la *yerba mate* du Paraguay », p. 199 ; Parodi, D. 1859. « Nota sobre la composición de la *yerba mate* ». p. 281-282.

⁶⁵ Burris K. P, F. M. Harte, et al. 2012, « Composition and bioactive properties of *yerba mate* (*Ilex Paraguariensis* A. St.-Hil.): A Review", p. 270

weight, and the level of polyphenolics in *yerba mate* extracts are greater than those of green tea and similar to levels found in red wine. Recent studies have also demonstrated that the plant has antioxidant, antiobesity, antidiabetic, diuretic and stimulant properties.⁶⁶ Concerning the energizing effect of the plant, it is worth noting that the combination of caffeine with the theobromine and antioxidants naturally present in *yerba mate* contributes to making the body absorb the caffeine far more slowly than other stimulant beverages. Thus, although coffee and *yerba mate* share the same caffeine component, they however do not diffuse it the same way: while coffee causes a rapid and intense excitation, *mate* diffuses energy more slowly, and over a longer time period. The table below (Figure 8) lists *yerba mate*'s main bioactive compounds as well as their health benefits.

Table 1. Main bioactive compounds found in Yerba Mate and their health benefits.

Chemical compound	Dry weight composition ca. %	Known health benefits	References
Caffeoyl derivatives	10.000		(Filip <i>et al.</i> , 2001)
Chlorogenic acid	2.800	Antioxidant, antimicrobial, antidiabetic, analgesic	(Filip <i>et al.</i> , 2001)
Caffeic acid	0.023	Antioxidant	(Filip <i>et al.</i> , 2000; 2001; Heck and de Mejia, 2007)
3,4-DCQ	0.855	Anticancer, antioxidant	(Filip <i>et al.</i> 2001; Arbiser <i>et al.</i> , 2005)
3,5-DCQ	3.040	Anticancer, antioxidant	(Filip <i>et al.</i> , 2001; Arbiser <i>et al.</i> , 2005)
4,5-DCQ	2.890		(Filip <i>et al.</i> , 2001)
Saponins	5 to 10	Anticancer, Anti-inflammation, antiparasitic	(Taketa <i>et al.</i> , 2004b; Puangpraphant <i>et al.</i> , 2011)
Xanthines			
Caffeine	1 to 2%	Anticarcinogenic, antiobesity, antioxidant, diuretic, stimulant, vasodilator	(Ito <i>et al.</i> 1997; Heck and de Mejia, 2007)
Theobromine	0.3 to 0.9%	Stimulant, diuretic	(Ito <i>et al.</i> , 1997; Heck and de Mejia, 2007)
Theophylline	0 to trace	Stimulant, vasodilator	(Ito <i>et al.</i> , 1997; Heck and de Mejia, 2007)
Rutin	0.060	Antioxidant, lipoxygenase-inhibitor, anticancer, anti-tumor, anti-ulcer	(Arbiser <i>et al.</i> , 2005; Heck and de Mejia, 2007)
Quercetin	0.0031	Anticancer, anti-inflammation, antimicrobial	(Rauha <i>et al.</i> , 2000; Arbiser <i>et al.</i> , 2005; Puangpraphant and de Mejia, 2009)
Kaempferol	0.0012	Anti-inflammation, antimicrobial	(Rauha <i>et al.</i> , 2000; Puangpraphant and de Mejia, 2009)

DCQ: Dicafeoylquinic acid.

⁶⁷ Figure 8: *Yerba mate*'s main bioactive compounds and their beneficial effects

The scientific classification of *yerba mate* as well as the consequent amount of research on its properties show that the plant aroused and still arouses interest. Faced with all the benefits attributed to the plant, one might wonder why it did not travel to the western world the way other beverages did. Although botanists such as Bonpland provisioned its marketability in Europe, *yerba mate* has until now hardly penetrated western markets and I think that it is partially due to the plant's resistance to be transplanted to other regions of the world. Contrary

⁶⁶ See: Gugliucci A. 1996. "Antioxydant effects of *Ilex Paraguariensis* infusion, a typical Argentine product, assessed by sensory evaluation and electronic nose"; Andersen T. and J. Fogh, 2001. "Weight loss and delayed gastric emptying following a South American herbal preparation in overweight patients"; Lunceford N. and A. Gugliucci, 2005. "Ilex paraguariensis extracts inhibit AFE formation more efficiently than green tea"; Gorgen M. et al., 2005. "Aqueous extract of *Ilex paraguariensis* decreases nucleotide hydrolysis in rat blood serum."; Athayde, M. L. et al. « Caffeine and theobromine in epicuticular wax of *Ilex paraguariensis* A. St.-Hil."; Filip et al., 1998. "*Mate* substitutes or adulterants: study of xanthine content."

⁶⁷ Burris K. P, F. M. Harte, et al. 2012, « Composition and bioactive properties of *yerba mate* (*Ilex Paraguariensis* A. St.-Hil.): A Review", p. 269

to tea and coffee which could be cultivated in regions more accessible to western markets, *yerba mate* still only grows in its precolonial territory.

Having analyzed how both the colloquial and scientific names given by settlers and August de Saint-Hilaire to *Caá* cut the plant from the Guaraní cosmology and made a sacred plant become a profitable product, it is worth questioning what, in the consumption of *mate*, may have bypassed the politics of dispossession.

CHAPTER 2

MATE UNDER THE CONQUEST FROM AN INDIGENOUS SACRED RITUAL TO A PROFANE RITE OF SOCIABILITY

Mate shows the curious case of being an energizing drink that has, until now, neither been detached from its collective consumption nor commercialized in South America. Contrary to coffee which was originally drunk in a ritualized way in Yemen, *mate*'s expansion had not been synonymous with a reframing of its shared consumption. While coffee became a product when spreading in the Near East and in Europe, *mate* somehow first travelled as a practice. Today, Argentinians, Uruguayans, Paraguayans and Southern Brazilian consume *mate*, at a rate equivalent if not superior to coffee drinking in Europe. Indeed, statistics stands that Argentinians consume 6.4 kg of *yerba mate* per year and per habitant in average, while Italians for instance, consume 5.6 kg of coffee per year and per habitant in average.⁶⁸ I consider this comparison important in the fact that it shows how strongly established *mate* is in South America. There, *mate* is not an occasional drink, it is on the contrary a beverage daily consumed by millions of people. How could such a widespread stimulant drink avoid capitalization? And what does the prevalence of its collective consumption tell?

I argue that *mate* consumption (collective, circular, and often in an organic calabash), might show the resilience of a Guaraní practice in a Europeanized region, and I want to investigate this potential lineage by questioning the relationship of Guaraní to *mate*. I am obviously aware that my position as a French white privileged researcher puts me in the state of an outsider, and I will not risk essentializing a practice that I am both spatially and temporally distant from. I do not want to demonstrate that *mate* current consumption is rooted in a precolonial Guaraní practice that traveled unchanged, it would be non-sense. But I do want to question what, in *mate* consumption, might signal the resurgence of a gathering that preceded and succeeded colonialism. I want to show that although dispossessed from their lands and culture, the Guaraní must have managed to re-place some of their traditions.

The reconstruction of a Guaraní's autochthonous culture is a methodological impossibility. On the one hand, the Guaraní were of an oral tradition, meaning that there are no existing written sources on their culture prior to settlers' accounts. On the other hand, the Guaraní culture was deeply altered by their interactions with the Europeans, something which prevents us from figuring what their worldview was like before the conquest. However, I consider that one can approach the early use and meaning of *mate* among the Guaraní by confronting their cosmology to the Spaniards' description of the beverage at the time of first contact.

⁶⁸ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/884925/consumption-yerba-mate-per-capita-latin-america/>

I. MATE : A GUARANÍ SACRED BEVERAGE

1) THE PLACE OF CAÁ IN THE GUARANÍ COSMOLOGY

The Guaraní inhabited politically autonomous territories spread over a vast area of tropical and semi-tropical jungle terrain in the Paraná region. According to archeological data, the “diffusion of the Guaraní from the Brazilian coast to the Bolivian lowlands originated in migrations inland from the Atlantic coast that began around 1000 AD.”⁶⁹ These data have led anthropologists to designate Brazilian Tupí as the linguistic origin of the various dialects of Tupí and Guaraní.⁷⁰ By the time of the arrival of European settlers in the Río de la Plata, the Tupí were located along the Atlantic coast from the mouth of the Amazon River to Río de Janeiro, while the Guaraní were concentrated along the coast of Brazil south of the island of Santa Catalina, and inland along river systems as far east as the Paraguay River.⁷¹ Estimations regarding the Guaraní population who inhabited this region in the early 1500s range from 300,000 to 1,000,000.⁷² It is thought Guaraní social organization was based on extended kinships that were patrilineal, with each kinship group occupying a large communal dwelling headed by a chief or cacique.⁷³

Contemporary anthropologists maintain that the Guaraní subsisted on hunting, gathering and slash-and-burn agriculture. Being a semi-nomadic people, the Guaraní used to grow corn and root crops such as sweet potatoes, squash and manioc on temporary sites cleared and abandoned after several years of cultivation. Indeed, once the soil’s nutrients were exhausted, the Guaraní would leave their land and look for another place to cultivate. Although considered as mainly sedentary, the Guaraní indigenous people displayed nomadic behaviors. Indeed, the quest for new lands as well as hunting and fishing expeditions, led them undertake journeys of various lengths through the Atlantic Forest. During those frequent migrations, their

⁶⁹ Tuer, Dorothy Jane. 2011. *Tigers and Crosses: The Transcultural Dynamics of Spanish-Guaraní Relations in the Río de la Plata: 1516-1580*. p. 3

⁷⁰ For an archeological and ethnohistorical overview and data on the Guaraní, see Francisco de Aparicio, “The archeology of the Paraná River”, HSAI III, p. 57-80; Métraux, “The Guaraní”, HSAI III, p. 73-74.

⁷¹ Robert H. Lowie, “The Tropical Forests; An Introduction” HSAI III, 2; Leon Cadogan. 1965. *La literatura de los Guaraníes*, p. 14 ; Susnik. 1979 *Etnohistoria de los Guaraníes*, p. 9

⁷² Julien H. Steward stated that 200.000 Guaraní-speaking people inhabited Brazil and Paraguay in 1500, HSAI V, p. 659. Pierre Clastres argued that there were one million Guaraní occupying 350,000 square kilometers east of the Paraguay River to the Brazilian Coast in *Society Against the State*. New York: zone Books, 1989, p. 94-95. And according to Jan M. G. Kleinpenning, 2003. *Paraguay 1515-1870: a thematic geography of its development* , p. 113, there were never more than 300.000 to 400.000 Guaraníes in this same region.

⁷³ Service, E. 1971. *Spanish-Guaraní relations in early colonial Paraguay*. p. 15

knowledge of the natural habitats allowed them to subsist by collecting fruits and plants on their way. It is thought that Guaraní developed a meticulous practical and spiritual knowledge of their environment, blending empirical medicine with beliefs and metaphorical explanations. The French anthropologist H el ene Clastres described that the Guaran  as the theologians of the forest and it is true that their conception of the creation reflects the importance they confer to nature.⁷⁴ The Guaran  cosmology, unlike most others, does not imply the preexistence of a Creator.  amand , the supreme deity, caused his own body to emerge from the darkness, and this self-creation resulted from a radiance originating from what was to become  amand 's heart. As Rub n Bareiro Saguier recalls:

“The majestic process unfolds like the burgeoning of a tree. All the imagery used to describe it is borrowed from the plant - world-feet are plants, arms are branches, fingers are leaves, and crowning all, the head is a magnificent tree-top in full leaf.”⁷⁵

The second stage of creation concerns speech, the divine yet human speech called *ayv *, which enables the Guaran  to communicate with the divinity. It is worth noting that this primordial speech is distinguished from the speech used in human relation (* e' *). Then comes the creation of the four principal gods:  amand  Great Heart, master of the words; Tupa, master of water; Kara , master of the fire and Jakair , master of the fog. The fourth and last stage regards the genesis of the first land which will host men, women, animals and plants. Once again, the description conveys the primacy and sacredness of the forest. The Supreme burgeons like a tree, and the land-to-be flourishes on a five palm-trees base that, like the fingers of a hand, support the bedrock of the earth. Trees are not only constitutive of the earth's creation in the Guaran  cosmology but also of its re-creation, after destructive cataclysms. And while *pind * (palm-tree) figures as a pillar in the genesis of the world, *ca * (*yerba mate*) is said to be the regenerative tree from which life can reemerge.

The regenerative and spawning function of *Ca * is reported by various narratives in which the plant helped to save the world. Having worked on Guaran  cosmology, Cadogan recalls that *Ca * played a fundamental role in facing past disasters.⁷⁶ After the colossal fire (*tata guachu*), one of the two main catastrophes which previously devastated the world, nothing remained but the *Ka'a ete 'l* (the genuine herb). Succeeding in germinating out of burnt areas,

⁷⁴ Clastres, H. 1975. *La Terre sans Mal. Le proph tisme tupi-guaran *.

⁷⁵ Bareiro Saguier R., 1990. “Guaran  genesis, the intricate cosmogony of South America's “forest theologians” p. 19

⁷⁶ Cadogan, L. 1992. *Diccionario Mbya-Guaran -Castellano*. See also Keller, H. A. 2013. “Ka'aguachu : “La selva en un s lo arbol.” Una contribuci n de la mitolog a Ava Chiripa a la toponimia de la regi n Guaran tica.”.

Caá is said to have allowed the regeneration of flora by preceding and fomenting the spread of other plants. In Ava Chiripa's version, the *Ka'a ete'l* is replaced by the *Ka'a guachu* (giant *yerba*/immense forest). This cosmology suggests that, before quitting the Earth, their primordial ancestor transformed his elder daughter into a gigantic *Caá* plant. Thanks to the numerous and heterogenous branches of the tree, housing the seeds of all species, the forest was guaranteed a perpetual and balanced revival:

“Ndee remopotĩmba retermina ko yvyra teĩ, el mimo koropi pecha e'l árami ko ñande ru kuery ko yvy oundi ramo, ñande oundipa aguã rami ojapo ramo a'ekuery, el mimo ko kampo va'ekue-ekue el mimo opyapaju ka'aguypa juta a'eramingua a'egui py”.⁷⁷

The role that *caá* plays in the Guaraní cosmology helps understanding its metonymic name. Indeed, since *caá* is the tree from which the whole forest can regenerate, it makes sense that Guaraní resorted to its name to designate the vegetal world in general. I also consider that the place of *caá* in the cosmology is a clear indicator of its sacredness, and that one can legitimately hypothesized that *caá* consumption might have primarily been part of religious ceremonies. Although early colonial sources are to be read with care since there are biased by settlers' non-scientific eye-witness, I think that they can help defending this idea.

2) *MATE*'S DESCRIPTIONS IN EARLY COLONIAL SOURCES

The documentation for the early colonial period of the Rio de la Plata are representations of the New World beset by the “artful rhetorical manipulation” of the storyteller. In “Colonial Perspectives on the Chiriguaná (1528-1574)”, Catherine Julien notes that:

“Reaching backward in time to study the first contacts between Europeans and native people in South America is like maneuvering a sophisticated obstacle course. Most of the written material that has been preserved from the 16th century was prepared by representatives of the Spanish Crown. This texts are loaded with messages tied to colonial policy. Some are difficult to recognize and can be unwittingly accorded the same value as “unloaded” information.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ “You can make a clean sweep, and even erase the last tree, but in the same way as our gods created themselves out of nothing, the nature will regenerate. Everything will re-emerge and the forest will rise again on a *decimated* field.” Keller H.A, 2013, « Arboles y arbustos en mitos guaraníes sobre el origen y el fin del mundo : elucidación de algunas expresiones fitonímicas. » p. 56.

⁷⁸ Catherine Julien, “Colonial perspectives on the Chiriguaná (1528-1574).” In María Susana Cipolletti, ed. 1997. *Resistencia y adaptación nativas en las tierras bajas* p.17.

I agree in saying that early colonial written material can be perceived as “unloaded information”, however, I think that one can access facts beyond the way they were reported. Although “messages tied to colonial policy” stress certain events and negate others, I consider that there is something at work in silence and absence. In other words, “unloaded information” can be useful if one analyses what they do not say. In the case of *mate*, it is worth noting that there is hardly any description of the consumption of *mate* by the Guaraní. Early sources instead mention its diffusion among Spaniards. Rather than detailing the circumstances in which Guaraní drunk *mate*, the colonial elite blamed other Spaniards for having been corrupted by Indians who introduced them to *mate*⁷⁹. Thus, we learn about the Indigenous origins of *mate* mostly through descriptions of its appropriation by Spaniards. The absence of sources specifically depicting the consumption of *mate* by indigenous is talkative. First, it shows that settlers refused to document a practice that they unanimously associated to the Guaraní – Spaniards are said to have adopted the vice of drinking *mate* from the “Indians”; second, it sheds light on the reason of this refusal: willing to eradicate the practice of drinking *mate*, colonial authorities worked to render it invisible. Faced with the rapid diffusion of *mate* in the whole of society, they silenced the Guaraní use of *mate* and turned the beverage into a mere threat. Hence the fact that sources mainly present *mate* as an indigenous disease that contaminates Spaniards.

Although the majority of early colonial sources focusses on *mate*'s appropriation by Spaniards, a few sources indicate that Guaraní were resorting to *mate* as a refreshment or as a vomitorium in the course of religious and official ceremonies. As with tobacco and coffee, *mate*'s infusion seems to have long been consumed ritually, and the *mate* ceremony was orchestrated by Shamans, who occasionally initiated people to the beverage. The speech Antonio Ruíz de Montoya delivers in his *Conquista espiritual* goes in that sense:

“Eager to understand the origin of *yerba* use, I discovered that the infusion was mostly consumed by old Indians (80 to 100 years old). Those Indians were not used to drink *mate* when they were young. They were initiated to it by a wizard who was certainly connected to the evil. Once initiated to it, they could introduce other persons to the beverage, and nowadays, *yerba* consumption has expanded. Old Indians participated in spreading its use.”⁸⁰

The secluded consumption of *mate* described by Ruiz de Montoya highlights the fact that the beverage had a strong symbolic charge which meant it was not in everyday use. Although the author did not provide an account on the way *mate* was prepared, he however recalled how

⁷⁹ Garavaglia, J. C. [1983]. *Mercado interno y economía colonial* p. 35-42 ; Cobo B. [1653] *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, in Obras del P. Bernabé Cobo de la Compañía de Jesús, 1956.

⁸⁰ Ruiz de Montoya, A. 1639. *Conquista espiritual hecha por los religiosos de la Compañía de Jesus en las provincia del Paraguay, Uruguay y Tape*, Imprenta del Reyno, Madrid, fjs. 9 vta.

the beverage was transmitted. In hands of “old” Indians, *mate* was a key intermediary that Shamans used in specific contexts. It was often used ceremoniously to seal a matrimonial union or to welcome an illustrious host for example.⁸¹ Guaraní also resorted to it as a divinatory drink, “by consulting oracles from a calabash filled with *yerba* and around which they gathered. They do various ceremonies of that type.”⁸² The sacredness of caá’s leaves as well as the ceremonies described by Ruiz de la Montoya support the idea that *mate* must have primarily been consumed as a sacred beverage by the Guaraní. It is however impossible to measure the ritual’s importance before the conquest since *mate* consumption evolved as soon as Europeans settled in the Paraná region and impacted on its social organization. Drawing a parallel with the case of the use of coca leaves, Garavaglia asserts that:

““The expansion of *mate*’s consumption after the conquest is similar to the phenomenon registered for the coca leaf and well accounted by Acosta and Cabo. *Yerba mate*, like the coca leaf, was originally merely consumed in the course of religious ceremonies and was enshrined in a certain prestigious halo. The conquest detached the drink from many of its primitive cultural ties, and this magic medicine quickly spread among Indigenous and Mestizo consumers.”⁸³

The mere contact of settlers with *mate* was responsible for an appropriation and therefore a resignification of its meaning. Among the Guaraní as well as the colonial society, *mate* quickly came to have a social function rather than to be part of a sacred ritual.

In the decades that followed the conquest, *mate* consumption widely spread, and I consider that in the same way as the name “*yerba mate*” is a material trace of the settler’s encounter with the plant under its processed form, the diffusion of *mate* as a collective drink is an indicator of the resilience of a Guaraní practice. According to the Guaraní cosmology and early colonial sources, *yerba mate* had a sacred function and *mate* was primarily used in the course of initiatory and religious ceremonies. Although it is impossible to claim that *mate* was shared during those ceremonies, sources however mention that Guaraní used to gather around the calabash, either to be initiated to the drink by a shaman or to consult *yerba mate*’s oracles. I argue that *mate* age-old collective consumption might be rooted in those gatherings and that the *mate* calabash had and still has the agency to gather people together. For me, whether

⁸¹ « Relação da origem e estado... », in *Manuscritos da Coleção de Angelis* (MCDA), tomo I, Jesuitas e bandeirantes no Guairá, p. 350; “Anua do Padre Diogo Ferrer...” [1633], *ibidem*, tomo II, p. 30; Padre Diego de Oñate [1618], *Decima carta Anua*, in DHA, tomo XX, p. 142

⁸² Montoya Antonio Ruiz, quoted in Oberti, F. 1979. *Historia y folklore del mate*. p. 53

⁸³ Garavaglia, J. C. 1983, *Mercado interno ...*, p. 37

mate was shared or not by the Guaraní during sacred ceremonies is not an important question. The use of passing the gourd from one person to another is a tradition that could have either been directly appropriated by settlers or created by both Spaniards and Guaraní when *mate* consumption expanded and that the drink's sacred function shifted to a social one. What, in *mate* consumption, carries the trace of a Guaraní practice is the resurgence of the circle surrounding the calabash.

Neither separated from its organic calabash nor from its collective gatherings, *mate* manifests the vivid re-inscription of an indigenous gesture in a Europeanized region. Contrary to other stimulant drinks such as coffee, which was originally drunk in a ritualized way too, *mate* was secularized without being standardized. And not only has the beverage remained embedded in a collective consumption but it has also, until now, avoided commercialization. I would like to make stand out the exception *mate* represents by briefly comparing it to coffee. According to Ralph S. Hattox, coffee was first being used by Sufis from the Yemen during religious ceremonies which were not restricted to members of the order. In Cairo, coffee started spreading around the mosque where those meetings happened, and the drink was quickly sold in the streets. Thus, the diffusion of coffee was directly accompanied by its commercialization:

“Once coffee had been taken out of the context of the Sufi dhikr and introduced into general consumption, it was embraced by an entirely different group of advocates, and with them the associations and images connected with the drink changed. While it remained one of the props of the nocturnal devotional services of the Sufis, others, perhaps less spiritually inclined, found it a pleasant stimulus to talk and sociability. From this the coffeehouse was born.”⁸⁴

Mate's trajectory is drastically different from the one coffee followed in the beginning of the fifteenth century. Indeed, as soon as coffee spread out of Sufi dhikr, it entered the place of the coffeehouse. *Mate* on the contrary, penetrated the whole of the colonial society throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries without being commercialized. Why did *mate* not follow the same route as coffee? Why did it remain a free drink out of the context of the Guaraní sacred ceremonies? How was the drink transmitted? Why wasn't it detached from its collective consumption?

⁸⁴ Hattox, Ralph S., 1985. *Coffee and coffeehouses, The origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near east*, P. 28.

II. MATE UNDER COLONIZATION: A CONQUERED OR CONQUERING DRINK?

1) APPROACHING THE RELATION BETWEEN THE GUARANÍ AND THE SPANISH THROUGH THE PRISM OF TRANSCULTURATION

Latin America came into being in the 1500's after European conquest of the New World. During this period of time, several European countries, primarily Spain and Portugal, explored and claimed control of the human capital and natural resources of the Americas. Rivalry between Spain and Portugal grew, so on the 7th of June 1494, both governments signed the Treaty of Tordesillas which divided their spheres of influence in the New World. Established under the aegis of Pope Alexandre VI, this Treaty basically shared the world into two parts, relying on a meridian 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde islands, off the west coast of Africa. All the lands located at the East of that line were attributed to Portugal while the western ones were recognized as Spanish.

The line which separated the Spanish and Portuguese zones of influences went through the Guaraní settlement areas. Indeed, Brazil, conquered in 1500 by Cabral, ended up being controlled by Portugal, while all the other regions surrounding the Paraná River were administrated by Spain. More numerous on the western side of the line, the Guaraní were colonized by Spanish settlers who imposed a new order on them. However, although previous investigations⁸⁵ of Spanish-Guaraní relations in the early colonial period argue that Spanish oppression of the Guaraní resulted in their acculturation to Hispanic norms⁸⁶, I think it more likely that a transmutation of cultures occurred. Notwithstanding the well-established violent subjugation of the Guaraní, one should nevertheless “present evidence of the convergences and conflicts between worldviews that make colonial dynamics unpredictable and surprising rather than inevitable”⁸⁷. It is necessary to shift from a narrative of victimization and domination to one of multiple cultural and social convergences in order to stop considering the colonial subject as fixed but rather as an identity that is “always in process and always constituted within, not outside, representation”.⁸⁸ The post-colonial perspective paved the way for new concepts such as creolization, hybridity and transculturation which recognize “the

⁸⁶ See Roulet Florencia, 1993. *La resistencia de los Guaraní del Paraguay a la conquista Española (1537-1556)*, Susnik Branislava. 1980. *Los aborígenes del Paraguay II: Etnohistoria de los Guaraníes..* and Elman Service 1971. *Spanish-Guaraní relations in early Colonial Paraguay*.

⁸⁷ Tuer, Dorothy Jane. 2011. *Tigers and Crosses ...* p. 2

⁸⁸ Stuart Hall, 1994. “Cultural identity and diaspora”, in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. p. 392

interdependence and mutual construction of colonizer and colonized”⁸⁹ and lend “more subversion, nuance and ambiguity than traditional assessments of the effects of colonialism”.⁹⁰ I posit that the Spanish-Guaraní interchange should be observed through the prism of “transculturation”, an interpretative tool coined by Ferdinand Ortiz in *Cuban Counterpoint* to describe the phenomenon of merging and conflating cultures.⁹¹ In *The Guaraní under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata*, one of the most recent book-length study of colonial Spanish-Guaraní relations, Barbara Ganson takes transculturation as an interpretative framework. Doing so, she responds to Elman Service, Branislava Susnik and Florencia Roulet who argue that Guaraní had been acculturated to Hispanic norms.⁹² Taking an opposite tack to their assimilationist positions, Barbara Ganson demonstrates that Guaraní “showed great resilience in resisting and adjusting to the encroachment of Europeans” by analyzing indigenous agency in the eighteenth-century Jesuit missions.⁹³ I consider that the diffusion of the consumption of *mate* among the colonial society also supports the idea that “Guaraní native culture did not simply fade away”.⁹⁴ Since transculturation neither consists of acquiring a new culture (acculturation) nor of losing a previous one (deculturation), but rather describes a culture born of a mutual interchange, I consider it as the best prism to apprehend the Spanish and Guaraní’s co-living dynamics. Indeed, as we will see, the Guaraní, although subjected to the Spanish rules, did not fully submit to the settlers. On the contrary, they both succeeded in composing a strict system of warrior and kinship alliances with them, and to have some of their constitutive traditions adopted.

⁸⁹ Liebmann, M. 2013, “Parsing Hybridity: Archaeologies of Amalgamation in Seventeenth-Century New Mexico.” In *The Archaeology of Hybrid Material Culture*, edited by J.J. Card, 25-49. p. 31

⁹⁰ Silliman, S. W. 2015. “A Requiem for Hybridity? The Problem with Frankensteins, Purées and Mules”. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 15 (3): p. 281

⁹¹ Ortiz, F. 1995. [1940] *Cuban Counterpoint*.

⁹² Service, Elman. 1971. *Spanish-Guaraní Relations in Early Colonial Paraguay*.; Branislava Susnik . 1979-1980. *Los aborígenes del Paraguay II: etnohistoria de los Guaraníes*. Florencia Roulet. 1993. *La Resistencia de los Guaraní del Paraguay a la conquista Española (1537-1556)*.

⁹³ Ganson Barbara. 2003. *The Guaraní under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata*. P. 29. See also de Asúa 2014. *Science in the Vanished Arcadia: Knowledge of Nature in the Jesuit Missions of Paraguay and Río de La Plata* ; Bauer, R. and M. Norton 2017, “Introduction: Entangled Trajectories: Indigenous and European Histories.” *Colonial Latin American Review* 26 (1):1-17. Hofman, C. L. and F. W. M. Keehnen, eds. 2019. *Material Encounters and Indigenous Transformations in the Early Colonial Americas: Archeological Case Studies* ; Sarreal, J. J. S. 2014. *The Guaraní and Their Missions: A Socioeconomic History*.

⁹⁴ Ganson, B. 2003, *The Guaraní under Spanish Rule*, p. 29.

2) WARRIORS AND KINSHIP ALLIANCES

Irala, minor *hidalgo*⁹⁵ and member of Pedro de Mendoza's 1535 expedition, is considered by nationalist historians to be the symbolic father of Paraguay's *mestizaje* for having established *amistad y alianza* with Guaraní living in the region⁹⁶. Confirmed provisional governor of Asunción in 1539, Irala exercised control over fractious Spaniards and rebellious Carios for the next seventeen years, through his appropriation of and adaptation to Guaraní kinship and warrior norms. Accustomed to making alliances with more powerful enemy tribes, the Guaraní resorted to the same strategy when faced with the arrival of Spanish settlers. Instead of risking defeat, they agree to join forces with the settlers and to fight with, rather than against, them. One has to keep in mind that settlers themselves needed those alliances to survive in an environment they barely knew. Most saliently, "the European conquest of the new world becomes inseparable from how cultural differences and affinities were perceived and acted upon by key protagonists".⁹⁷ The Guaraní-Spanish warrior alliances was mutually beneficial. On the one hand, the Spanish could rely on Guaraní knowledge of the land to better conquer the territory, and on the other hand, Guaraní could carry out more successful attacks against their traditional enemies by incorporating Spanish warriors' weapons and strategies. Thus, in the course of those unions, Guaraní carried out many fierce raids against the Payaguas and Agaces' tribes and would sell their numerous captives as slaves to the Spanish.

The existence of pacts sealed between Spanish and Guaranís invalidates the idea of unilateral domination of the local by the Europeans. Indeed, settlers did partially adapt to the norms of the Indigenous people they invaded in order to be able to settle in a territory they couldn't have mastered without establishing coalitions. Moreover, the Guaraní's agency and power to resist the invader is shown by the fact that they rebelled on several occasions. When they felt abused or betrayed, especially when the Spanish did not respect agreements, Guaraní violently protested, as in the insurrection of 1545-1546 for instance. The mutual interchange observable on an administrative level, is also, and mainly, conveyed by a social crossbreeding. The Spanish-Guaraní interactions, officialized in warrior alliances, were accompanied by an intense *mestizaje*.

In one of the chronicles reported in his *Viaje al Rio de la Plata*, Ulrich Schmidl, German explorer asserted that:

⁹⁵ Hidalgo: means a "noble"

⁹⁶ Cardoso, E. 1959. *El Paraguay colonial. Las raíces de la nacionalidad*.

⁹⁷ Tuer, D. J. 2011, *Tiger and crosses...* p. 2

“Indians gave six women to our captain, the oldest was around 18 years old. They also offered each soldier two women in charge of taking care of them by cooking, washing up and helping them in any other task. Those women are tall and beautiful, they are loving persons and affectionate mistresses with desirable bodies.”⁹⁸

According to the author, Guaraní women were a “gift” offered to Spanish soldiers in order to guarantee peaceful coexistence. Once again, early colonial sources must be read with care and Ulrich Schmidl’s account is a good illustration of the romanticizing of historical narrative. Travel diaries were reserved for a European audience and therefore articulated in function of European mores and imagination. The spontaneous “giving” of women might have been fantasized by Ulrich Schmidl and the story of a Guaraní spontaneous “invitation” to develop kinship alliances seems slightly reductive. At a time of first contact, Spanish settlers who were almost all male, saw indigenous women as potential mothers and workers and must have merely “taken” them. I intentionally use the verb “take” to translate the dehumanization of indigenous women that is at work in the explorer’s account. Whether “given” by the Guaraní or “taken” by the settlers, Guaraní women were married to Spaniards who were quick to adopt the Guaraní practice of polygamy. Far from Europe where they would have been forced to remain monogamous, settlers did not hesitate to marry several women leading to Paraguay earning nickname the “Paradise of Mohamed”⁹⁹. In his book *Caá Pora, El espíritu de la yerba mate*, Pau Navajas recalled a chronicle written in Asunción in 1620 by an anonymous Jesuit saying that:

“Mohamed and his Koran allowed the man to have seven women at most, but here they can marry up to sixty women. Well, the Christian is satisfied with fours Indians when he cannot have eight, and is fulfilled with eight women when he cannot have sixteen, etc, etc”¹⁰⁰

The quick and intense miscegenation following from these numerous unions has long been perceived as the evidence of the “special psychology of the Guaraní people” and of their spontaneous cooperation, ranging from an economic one, with constant agricultural contributions, to a personal one “in which a regime of servitude was established through the delivery of Indian women to the Spanish”.¹⁰¹ I consider that, by reducing Guaraní women to the mere idea of “servitude”, the twentieth-century nationalist historians such as Julián María

⁹⁸ Ulrich Schmidl, *Viaje al río de la Plata (1534-1554)*, quoted by Pau Navajas 2013. *Caá Pora*, p. 58.

⁹⁹ The first reference to Asunción as Mohamed’s paradise is found in a letter sent by Francisco González Paniagua to the King, on March 3, 1545. DHG: II, 49.

¹⁰⁰ Navajas, P. 2013, *Caá pora...* p. 64

¹⁰¹ Rubio, J. M. 1942. *Exploración y conquista del Río de la Plata : siglo XVI y XVII*, p. 181

Rubio and Enrique de Gandía of Argentina and Efraím Cardoso of Paraguay¹⁰², have tended to focus solely on the voluntary submission of the Guaraní to Hispanic laws instead of acknowledging “the interdependence and mutual construction”¹⁰³ of Guaraní and Spaniards. If Guaraní women were forced to marry Spaniards and to serve them, they actively resisted by maintaining their values. Without denying the violence women were exposed to, I nonetheless do not want to reify them as mere victims. Guaraní women did have the power to pushback against their submissive status by maintaining their language and traditions within the home. Far from being absorbed by their husband’s European values, they rather infused their own culture into the children born of those mixed unions.

3) MATE, A CONQUERING DRINK? THE BEVERAGE’S TRANSMISSION WITHIN MIXED HOMES

As the settlers incorporated Guaraní women into Spanish culture as servants and concubines, the Guaraní also incorporated the Spanish into their social structure through their female lineage. And since women are “conduits of cultural knowledge”, and that “personal histories or pasts, constructed through memory, or the process of remembering with others, are often centered on food” I argue that the mixed home constituted a space in which Guaraní women could actively transmit their language and the tradition of drinking *mate*.¹⁰⁴ Having constituted a key product of the Guaraní-Spanish’s relationship since the very beginning of the conquest¹⁰⁵, I consider that *mate* would not have spread around in such a wide scale if it had not been first intimately experienced and deeply appropriated. And nothing better than the mixed home, which represents a space in which two cultures are put in contact and blended, could have participated in making *mate* circulate. Indeed, the fact that *mate* penetrated the colonial society under its traditional form – the consumption remained collective- shows that Spaniards got accustomed to *mate* only after having been intimately initiated to it. Within the home where the practice might have taken hold, *mestizo* children might have picked up the habit of drinking *mate* by mimicry and Guaraní women, by reactivating their practice, in a way conquered the colons by conforming them to their own gesture. The fact that today Guaraní is still an official language in Paraguay and that *mate* is considered as a cultural symbol there, show “how important oral tradition is within the inter-generational transmission of cultural

¹⁰² Gandía, Enrique de. 1935. *Indios y conquistadores en el Paraguay ; Historia de la conquista del Río de la Plata y del Paraguay : los gobiernos de don Pedro de Mendoza, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca y Domongo de Irala, 1535-1556.* ; Efraím Cardoso, 1959. *El Paraguay colonial. Las raíces de la nacionalidad.*; Efraím Cardoso. 1996. *El Paraguay de la Conquista.*

¹⁰³ Liebmann, M. 2013, “Parsing Hybridity: Archaeologies of Amalgamation in Seventeenth-Century New Mexico.”p.31

¹⁰⁴ See Janet Floyd and Laurel Forster, 2010. *The recipe Reader: Narrative contexts, traditions*, p. 7

¹⁰⁵ Garavaglia J. C, 1983, *Mercado interno...* op. cit. p. 38

practice”.¹⁰⁶ I think that, contrary to coffee which spread as a social drink by entering public spaces¹⁰⁷, *mate* first remained part of the intimate sphere. While coffee was adopted as a stimulant drink, *mate* was inherited as a practice. To question *mate*'s expansion in regards of the Guaraní women and of the *mestizo* home helps understanding its trajectory. Indeed, rich in caffeine, *mate* could have penetrated the colonial society as a stimulant. Its consumption and its meaning could have been changed. Spaniards could have simply become addicted to its effects. But this did not happen. From Spanish-Guaraní first contact to present day, *mate* was not diverted from its collective consumption, and I consider that the non-commercialization of the beverage shows that *mate*'s transmission prevailed on its diffusion. In the context of the *mestizo* home, Spaniards were not introduced to a beverage but initiated to a beverage-object-practice by Guaraní women. The gatherings articulated around *mate* during Guaraní religious ceremonies were transferred in the intimacy of the home and once detached from its sacred function, the calabash might have structured relationships. According to Marcy Norton, “colonial spaces of dependence included households where women labored as wives, concubines and servants” in Spanish America, and “cross-cultural contacts flourished in intimate setting, some voluntary, others coerced”¹⁰⁸. Both a shortage of Spanish women and a strategy of appropriation through matrimony, led to many forms of domestic unions between Europeans and Indians in the sixteenth century¹⁰⁹. I argue that in such a context, Guaraní women replaced *mate* by acculturating Spanish men to the beverage¹¹⁰. The collective gatherings fomented by the *mate* cup were deeply internalized, to the point that the practice guided the drink's expansion. In other words, Spaniards learned to like *mate* because of their material dependence on Indians.

Starting in the *mestizo* home, the route of *mate* then radiated out across the whole empire, following an erratic itinerary. The spatial diffusion of *mate*'s consumption was rapid and the beverage quickly penetrated areas where interbreeding was far less widespread than

¹⁰⁶ Parveen, Razia. Spring 2016. “Food to remember: culinary practice and diasporic identity”, *Oral History*, vol. 44, no 1, p. 47

¹⁰⁷ See Hattox, Ralph S., 1985. *Coffee and coffeehouses, The origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near east* ; and Cowan B. W. 2005. *The social life of coffee: the emergence of the British coffeehouse*.

¹⁰⁸ Norton, Marcy. 2006 “Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics”, *The American Historical Review*, vol 111, no 3 , p.677

¹⁰⁹ See Boyd-Bowman, P. 1956. « Patterns of Spanish Emigration to the Indies until 1600” and Carrasco, Pedro. “Indian-Spanish Marriages in the First Century of the Colony”, in Susan Schroeder and Robert Haskell, eds. 1997. *Indian Women of early Mexico*..

¹¹⁰ Historians have long depicted how Indian wives participated in acculturating Spanish men to Indian culinary and domestic practices. See J.H. Parry, 1966. *The Spanish Seaborne Empire*. Repr. Berkeley, Calif. 1990, p. 123; Solange Alberro, 1992. *Del gachupín al criollo: O cómo los españoles de México dejaron de serlo..* pp 71-73; Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe, 1996. *The True History of Chocolate*, p. 110-111; Rodriguez-Alegría, E. “Eating like an Indian: Negotiating Social Relations in the Spanish Colonies”.

in the Paraná region. In the first decade of the XVIIth century, it is attested that *mate* had reached the regions of Paraguay and Tucuman.¹¹¹ A few years later, it reached the Alto-Peruana region which became one of the key areas for the trading of *yerba mate*, and according to Padre Cobo, *mate* continued his journey to first Quito and Panama and then in “the mere viceroyalty of New Spain”.¹¹² Yet in 1594, Juan Romero Cardiel remarked on the common consumption of *mate* in the city of Concepción de Bermejo, saying that “Spaniards consumed as much as Indians, an infusion made of an herb they call “*yerba del Paraguay*”¹¹³; and in 1596, Alonso de la Madrid noticed that “the vicious practice of drinking *mate* has expanded to the point that Spaniards as well as their wives and children now even consume it more than Indians”¹¹⁴. *Mate*, first transmitted, then diffused, finally settled among all classes of the colonial society.

III. MATE: A TRANS-CLASS RITE OF SOCIABILITY

1) THE SOCIAL DIFFUSION OF MATE'S CONSUMPTION IN THE COLONIAL EMPIRE: A BEVERAGE OVERCOMING CLASSES?

Mate spread across the whole empire until its consumption was common in every territory the Spaniards had conquered. Even more surprising than this spatial dispersion, was *mate* penetration of all classes of what was a highly hierarchical society:

« Not only the rich master of Indios of Salta, but also the minor from Potosi, the wealthy merchant of Lima, and the farmer of Quito are fervent consumers of *mate*. Sources attest of *mate*'s peculiar social and ethnic diffusion.»¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ About its consumption in Buenos Aires, see Acuerdos del extinguido Cabildo de Buenos Aires (ACBA), tomo II, p. 23 [1609] ; as for Tucuman, see la carta al tribunal de la santa inquisicion, in Archivo Historico Nacional, Madrid (AHNM)-Inquisición, libro 1037, fjs. 192-194 vta

¹¹² Cobo, B., Historia del nuevo mundo [1653] in Obras del P. Bernarbé Cobo de la Compania de Jesús, Biblioteca de autores españoles, tomo 91, Madrid, 1956, p. 272 ; The Italian traveler Giovanni Gemelli Carreri, when visiting Acapulco in 1697, was received and offered a *mate* by a Spanish man from the Peruvian armada. This habit of welcoming foreigners with *mate* might have participated in making the tradition spread far away from the region where the drink was originally established. See Carreri, G. F., Viaje a la nueva españa [1699-1700] estudio preliminar, traduccion y notas de Francisco Perujo, UNAM, Mexico, 1976, pp. 10-11

¹¹³ La carta in Biblioteca de la Real Academia de Historia, Madrid (BRAM) -Jesuitas, 81, fjs. 58.

¹¹⁴ Alonso de la Madrid [1596], in Aguirre, J. F. de, « Diario... », tomo XIX, no. 47-48, pp. 359-360

¹¹⁵ Garavaglia, J.C, 1983. *Mercado interno...* p. 40. See also Acarette, 1943 *Relación de un viaje al Río de la Plata y de allí por tierra al Perú, con observaciones sobre los habitantes, sean indios o españoles, las ciudades, el comercio, la fertilidad y las riquezas de esta parte de America [1657-1659]*, pp. 33-34 ; Coreal, F. 1722. *Voyages de... aux indes occidentales. Contenant ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable pendant son séjour depuis 1666 jusqu'en 1697*, tome 1, p. 276 ; Frezier, 1716 *Relation du*

Mate's capacity to seduce and tame the whole colonial society, regardless of social or ethnic distinctions is a rare phenomenon since such a society, supposedly based on the exacerbation of status markers, would normally be reluctant to adopt an indigenous habit. Indeed, the colonial elite generally rejected and despised all practices associated with a lower or poorer groups. *Mate*'s expansion shows how the direction of cultural influence was independent of that of the dynamics of power and demonstrates that a practice associated to the bottom of the social echelon by creole authorities could infiltrate colonists' milieu. The diffusion of *mate* as a cross-class social rite in a rigid society where class distinctions were signaled by external manifestations of belonging to a determined group (specific clothes, manners, mores) should be recontextualized. Indeed, although hierarchical, colonial society was less rigid in the first decades of the conquest, as mixed-weddings were a necessary step in the colonization and *mestizos* were then considered as fully integrated in the Spanish system. It was only in a second time that a rigid system of identifiable classes was formed. Relying on the ephemeral flexibility of a society on the verge of constructing differences, *mate* could penetrate all emerging classes, and remained when the society became stabilized into a fixed hierarchy. I consider that *mate*'s appropriation by Spanish settlers was in many points similar to the one of chocolate. Indeed, according to Marcy Norton:

“During the early history of chocolate among Europeans, the transmission of taste did not accord with the top-down structure of society. Instead, it flowed in the opposite direction: from the colonized to the colonizer, from the “barbarian” to the “civilized”, from the degenerate “creole” to the metropolitan Spaniard, from gentry to royalty”¹¹⁶.

Although *mate* did not travel to the metropole, it however represented, like chocolate, a “contingent accident of empire”¹¹⁷. Indeed the taste for *mate* flowed from the Guaraní indigenous people to the colonial elite, and it is worth noting that the role of Indian women as intermediaries has particular salience for both the transmission of chocolate and *mate*.¹¹⁸

voyage de la Mer du Sud aux Côtes du Chily et du Pérou, fait pendant les années 1712, 1713 & 1714, p. 150 ; Juan, J. y Ullóa A. de, 1748. *Relación histórica del viaje a la América meridional*, tome III, p. 144

¹¹⁶ Norton, Marcy. 2006. “Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics”, *The American Historical Review*, vol 111, no 3, p. 670

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 670

¹¹⁸ In pre-Columbian and colonial Mesoamerica, Indian women dominated the domestic sphere and were in charge of the preparation of chocolate. See Bernard Díaz del Castillo, 1964. *Historia verdadera de la Conquista de la nueva España* ; Bernardino de Sahagún, 1950. *The Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain* ; Coe, S. 1984. *América's first Cuisines*. pp, 75,78, 103. Diego Valadés, *Retórica Cristiana* (Perugia, 1579), pp. 172-173.

Although *mate*'s social dispersion can be explained by the role Guaraní women played as fundamental vectors of cultural transmission, there is still a question that must be addressed. Having seen why *mate could* spread, one should wonder why *mate actually did* spread. Why did *mate* become so popular? Why did its consumption arouse such a keen interest? In short, what made *mate* addictive? By comparing the drink to other products rich in caffeine, one can notice a series of similarities. In his detailed synthesis on stimulants, ranging from drinks to drugs, L. Lewin highlights the importance of the conviviality that surrounds the consumption of such vegetable products.¹¹⁹ And if *mate*'s consumption, contrary to that of coffee or tea which occurred in a specific social space (coffeeshop or teahouse), was not associated to a specific social space, it did remain intrinsically linked to conviviality. As the *mate* circulates around a group of individuals who gather to drink it in turn from a single metal straw, an important social function is served. And in addition to the symbolic meaning of stimulants, there is an undeniable physical effect which explains the consumption's frequency and the habituation to the substance. Indeed, although *yerba mate*'s high caffeine content cannot fully explain its wide adoption, which was obviously also rooted in strong socio-cultural values, it remains true that the plant's addictiveness has contributed to its continuing popularity. Spaniards might have been conquered by the convivial ceremony *mate* was inscribed with, but the very stimulant effect of the beverage, providing an essential complement for their alimetal balance, must have been an even bigger factor in its swift and widespread diffusion.¹²⁰

2) WHEN MATE, AS AN OBJECT, BECAME A STATUS MARKER

The spatial and social dispersion of *mate* was partially due to its ability to momentarily erase hierarchy, class and gender. *Mate*, as a beverage, was consumed in an unequivocal way. In the countryside as well as in the city, "the custom to offer a *mate* to welcome a stranger

¹¹⁹ Lewin, L. Phantastica. 1970. *Drogues psychédéliques, stupéfiants, narcotiques, hallucinogènes*.

¹²⁰ *Yerba mate*'s stimulant and addictive properties played an important role in *mate*'s widespread diffusion, and it would therefore be interesting to study *mate*'s trajectory through the perspective of the plant. My research has focused on the drink's agency by observing *mate* as a quasi-object but a deeper investigation of the agency of the plant in itself would provide other interesting research tracks. According to Van der Veen, one should revert their gaze towards plants that have tended to be mainly studied from an anthropocentric point of view and thus relegated to passive objects. Concepts such as materiality and entanglement help approaching the agency of plants while shading light on the way they interact with humans. See Van der Veen, M. 2014, *The Materiality of Plants: Plant-People Entanglements*; Hall, M. 2011, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*; Kohn, E. 2013, *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology beyond the Human*; Coole, D., & Frost, S. 2010, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics*. Regarding the emerging field of Plant humanities, also see <https://labs.jstor.org/projects/plant-humanities-initiative/amp/>

was common to poor and rich people.”¹²¹, and in the eighteenth century the drink was everywhere far more well-established than coffee or tea:

“Neither coffee, nor chocolate, nor tea expanded the way *mate* did. It is commonly admitted that people should be offered *mate* in all circumstances. If the host is tired, *mate* to awake, if he is thirsty, *mate* to quench, if he has the mind worried, *mate* to free the soul, if he has a stomachache, *mate* to heal the pain...”¹²²

Mate's, as a beverage, symbolized hospitality and sociability in both modest and affluent homes. It was however quickly detached from its non-hierarchical state by being refashioned as an object. Indeed, if *mate*, as a beverage, was shared by all classes, it reinstated, as an object, ostentatious distinctions. The elite and the rural class both drank and shared *mate*, but the class differences were expressed through the object from which it was consumed. In order to manifest their wealth, rich people transformed their calabash into luxury status symbol. They could then be distinguished from the people who infuse the *yerba mate* in a plain calabash, while still drinking the same beverage. Distancing themselves from the masses by using a gold or silver *bombilla*¹²³, the elite converted *mate* into an object marker of status:

«Poors and riches consume similar amount of *mate*. But poor people drink it from plain calabashes while rich people decorate their gourd and straw with gold and silver. The poors and the slaves drink the beverage bitter while the riches add sugar and aromatic pastils to it”¹²⁴

Through the addition of sugar or expensive aromas and the presentation of calabashes decorated by famous goldsmiths, the elite refashioned *mate* according to their own codes and succeeded in detaching the object from its inclusive function by using it as a way of displaying their wealth. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Bourdieu states that “taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make between (...) the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed”.¹²⁵ I consider that the re-inscription of class in *mate* illustrates this statement, in that the elite managed to express their position in a beverage that was not primarily associated to them. In order to distinguish themselves from “the vulgar”, they made both the aspect of the cup and

¹²¹ Aguirre, Francisco. Quoted by Oberti, F. 1979, *Historia y folklore del mate*, p.252

¹²² Padre Pedro Lozano, *Historia de la conquista del Paraguay, Rio de la plata y Tucuman (1739-1744*

¹²³ Bombilla : Spanish word for *mate*'s specific “straw”

¹²⁴ Cardiel, J., « Breve relación... » [1731], en BRAM-9-11-5, No. 2271, signatura antigua, fjs. 9.

¹²⁵ Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: A social critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

the taste of the infusion accord with social hierarchies. It is worth noting that sugar worked manifesting power as much as gold at that time. As Mintz argues in *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, the transformation of sugar from a medicinal additive to a luxury good among the upper classes made this product embody “the social position of the wealthy and powerful”. He insists on “sugar’s usefulness as a mark of rank-to validate one’s social position. To elevate others, or to define them as inferior”, and shows that sugar traveled down to other classes only because their members absorbed the meanings of the upper class.¹²⁶ *Mate*’s case is interesting since the drink did not travel down after having been signified. On the contrary, it is only when the drink had strongly established itself in the whole of colonial society that the elite started to distinguish it by adding sugar to the beverage and by adorning its cup. *Mate* therefore became the support of multiple appropriations: through the appearance and taste given to *mate*, the elite could perform their belonging to a class they identified with and wished to be identified to. The “classification” of *mate* sometimes even led to its owner’s name being inscribed on the object, like “I belong to Juan Fernandez: I am pleased to offer you a sip”.¹²⁷ The importance of such pieces, especially in Buenos Aires, is confirmed by the mention of luxurious *mates* in numerous 18th century’s inventories. The goods and tools’ inventory of the Portuguese silversmith Manuel Antúnez for instance, mentions that:

“ We first have a wooden box with four *mates* decorated with silver. In addition to that an other regular *mate* and a large one, both silvered.”¹²⁸

According to Oberti, Peru was one of the main centers of silvered *mate* production. One of the most common and redundant motifs used by goldsmiths to decorate their silver-plated *mates* was the “paloma eucarística”¹²⁹ (see Figure 1). Designing pieces which combined various influences, Peruvian craftsmen were used to embed the contribution of the French artistic scene with an indigenous repertoire. This led to a curious syncretism where European forms were melted with Indians motifs such as flowers and animals (Figure 2). The golden age of such an art reached its zenith in the last decades of the XVIIIth century. This period is characterized by another layer of influence, brought by industrialists and traders from Manilla who reached the harbor of Acapulco with many Chinese and Japanese consignments. At that time, the magnificence of *mates* almost turned them into works of art without any practical function, and it is only in the 1890’s that *mate*, until then overloaded with multiple Indigenous,

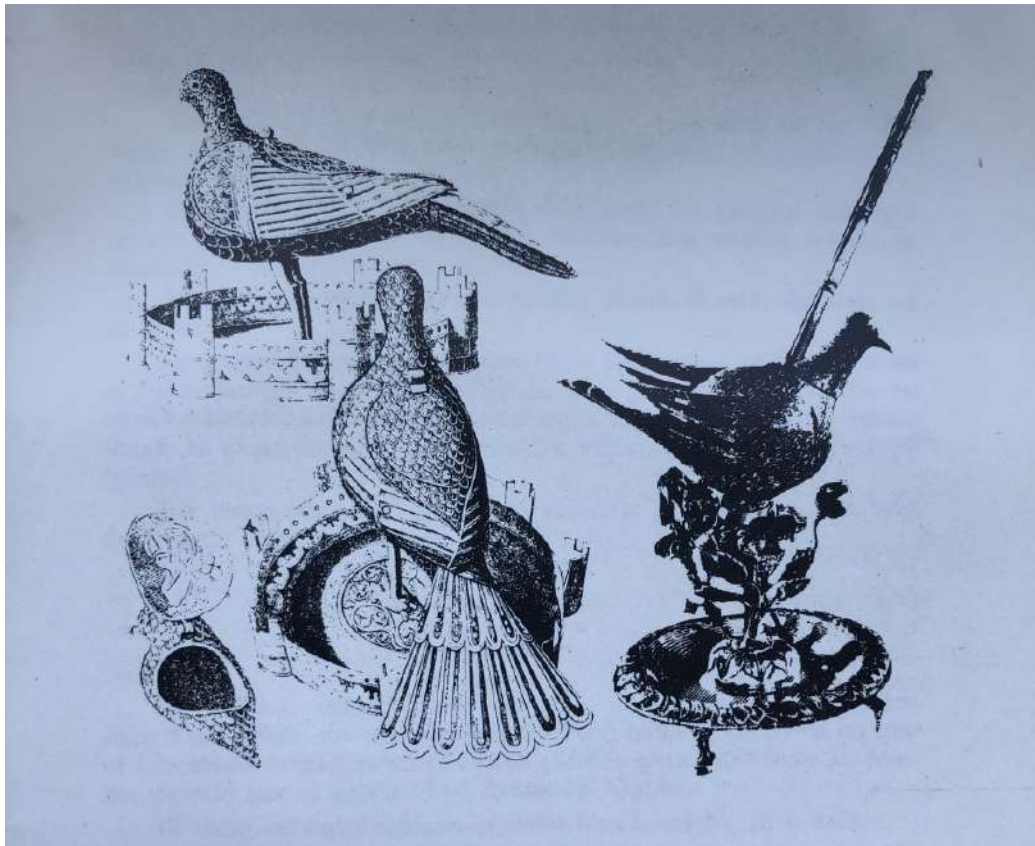
¹²⁶ Mintz, S. W. 1985. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. k

¹²⁷ Oberti, F. 1979, *Historia y folklore del mate*, p.200

¹²⁸ Manuel Antúnez’s inventory, 1775, quoted by Oberti 1979, *Historia y Folklore del mate*, p. 34

¹²⁹ The eucharistic dove

Europeans, and Oriental references, started to be less cluttered in order to become a more ductile, accessible and intimate object.



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Figure 1: *Mate* (on the right) inspired by the aesthetics of the Eucharistic dove (on the left)

¹³⁰ Picture extracted from Oberti, F. 1979, *Historia y folklore del mate*. On the left, two drawings of the Eucharistic dove (recurrent motif in French churches in the 13th century and on the right a 18th century silvered *mate* reproducing its design).



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Figure 2: 18th century silvered *mate* with a handle decorated with sculpted animals

¹³¹ Picture extracted from Oberti, F. 1979, *Historia y folklore del mate*. See also D'harcourt, Raoul, 1925. *L'argenterie péruvienne à l'époque coloniale*.

3) THE MATE CEREMONY: A NON-CAPITALIZED PRACTICE GENERALLY CONDUCTED BY WOMEN

Behind the external appearance of the object, the inherent meaning of the beverage persisted, as if *mate* could wear various costumes and labels without conforming to them. The drink kept the trace of an indigenous resilience: the collectiveness of the practice survived the changing form of the object. Thus, although the upper classes managed to inscribe distinction in the taste and aesthetics of *mate*, they kept drinking it collectively, in the same way as lower classes. It seems that *mate*, as a practice, had the agency to re-assemble what it distinguished as an object. Men, women, wealthy and poor people all repeated an identical gesture. The organic calabash or the silvered cup fomented the same gathering. I think that this shows again the prevalence of a practice which worked preventing the drink from fitting any classification. *Mate* was reshaped as an object and flavored as a beverage, but was not disrupted as a practice. It could be said that, as an object-practice-beverage, *mate* defies appropriations and bypasses circumscriptions, one evidence supporting this idea being that the beverage never ended commercialized. Indeed, even if multiple attempts were made to frame *mate*'s consumption, none of the endeavors came to fruition.¹³² *Mate*, as a beverage, resisted commercialization and never entered a coffeeshop-like place. Instead, it invaded the private sphere, becoming a widely-consumed social drink. I consider that the internalized collective consumption that accompanied *mate*'s transmission in the household, might have played a role in allowing the drink to emancipate from any type of commercialization. It would not have been profitable for a coffeeshop to sell *mate* without individualizing its consumption. But people were so attached to sharing the drink in the collective traditional way that it would have been difficult to persuade them to buy a *mate* to consume alone. The transmission of *mate* preexisted the attempts made to capitalize it, and individual choices therefore counterbalanced economic projections. Separated from its original sacred function, the consumption of *mate* nevertheless retained a ceremonial quality, with people alternatively sipping the beverage from the same straw, and came to be commonly regarded as a rite of sociability in the whole region.

In rural areas, the offering of *mate* was mainly considered as a way of showing hospitality while in the urban dwellings it was essentially associated with a more presumptuous sociability. In his *Descripcion e historia del Paraguay y Rio de la Plata*, Felix de Azarra described that :

¹³² Garavaglia, J. C, 1983. *Mercado interno...* p. 43

« The house, the food and the *mate* cup are at the disposition of the one who arrives, and who is never even asked his name. Hospitality is constitutive of *Gaicho*. They always welcome strangers and invite them to stay.”¹³³

Mate was part of the *gaucho*'s diet and house and was offered to anyone who knocked on the door, whether being a friend or a total stranger. This gesture was a show of hospitality as well as an opportunity to engage in conversation. Indeed, “circulating from mouth to mouth, like something alive” *mate* was a way of creating a connection and provoking a dialogue.¹³⁴ Regarding the role *mate* played in high-class receptions, one should pay attention to the codified *mate* ceremony which often blurred the difference between sociability and niceties. More than a welcoming beverage, *mate* was, among the elite, attributed an intermediary function. It represented a socializing tool, for which, according to numerous sources, women were responsible. Indeed, in the eighteenth century, *mate* was in the Andes, associated with female and domestic consumption.¹³⁵ And this was due to the fact that, although consumed by men and women, *mate* was most of the time prepared and orchestrated by women. As a contemporary observer stated in the late eighteenth century:

“There is no household, rich or poor where *mate* is not always on the table, and it is nothing short of amazing to see the amounts spent by women on *mate* utensils.”¹³⁶

Within the houses of the colonial elite, women were the ones in charge of receiving and offering *mate* to the guest who came by. This sociability rite was made all the more seductive by the beverage being given to the host only after having passed by the mouth of the “dueña de la casa”- woman of the house- who always consumed it first.¹³⁷ According to Octavio Battolla, *mate* was also part of long festivities, circulating among the people dancing throughout the whole night. In his account, women were, once again, the one in charge of the preparation and serving of the *mate*.

¹³³ Azara, Felix de. [1793] *Descripcion e historia del Paraguay y Rio de la Plata*, p.208

¹³⁴ Ibid. p. 208

¹³⁵ Ross W. Jamieson. 2001. “The essence of commodification: caffeine dependencies in the early modern world”,p. 278

¹³⁶ Alcedo de. Antonio. [1786] 1967. *De las Indias occidentales o America*, p. 330. For examples of *yerba mate* utensils see ANH/C C116.229a f.2r (1772); ANH/C C116.095a f.2r (1772); ANH/C C97.102 f.3v (1770); see also the collections of the Chilean Museo de artes decorativos : <https://www.artdec.gob.cl/galeria/mates-de-plata>; Museo de America Madrid; and private collections such as the one of Alicia and Samuel Setián in Buenos Aires (see in Lagier, J. 2008, *La Aventura de la yerba mate*, Buenos Aires: Instituto nacional de la Yerba Mate.

¹³⁷ Gillespie, A. *Buenos aires y el interior. Observaciones reunidas durante una larga residencia, 1806-1807*. P. 115

“Meetings were always friendly, and people used to dance from 8pm to midnight. In that occasion *mate* was offered. But when the party was continuing until daytime, chocolate was served too. In both cases, the woman of the house was in charge of filling the *mate* with water before adding sugar to the beverage and passing it to the hosts.”¹³⁸

The most ancient drawing in which *mate* figures, corroborates the idea of women’s leading role in the stewardship of the ceremony (Figure 3). Representing an enormous calabash surrounded by three women, the drawing was accompanied by an explanation saying that the *mate* “was given to the Limenian woman who sipped it first before passing the gourd to her family as well as to her hosts and to her servants”¹³⁹. The size of the calabash might have been a way to symbolize its inclusive function, since there are no sources mentioning the use of any gigantic jar of that type. But the most important indication here is that the first graphic representation of *mate* pictures it in hand of a woman, something that provides evidence of the central role women used to play in the orchestration of the *mate* ceremony. I argue that *mate*’s association to women also confirms the importance of Guaraní women as cultural intermediaries. From mestizo households to high class reception rooms, was transmitted and passed around by women. However, although I consider that there might be a lineage between the early transmission of *mate* by Guaraní women and its woman-led ceremony in eighteenth century Spanish America, it would be worth investigating to what extent European influences might have also impacted on *mate* consumption. Contrary to coffee which was rather part of male socializing in Europe, tea’s consumption was there considered as a feminine practice.¹⁴⁰ Was *mate* in hands of women in the Andes also because it more closely resembled tea than coffee?

¹³⁸ Battolla Octavio, 1908. *La sociedad de antaño*.

¹³⁹ Frezier, Amédée, 1726. *Relation de voyage de la mer du sud*. p. 170

¹⁴⁰ Ross W. Jamieson. Winter 2001. “The essence of commodification: caffeine dependencies in the early modern world”, p. 278. See also Goodman J., Paul E. Lovejoy and Andrew Sherratt, eds. 1995. *Consuming habits: Drugs in history and anthropology*.; Shivelbush Wolfand, 1992. *Tastes of Paradise: a Social History of Spices, Stimulants and Intoxicants*; Ralph S. Hattox, 1985. *Coffee and Coffehouses: The origins of a social beverage in the Medieval Near East*; Rudi Mathee, “Exotic substances: the Introduction and Global Spread of Tobacco, Coffee, Cocoa, Tea and Distilled Liquor, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries”; Paul Butel, 1997 [1989]. *Histoire du thé*. Jean Leclant, “Coffee and Cafés in Paris, 1644-1693”, in Robert Foster and Orest Ranum eds. 1979 [1951]. *Food and Drink in history: Selections from the Annales*.



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Figure 3: Most ancient drawing depicting *mate*.

¹⁴¹ Drawing by Juan Cano y Olmedilla which was published In Amadeo Frezier, 1716. *Relation du voyage de la mer du Sud*. This drawing was found in Taillard, Alfredo. 1941. *Plateria Sudamericana*. Sevilla: Ediciones Espuela de Plata (drawing number 107).

CHAPTER 3

YERBA MATE: THE GREEN GOLD BUSH, KEY PILLAR OF THE COLONIAL ECONOMY

I. THE GREEN GOLD RUSH

1) LAS MINAS DE ORO VERDE¹⁴²

Mate's spatial and social diffusion went hand in hand with the extraction of *yerba*, since the drink could never have become so successful if the raw *material* the beverage was made from had not been accessible. The consumption of *mate* is thus indissociable from the production of *yerba mate*, one should take into account both sides of its history in order to fully apprehend the contradictions at work in those two parallel routes. Indeed, while *mate*, as a beverage, was able to evade a rationalized commercialization, *yerba*, on the contrary, was made to obey the logic of capitalism. Becoming a key pillar of the colonial economy, *yerba* was a product which benefitted, and indeed was instrumental in Empire building. Once processed and consumed, the leaves of *yerba* barely conformed to the order which organized its systematic extraction, but although the plant could be transformed into an antagonist beverage, it also filled the coffers of an imperial system which avidly harvested as much "green gold" as possible.

When settling in the region of La Cuenca del Plata, Spaniards found their principal source of wealth in the *yerbales*- forests of *yerba mate*- and in the availability of a plentiful supply of indigenous forced labour.¹⁴³ As the region did not provide the minerals they had hoped to find, settlers, who originally came for gold, changed their plans once they realized how profitable the exploitation of *yerba mate* could be. They substituted the plant for gold as the object of their quest rebaptizing *yerba mate* the "*oro verde*"- green gold- indeed, the expeditions into the wild *yerbales* were in many aspects similar to the famous Gold Rushes. It is worth noting here that the anarchic and uncontrolled extraction of *yerba* was referred to using the vocabulary normally associated to the mining of minerals:

"The colonial market sustained the demand for *yerba mate* and established a profitable business. Numerous expeditions were conducted into northern forests where there was a dense concentration of *yerba mate* trees. *Yerba's* market was therefore based on an extractive economy which relied on forced

¹⁴² The green gold mines

¹⁴³ Gortari, J. 2017 "Maldita *yerba mate* : explotación de la mano de obra en las minas yerbateras del Paraguay colonial », *Tareferos, vida y trabajo en los yerbales*, P. 34

labor. Indians were turned into beasts of burden and this enslavement continued up to the 20th century. The *yerba* industry operated outside the law and was soon designated as a mining industry, since *yerba*, like gold or silver, was observed as a natural good comparable to minerals. Thus, the forests of *yerba mate* ended up being known as “mines”. As for the people harvesting the plant, they were called “miners” and *yerba* soon became widely known as the “green gold”¹⁴⁴

An unexpected source of wealth, the “green gold” became the most sought-after product of the Empire, and the economic and political history of the region remained essentially the story of the conflicts accompanying its appropriation.¹⁴⁵ The extraction of *yerba* indeed not only constituted the key pillar of the colonial economy but also financed the regional development of what later became Brazil, North Argentina and Paraguay. The rich “mines”, from which the “green gold” was collected, were extremely hostile environments and the labour conditions of Indigenous people were inhuman. Indeed, Spaniards could amass power only by appropriating the Guaraní work force, and by basically turning them into slaves. The deadly expeditions into the mines were organized and supported by the *encomienda* regime, which gave Spaniards the right to deny Indians their humanity.

2) “MALDITA YERBA”¹⁴⁶: THE *ENCOMIENDA* REGIME

The city of Asunción, originally founded on a site that had been wrongly perceived as a good gateway to Peru, or more precisely, to the minerals Peru contained, ended up being very isolated. Even though it was possible to reach the Andes from there, the routes Spaniards tried to open to connect the city to this area were not practicable without enormous efforts. Thus, when Potosí started to gain notoriety, Asunción, though the capital of the *rioplatenses*¹⁴⁷ provinces was very far from the main axis of Peruvian activity. So, despite its exceptional vitality and demographic diversity, the city was seriously isolated economically and geographically. Therefore, numerous expeditions were conducted in order to find other routes susceptible to save Asunción from its enclaved situation. In addition to the continuation of the only partially successful effort to pave a way to Alto Peru – the creation of Santa Cruz de la Sierra in 1558 and Concepcion del Bermejo as stopover towns were part of this project-

¹⁴⁴ Navajas, Pau. 2013. *Caá Pora*. p. 66

¹⁴⁵ Gortari, J. 2002, *La yerba mate, un rito guaraní de proyección universal*

¹⁴⁶ « Accursed herb »

¹⁴⁷ *Rioplatenses* is an adjective designating the Provinces part of the Region del Río de la Plata

Asunción tried to connect with Brazil by following the Parana fluvial axe – again, cities such as Ciudad Real in 1557, were built along the way- and finally developed a southern route taking form with the foundation of Santa Fe de Vera in 1573.

Those attempts did not fully resolve the problem of Asuncion's isolation, but it was, however, during those pioneer movements towards Brazil, that settlers discovered the first wild *yerbales*, when crossing the forest of Mbaracayú which was densely covered with *yerba mate* and turned out to be the main area for the extraction of the plant during the whole colonial era.¹⁴⁸ The encounter of *Asuncenos* with the *yerbales* triggered a political change within the city which adopted a system that it had previously rejected: the *encomienda*.

First reluctant to adopt the *encomienda* regime which other Spanish colonies had developed, Irala gave in to rising pressure and implemented it in Asunción in 1556. In favor of a local organization based on a parentage allowing a voluntary service, Irala's position was contested and fought against by settlers who wanted to appropriate the indigenous labor force in order to conduct expeditions within the *yerbales* of Mbaracayú. Indeed, the production and exportation of *yerba mate* "was impossible without the contribution of Indians".¹⁴⁹ Therefore, although Europeans and Guaraní were, in a first time, linked by kinship alliances which guaranteed cooperation and mutual exchange in Asunción, the establishment of the *encomienda* regime totally rearticulated the interethnic relationships and Guaraní came to be forced to comply with the Spanish order.¹⁵⁰ More than 20 000 Natives were distributed among 320 *encomenderos* who coopted the Indians workforce force for their own profit:

"Two forms of the *encomienda* in Paraguay, which became known as the *encomienda originaria* and the *encomienda mita*, were instituted. The *encomienda originaria* allocated Carios who were already providing service to the Spanish to specific conquistadors, and converted indigenous labour previously obtained through reciprocal kinship obligations into permanent year-round tribute. The Carios who were subject to this form of the *encomienda* became known as *originarios* or by the Incan term *yanacona*. The *encomienda mita* also appropriated Inca terminology. Often synonymous with the term *repartimiento* in the contemporary accounts, the *encomienda mita* assigned to the *encomendero* a designated number of Indians who had no previous kinship ties to the Spanish and lived in *tekó-ás* that were located some distance from Asunción. These Indians, who were called *mitayos*, were expected to provide labour services by turns for a number of months out of a year by travelling to Asunción. In both forms of the *encomienda*, the caciques were responsible for insuring that the Carios

¹⁴⁸ Garavaglia, J. C., [1983], *Mercado interno...*, p. 108

¹⁴⁹ Mörner, M. 1985, *Actividades políticas y económicas de los jesuitas en el Río de la Plata*.

¹⁵⁰ See Roulet, F. 1993. *La resistencia de los guaraní del Paraguay a la conquista española*,

in their villages complied with tribute obligations and the *encomenderos* were entrusted with the Indians' welfare and their instruction in the Christian faith."¹⁵¹

The official shift from kinship alliances to an official domination allowed multiple abuses and exacerbated the settlers' violence. Driven by the desire to make a fortune by extracting as much "green gold" as possible, Spaniards treated Indigenous people as dehumanized tools, sending them into the *yerbales* where, exhausted and underfed, they died by the thousand. The system of the *encomienda* which stipulated that *encomenderos* owed "welfare and instruction" to the Indians who had paid a working tribute to them in exchange of this "care", was not respected at all. Thus, the *encomienda* rather represented a structure in which settlers, under the pretext of protecting and evangelizing the Guaraní people, could actually coopt their working force.

Alongside the establishment of the *encomienda* regime, multiple "*pueblos de indios*"¹⁵² were developed around Asunción. Led by priests, those *pueblos* gathered Guaraní under the Franciscan rule while also incorporating some indigenous values. This enterprise aimed to evangelize and obtain the obedience of the Indians, who would then pay their tribute without rebelling.¹⁵³ The concomitant efforts made by Franciscan priests and *encomenderos* not only resulted in the "evangelizing of Indians" but also in their "submission to the *encomienda*".¹⁵⁴ In the first decades of the XVIIth century, the impiety and cruelty of *encomenderos* as well as the inhuman working condition inflicted on Indians entering the *yerbales* were commented on by contemporary witnesses. The "green gold" was not long to be also referred to as "*maldita yerba*" (the curse herb) and the *yerbales* of Mbaracayú were soon portrayed as the "*infierno verde*" (the green hell)¹⁵⁵. In his *Conquista espiritual del Paraguay*, Antonio Ruiz de Montoya testifies that:

« I myself witnessed that in the Guairá province, the *encomenderos* had their Indians working for 6 months without giving them anything, and often kept them the whole year when they were not too exhausted to keep working. (...) The extraction of *yerba mate* has resulted in the death of thousands of

¹⁵¹ Tuer, D. 2013. *Tigers and Crosses*. p. 310..

¹⁵² *Pueblos de Indios* were villages in which Indians were gathered under the direction of Franciscan or Jesuit priests.

¹⁵³ See Salinas Maria Laura, 2019. *La encomienda paraguaya : pueblos de indios en el siglo XVII, Población, familia y trabajo*, Revista electronica da ANPHLAC, ISSN 1679-1061, n°26, p. 268

¹⁵⁴ Necker, L. 1990, *Indios guaraníes y chamanes franciscanos. Las primeras reducciones del Paraguay. 1580-1800*. Asunción : Biblioteca paraguaya de Antropología. p. 81

¹⁵⁵ Oberti, F. 1979. *Historia y folklore del mate*, op. cit. p. 84

Indians. I saw bones there. Indians' bones. And it broke my heart to think of them dying there, innocent and impotent. In order to survive, Indians look for snakes and toads to eat, and they drink *yerba mate* to compensate for the lack of food. They carry five or six arrobas [70 kg] of *yerba mate* alone, and have to walk fifteen, twenty leagues with such a burden. Indians usually weigh less than their loads... insane people have put an Indian and their *yerba* pack on the same scales: the pack was always heavier."¹⁵⁶

Ruiz de Montoya's denunciation and other accounts, were not sufficient to prevent those atrocities from continuing to be perpetrated.¹⁵⁷ *Yerba* became such a coveted product, that neither legal prohibitions nor moral injunctions ever diverted *encomenderos* from their *folie des grandeurs*.

3) PROHIBITING YERBA MATE: A FAILED ENTERPRISE

The plague induced by the anarchic and barbarous extraction of *yerba mate* aroused indignation and opposition from contemporary administrators, such as Hernandarias, Governor of Paraguay and Rio de la Plata from 1596 to 1618, who was one of the most virulent detractors of *mate*. Already in 1596, concerned with the deplorable situation of the Indigenous people forced to work in the mines, Hernandarias tried to prohibit the consumption and traffic of *yerba mate* by editing an ordinance stipulating that:

«Any person who drinks *yerba* in the public or private sphere, shall incur a fine of 10 pesos the first time and 15 days in jail, and from now on they shall be severely punished (...). That no one from now on should go or send Indians to make *yerba* to any place. All the *yerba* that would be collected would be burned in the public square, and whoever brings it or wants to bring it into the city, incurs a one hundred peso fine."¹⁵⁸

Hernandarias was determined to have these measures respected, as testified by the account of Father Pedro Lozano who related that, during a visit to Buenos Aires, the governor applied the law and had burnt a large amount of *yerba mate* on the city's central square. According to

¹⁵⁶ Ruiz de Montoya, Antonio, 1639. *Conquista espiritual del Paraguay*. p. 349.

¹⁵⁷ See for instance Mastrille Durán's Carta anua (1616-1627) quoted in Amable y Rojas, 1989. *Historia de la yerba mate en Misiones.*, and the Manuscritos de de la colección de Angelis, in Meliá, 2015, *Camino guaraní : de lejos venimos para más lejos caminamos*.

¹⁵⁸ Gortari, J. 2017 "Maldita yerba mate...", p. 40

the Jesuit Father, Hernandarias claimed the following sentence to the Indians he took the *yerba* from:

« Don't be surprised by this demonstration, since this *yerba* is responsible for the ruin of your prestigious nation. If only you hadn't introduced Spaniards to the pernicious use of this *yerba* which will cost you so dearly in the future.”¹⁵⁹

Hernandarias' view was shared by Francisco de Alfaro who also pronounced an ordinance on the 4th of July 1611 which aimed to prevent Indians from working in the *yerbales*. Supported by his peer, Hernandarias kept burning *yerba*, notably in 1617 in Asunción, an attitude merchants reacted to by denouncing him to the Audiencia de Charcas. Undeterred Hernandarias stubbornly refused to be intimidated, justifying his policy as follows in a letter to the King of Spain dated 8th of July 1617:

«I have also executed an order that the said visitor made, to cease a treatment of the *yerba* they take in this province with incredible work of the Natives to whom the Spaniards make great aggravations. Submitted to the cupidity of Spaniards, Indians found themselves forced to work to death. *Yerba mate* consumption is a plague that has expanded up to Peru and Tucuman, and this vice renders men vicious, lazy and abominable”.¹⁶⁰

In his letter sent to the Crown, Hernandarias was highly critical of the extraction of *yerba* citing the human costs and risks to life inherent to the expeditions led into the mines, and claiming consumption of the beverage was a vice. He takes pains to emphasize the pernicious effects aspect of a harmful drink which, paraphrasing his words, renders people “vicious” and “lazy”. This point highlights the fact that the prohibition of *mate* relied on both legal and moral arguments. If on the one hand the extraction of *yerba mate* was fought against for political and humanistic reasons, the consumption of *mate* was, on the other hand, mainly decried using ideological and religious claims.

As soon as the Jesuits arrived in Paraguay, charged with the mission of establishing various reductions to facilitate the religious conversion of Guaranís, Jesuits condemned the consumption of *mate*. Indeed, in 1610, a few years after the establishment of the Compañía

¹⁵⁹ Crovetto, M. 1995. *La yerba mate: maravilla de América*.

¹⁶⁰Hernandarias in Oberti, F. 1979, *Historia y folklore del mate...* p. 98

de Jesus in the Paraná region, Father Diego de Torres indeed denounced *mate* before the Inquisition's tribunal in Lima by picturing it as a "diabolic superstition". He added that "the Indians who first consumed it, had clearly made a pact with the devil".¹⁶¹ In order to dissuade people from drinking *mate*, the tribunal took concrete measures and there were numerous excommunications around Mbaracayú, as recorded by Fathers Cataldino and Maceta's cartas¹⁶². Despite these measures, *mate*'s consumption did not seem to decrease, and numerous complaints were registered regarding the ill effects of such a habit, notably during the communion service:

" Because of *mate*, people stopped coming to mass, or do not pay attention to what is said during the service. And they transmit their bad attitude to their children"¹⁶³ and "the worse is that people don't come anymore to receive sacraments because they start drinking *mate* before dawn."¹⁶⁴

Failing to cure the faithful of their deeply rooted "vice", the Jesuit order, meeting in Cordoba in 1677, decided to work for a drastic prohibition of *yerba mate* use going hand in hand with the banning of tobacco and chocolate's consumption. The gathered assembly unanimously agreed on the need to stand together against this abominable vice, "if we don't resolve the problem of the spread of such a vice, the honor of our Order will be besmirched"¹⁶⁵. Prohibitions continued until 1740, when Father Antonio Machioni, although supporting the past bans in his carta general, opened the door towards toleration of moderate use in the future.

If legal and moral prohibitions briefly impacted on the *yerba* trade, they nonetheless neither decreased nor channeled *mate* consumption which, in those very years, quickly spread to the farthest parts of Peru.¹⁶⁶ And facing this unstoppable custom, Jesuits quickly changed their tactic when they became aware of how profitable the plant could be.

¹⁶¹ Villanueva, A. [1960] *El arte de cebar*, . p. 10

¹⁶² Carta of padre Joseph Cataldino to Diego de Torres, Guayrá, 7/2/1610 and of Simon Maseta to Guayrá 3/5/1610, in ARSI-Paraguaria-Historia, volumen 11, fjs 71 y 58 vta.

¹⁶³ Anonym report [ca. 1610], transcribed by Pastells, in *PAST*, tomo I, p. 385

¹⁶⁴ Segunda carta anua, padre Diego de Torres, [1610], in *DHA* tomo XIX,p. 42

¹⁶⁵ ARSI-Generalia-Congregaciones Provinciales, volume 80, fjs 118

¹⁶⁶ Garavaglia, J. C. 1983, *Mercado interno* ... p. 50

II. CULTIVATING *YERBA MATE*: THE JESUIT MISSIONS AND *YERBA MATE* FIRST PLANTATIONS

1) THE MYSTERIOUS SECRET OF *YERBA MATE* GERMINATION

When Europeans arrived in the Parana-Paraguay region, there was no existing *yerba mate* market beyond the local region. But by encouraging large-scale plantation agriculture, Jesuits succeeded in turning *yerba mate* into a marketable commodity and in doing so made their South American Missions not only self-sufficient but profitable.¹⁶⁷

In the early seventeenth century the province of Paraguay allocated to the Jesuits when they arrived in South America, was ten times bigger than the current Paraguayan Republic. Jesuits established their Missions on a single circumscription (corresponding nowadays to Misiones and Corrientes in Argentina, Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil and Paraguay), depending on Asunción, with the aim to bring Indians under their rule and evangelize them. Located on the frontier of the Spanish and Portuguese territories, the Jesuits' province was a strategic buffer state which was under pressure from two sources. On the one hand, there was the problem of the Spanish *encomenderos* who controlled the Guaraní people in their Missions, since the Indians owed them a tribute, and on the other hand they were harassed by attacks by the bandeirantes paulistas who sought to appropriate the Jesuit territory. From 1632 to 1648, the Missions were regularly attacked, and the violence of those Portuguese raids drove the Jesuits to move some of their missions in the current Brazilian state of Matto Grosso. Yet in 1631: "12000 Indians, men and women, of all ages boarded on 700 canoes in order to go down the Parana River".¹⁶⁸ The Jesuits' departed from the region of Guayra where they had originally planned to settle, with no intention of ever returning, henceforth the Order concentrated their activities on another area, which proved more fertile :

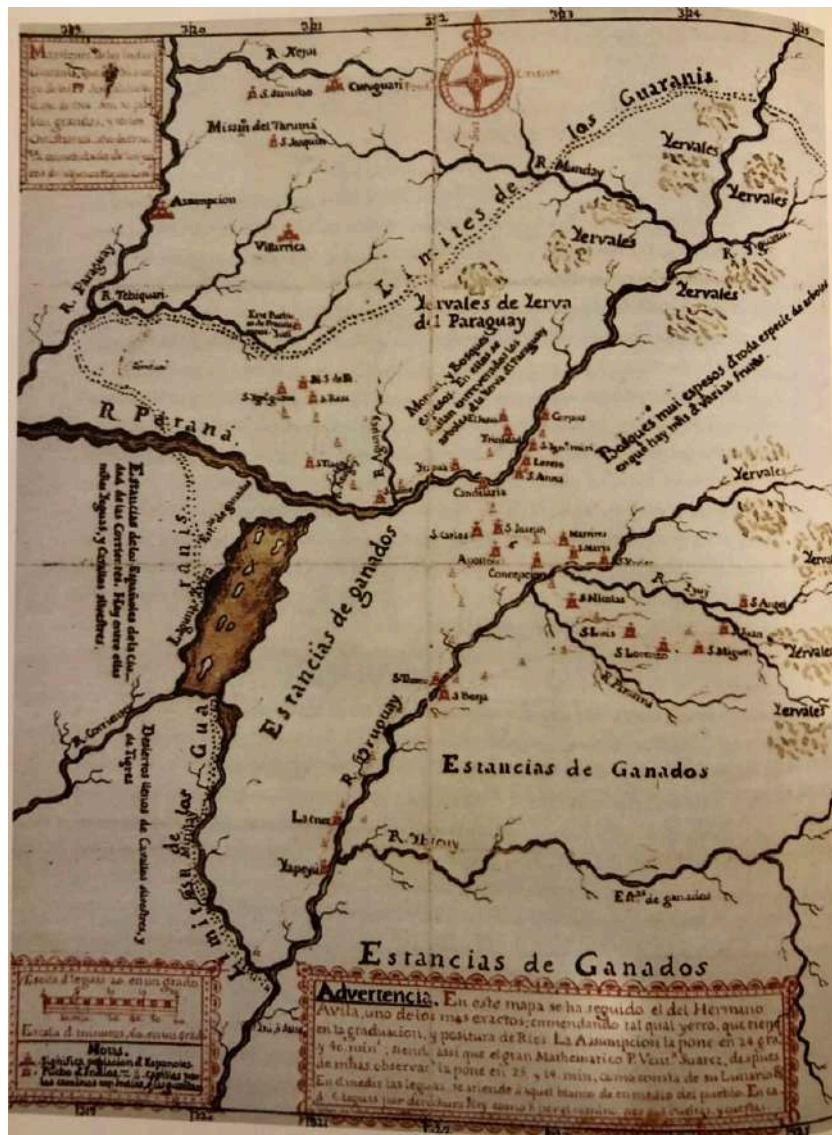
« The magnificent territory conquered by the Jesuits compensates the loss of the reductions in the Guairá region. The land was more fertile, better irrigated and the *climate* more clement, thanks to the influence of the Parana and Uruguay Rivers. In between those two rivers, in the Miriñay triangle, the reductions of La Cruz, Santo Tomé, Concepcion, Apóstoles, Mártires del Japón, Candelaria, Santa Ana, Corpus, San Ignacio Mini, San Javier, San Carlos, San José, y Santa Maria la Mayor were established in between 1620 and 1655. (...) on River Uruguay's left bank, seven reductions were constructed in between 1627 and 1706: San Borja, San Nicolas, San Luis Gonzaga, San Lorenzo, San Angel, San Miguel, San Juan. Close to

¹⁶⁷ Ross W. Jamieson, winter 2001 "The essence of commodification: caffeine dependencies in the early modern world". p. 276

¹⁶⁸Oberti, F. 1979, *Historia y folklore del mate...* p. 78

Tebicuary: Santa Fe, San Ignacio Guazu, Santa Rosa y Santiago, between 1692 and 1698. And North East of the River Paraguay, the reductions of Moxos y Chiquitos, San Joaquin, San Estanislao y Belén were built in 1746, 1749 and 1760. »¹⁶⁹

In the years 1650 to 1670, Jesuits who had successfully set up their missions in a more stable environment (Figure 1), started working on the project of developing *yerba mate* plantations.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, sheltering more than 90.000 Indians, the reductions, despite the fact they constituted an independent territory, were submitted to the tribute owed to *encomenderos*, who considered Indians as theirs.¹⁷¹



¹⁷² Figure 1: The Jesuit Missions in the 1760's

¹⁶⁹ Cortesão, J. *Manuscrito de la coleccion de angelis* (MCA)

¹⁷⁰ Caraman Philip, 1975. *The lost Paradise: the Jesuit republic in South America*, p. 126

¹⁷¹In 1768 the 32 Missions towns accounted 92.641 Guaranis. See *Varia Historiae, Provincia paraquariae*, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), p.8

¹⁷² Map of the Jesuit Missions made by José Sanchez Labrador (1717-1798) a few years before the Jesuit's expulsion (1767). Map extracted from Navajas, P. 2013. *Caá Pora ...*, p. 113.

Concerned about the exhausting- and sometimes deadly- expeditions the Guaraní were forced to make into the *yerbales*, Jesuits were keen to find a way to spare Indians and started investigating the possibility of cultivating the plant inside their missions:

«Indians from our reductions must travel 60 to 70 leagues to reach the forests of *yerba mate*, and it is the same for the reductions close to the Uruguay river. Those who travel by land with cows and carriages do not have too much work, but those who must travel on the rivers have to face awful working conditions. Indeed, they often have to go and search *yerba* in remote areas, walking alone into the forests without cows and carriages because the paths are too narrow. They process the *yerba* in the forest and then carry it back to the boats, walking 6 to 8 leagues with heavy loads containing up to 6 arrobas of *yerba* [68 kg]. Indians often lose themselves in the dense forest and they have to repeat this journey twice. Sometimes they carry 9 arrobas of *yerba* [100 kg] without any help. I still don't know how a single man can carry such a weight. Many Indians meet their death in the forest, exhausted by this inhuman work. And a lot of them fall ill. The situation led almost all the fathers to work to create plantations of *yerba* within our reductions in order to free Indians from those murderous expeditions. Some reductions have already managed to develop *yerbales* on the model of European olive groves. To do so, Jesuit fathers have replanted little trees they had taken from remote forests and succeeded in keeping them alive. They can pay the tribute with the *yerba* extracted from their plantations. Other reductions are still trying to implement durable plantations.»¹⁷³

Attempting to bring *yerba mate* to the Indians rather than being complicit with the inhuman treatment of a people they aimed to evangelize in a humane way, Jesuits carefully investigated the plant with a view to domesticating it. Jesuits built their missions on an ideal of reciprocity, teaching their faith while also valuing and incorporating aspects of the Guaraní culture.¹⁷⁴ Thought as places of mutual exchange, the thirty Misiones gathered 140 000 Indians in the 1730's and the syncretic architecture of the towns is a good example of the intertwined relationships of Guaraní and Christians, whose repertoires inspired and nourished one another.¹⁷⁵ The sacred leaf of *yerba mate* for instance, often adjoined the cross on the pediments, something that is still observable on San Ignacio Miní's frontispiece.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Cardiel, *Carta y relacion de las misiones de la provincia del paraguay*, ARSI, p. 41

¹⁷⁴ Jesuits showed a constant respect toward a culture they supported by editing, among other things, the first written translation of the oral Guaraní language.

¹⁷⁵ Sarreal, 2014. *The Guaraní and their Missions*, p. 82

¹⁷⁶ See Magadán, M. L. 2009. "Trabajos de conservación en un sitio de patrimonio mundial : la misión Jesuitica-Guaraní de San Ignacio Miní", 1er Congreso Iberoamericano y VIII Jornada "Técnicas de Restauración y Conservación del Patrimonio", La Plata, Buenos Aires.
https://digital.cic.gba.gob.ar/bitstream/handle/11746/1611/T3-10_PDFa.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Unable to understand the mystery of *yerba mate*'s germination, Jesuits initially proceeded by transplanting saplings from the wild *yerbales* to the missions. Indeed the seeds collected resulted sterile, and Jesuits could not understand how the plant reproduced in nature. This is why they decided to bring small trees and wait for their development. After numerous repeated attempts, the first plantations fructified, and *yerba mate* started proliferating in a controlled way. It is only later that Jesuits discovered the secret of the plant's germination. Thanks to a careful and systematic observation of the natural dispersion of the plant over an extended period, Jesuits established a correlation between the seeds' fertility and, surprisingly enough, the presence of toucans (Figure 2). Indeed, they came to the conclusion that *yerba mate* seed could germinate only after having been digested by this species of bird: toucans contributed to depriving *yerba mate*'s seeds from the thick gelatinous film that protected them and made them sterile. Processed by the toucan's stomach, the seed turned fertile when the bird rejected it. Recalling this encounter, Father Florián Pauke asserted that:

“Nobody could have imagined how precious this bird was for the production of *yerba mate*. This bird is the very sower of the *yerba* that Paraguayans, Peruvians, and Chileans consume.”¹⁷⁷

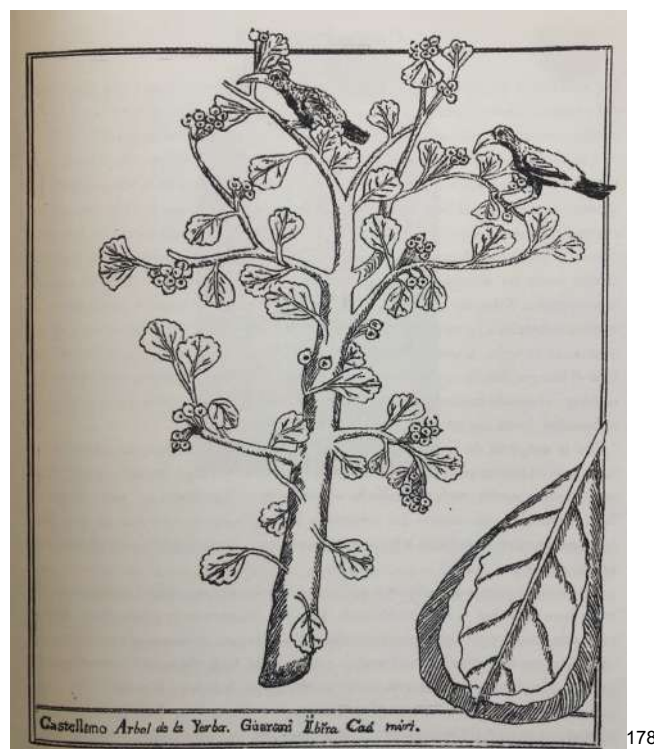


Figure 2: Toucans on a *yerba mate* tree, drawing by Pedro Montegrano, 1710

¹⁷⁷ Jesuit Florián Paucke (1719-1780), quoted by Navajas, 2013. *Caá Pora*, p. 94. Florián Paucke became member of the Society of Jesus in 1736 and spent most of his time drawing and painting the scenes from daily life in the region when living in the Rio de la Plata.

¹⁷⁸ Drawing by Pedro Montegrano published in “*Materia médica misionera*” in 1710, reproduced in Navajas, Pau, 2013. *Caá Pora...* p. 97

Jesuits therefore later replicated the process within their own plants' nurseries, describing it in great detail: "when washing *yerba*'s seed several times in clear water, one can separate it from its gelatinous layer which spreads in the water like soap"¹⁷⁹. In his *Breve Relación (...)* Father Jose Cardiel precisely depicted the process the Jesuits had to obey:

" It was hard work because the seed taken from the forest didn't germinate. The seed is like a pepper seed surrounded by a gelatinous layer. But after numerous attempts and further observations, we succeeded in having the seed germinate and we managed to successfully transplant it into the *yerbal*. Two to three years were necessary for the tree to develop and after 8 to 10 years we could start harvesting it. In that way we could create large plantations and Indians are not compelled to risk their lives in exhausting expeditions anymore".¹⁸⁰

The development of *yerba mate* plantations within their missions towns enabled the Jesuits to spare the Guaraní from most of the grueling journeys necessary to reach natural locations that were often several hundred kilometers away.¹⁸¹ The cultivation of *yerba mate* shows how Jesuits could appropriate environmental knowledge and reprocess it as a scientific discovery¹⁸². It also demonstrates "the multidirectional ebb and flow of cultural influences in colonial contexts".¹⁸³ Indeed:

"without Guaraní ecological knowledge of this sub-tropical forest environment, and the associated technologies, this achievement would likely not have occurred, as it required not only extensive investments of labor but also a deep understanding of the tree and its biome."¹⁸⁴

The construction of knowledge and practices that actively involved both the Guaraní and the Jesuit Fathers led to a new understanding of their environment and facilitated the displacement of *yerba* forests within their mission towns. Moreover, with the domestication of *yerba* as a plantation crop, the Jesuits also contributed to the creation of a commercial market for it. And as they successfully relocated the *yerbales* to their Missions, while *encomenderos* continued to exclusively pick it in its wild state, Jesuits could dedicate far more time to the improvement

¹⁷⁹ Padre Sanchez Labrador quoted by Navajas, 2013. *Caá Pora*.... p. 95.

¹⁸⁰ Padre Jose Cardiel, quoted in Navajas. 2013, *Caá Pora*... p. 95

¹⁸¹ Furlong, G 1962. *Misiones y sus pueblos guaraníes*.

¹⁸² Cañizares-Esguerra 2005. « Iberian Colonial Science. » and Massimi, M. 2018. « Erva-mate em debate: Federico Borromeu, jesuítas e médicos.»

¹⁸³ Liebmann, M. 2013, « Parsing hybridity : Archeological of Amalgamation in seventeenth-century New Mexico". p. 31

¹⁸⁴ Nimmo, Evelyne R., and João Francisco Miró Medeiros Nogueira. 2019 "Creating hybrid scientific knowledge and practice: the Jesuit and Guaraní cultivation of *yerba mate*". *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, vol. 44, No. 3, p. 349

of the plant's quality, leading to them establishing a monopoly over the production and commercialization of the finest quality of *yerba mate*, called *Caá mini*.

2) TRADING YERBA MATE: THE JESUIT'S MONOPOLY OVER CAÁ MINI

The development of *yerba mate*'s cultivation using a more systematic scientific approach, allowed the Jesuits to both spare the Guaraní from the dangerous journeys they had to undertake to wild *yerbales*, and conduct extensive research on *yerba mate*'s production process. Two different types of *yerba* started to compete in the market, the first, produced by *encomenderos*, being "*yerba de palo*", and the second, prepared in the compound of the Missions, being *Caá Mini*. After cutting the *Caá*'s leaves, the Jesuits exposed them the following day to a very high temperature for a short time, a process called *sapecado*, which prevented the plant from deteriorating and oxidizing. The second step, known as *fogueado*, consisted of another drying stage during which the leaves were exposed to hot air for several hours. Finally, they ground the leaves in order to almost turn them into a powder, which they could then infuse. Containing large amounts of dried twigs and stems, the cheaper "*yerba de palos*" traded by *encomenderos* was ground on the bare earth while the *Caá mini*, signifying "dainty herb" in Guaraní, was ground in wooden mortars or in leather-lined holes and was free of dirt stems.¹⁸⁵ Thus, "*yerba de palo*" differed from *Caá Mini* in that it was less homogenous, and therefore, less pure:

"*Yerba mate*'s leaves and thin branches must be roasted soon after being cut. After being exposed to fire and smoke, it is ground and Indians are careful to keep the *yerba* clean, by avoiding any addition of earth. The *yerba* produced by Spaniards is inferior from the one produced by our Indians: they don't have high standards of cleanness in the production process and rigour is not very commonly used, there is always earth in their *yerba*. The clean *yerba* produced by Indians is called *Caa Mini* while the one produced by Spaniards is called *yerba de palo*. Our Indians only produce *Caa Mini*, and in 3 or 4 reductions close to the Paraguay river, they also make *yerba de palo* in order to trade it to Spaniards in exchange for cotton. An arroba of *Caa Mini* is sold 4 pesos in cities, and if it is really well made, it could even be sold for 6 pesos, in Chile for 8 to 10 pesos and in Lima up to 20. On the contrary, an arroba of *yerba de palo* is generally sold for 2 pesos, in Chile for 4 pesos and in Lima for 6 pesos. But *yerba de palo* quickly deteriorates. »¹⁸⁶

Spaniards who never had the patience to develop plantations, used to collect *yerba mate* from the forest and to quickly process it, preferring quantity to quality. Jesuits, on the other hand who invested care and meticulous attention in developing the elaboration of a more profitable

¹⁸⁵ Dobrizhoffer, (1822) *An Account of the Abipones*, 1, p. 101,108; Popescu, 1952. *El Sistema económico en las misiones jesuíticas*, p. 151; Cardiel, 1747. *Carta y relación...*, p. 147.

¹⁸⁶ Cardiel, 1747. p. 41

yerba. The most successful producers of *Caá Mini* were the Missions located on the banks of the Parana River, with the Loreto area producing the best quality *yerba*. The superiority of the Jesuits' method were reflected in the price gap between the *yerba de palo* and the *Caá mini*: the *yerba* produced by Jesuits was sold for twice the price of the *palo* one.¹⁸⁷

It is worth noting here that the keen interest and care the Jesuits devoted to the cultivation and marketisation of *yerba* was accompanied by the production of a new discourse around the plant which they had long distained. As Jesuits could not based their self-sufficiency on a "diabolical" herb, they invented new legends to legitimize their enterprise. Through the Christianization of the Guaraní myth, Jesuits asserted that *Caá* was nothing but a sacred gift offered to mankind by Saint Thomas.¹⁸⁸ Thus, paradoxically, Jesuits started to defend the trade of *yerba mate* at the very moment in which the Order sought to demonize it. In the end business imperatives trumped moral questions: in 1664, the Audience of Buenos Aires passed a law enabling the Jesuits to legally trade *yerba mate*, something that officially sealed the Jesuit's recognition and coopting of a plant they recognized to be the most profitable crop available.

Jesuits not only rationalized *yerba mate*'s production but also developed a structural network to guarantee its efficient distribution across the whole empire. Since it was necessary to ensure efficient transportation towards the areas where *mate* was consumed, Jesuits developed numerous routes, the most important remaining the *Camino real de los yerbales*. A land route between Itapua (the Paraguayan side of the city nowadays called Posadas) and San Borja, the *Camino Real de los yerbales* crossed the Mesopotamia region to connect the two main fluvial axes of communication: the Parana and Uruguay Rivers. Shipped down to the Parana-Paraguay system, *yerba* then continued its journey to either Santa Fe, where it was hauled overland to Chile, Upper Peru and Lima, or was transported by river to markets in Buenos Aires and Montevideo.¹⁸⁹ The growing power of Jesuits, who not only commercialized the best quality *yerba* but also controlled its transportation, aroused jealousy and harsh reactions from local *encomenderos* and traders, who started spreading rumours. Depicting the wealth of the Missions as a dangerous threat to the Crown, they basically managed to create deep suspicion

¹⁸⁷ López Adalberto, 1974. "The economics of yerba mate in seventeenth-century South America", *Agricultural history*, vol 48. No. 4, p. 501

¹⁸⁸ See Lurán del Campo. 1942. *Cancionero del mate*. p. 13 and 15 for the appropriation of the legend and the shift from Tupa or Pay Zumé, to Santo Tomé.

¹⁸⁹ Mary-Elizabeth Reeve, 1994. "Regional Interaction in the Western Amazon: The Early Colonial Encounter and the Jesuit Years: 1538-1767," *Ethnohistory* XLI; p. 106-138; Caraman, 1975. *Lost Paradise*, p. 126; Thomas Whigham, 1991 *The Politics of River Trade: Tradition and Development in the Upper Plata, 1780-1870* pp. 11, 110; Jonathan C. Brown, 1979. *A Socioeconomic History of Argentina, 1776-1860*, p. 14- 15.

of the Order which, along with the decline of the Jesuit reputation in Europe, led to its expulsion from South America in 1768.

3) THE JESUIT'S EXPULSION AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF *YERBA MATE'S* PLANTATIONS

Settlers and Jesuits did not compete for the extraction of *yerba mate* - they had each a delimited territory, the settlers harvesting their *yerba* from the region located to the north of the Tebicuary River while the Jesuits cultivated it in between the Tebicuary and the Uruguay river- but rather competed for the *yerba* market. And although Jesuits could only export a limited amount of *yerba* - by virtue of a law passed in 1664 which allowed them to sell no more than 12,000 arrobas of *yerba* a year- "settlers vehemently opposed the Jesuits' commercial activities" and an acrimonious dispute arose in the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁹⁰ Arguing that Jesuits were exploiting Indians in their Missions, settlers spread the idea that Jesuits were enriching themselves at such a rate that they would soon be more powerful than the Crown itself. The active role Jesuits later played during the Guaraní war, was used to further discredit them. Indeed, as a result of the Treaty of Madrid sealed in 1750 between Spain and Portugal, seven missions located on the West bank of the River Uruguay which contained more than 30 000 people, suddenly passed into the hands of Portugal. Spain having conceded those territories to its neighbor, the seven missions were from a day to the next denied their autonomy, and Portuguese repeatedly attacked them with the aim of appropriating their Guaraní work force. The joint armed response of Guaraní and Jesuits who took up arms to defend their Missions, backfired on them since the Order's detractors presented the Jesuit's armed struggle as further evidence of their abusive power.¹⁹¹

As a consequence of the Guaraní war, Jesuits were expelled from Brazil in 1759. In 1767, a law was promulgated to evict them from the region of La Plata and passed a year later. In 1768, the 400 Jesuits who were living in the region, including the 80 ones leaders of the Missions, left without resistance.¹⁹² As a direct consequence of their expulsion, the plantations created by the Jesuits soon disappeared. Indeed, settlers severely over exploited the hitherto rationalized plantations to the point of exhausting them. The Jesuits having left with their

¹⁹⁰ Lopez Adalberto, 1974. "*The economics of yerba mate ...*", p. 493

¹⁹¹ Garavaglia, J.C., 1983, *Mercado interno...*, p. 151

¹⁹² *Ibid* p. 110

secret, the plantations' period ended with the fall of the Missions. As for the Guaraní who had been part of the reductions, they became slaves again:

“After the expulsion of the Jesuits, the reductions that were under their jurisdiction came to be administrated by representants of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe. A general administration was created to rule the whole region of the missions. The reductions were converted into a real inferno in which merchants, bureaucrats and farmers were to become mere leeches sucking the surplus produced by Indians.”¹⁹³

According to Juan Carlos Garavaglia, after the Jesuits' expulsion, an average of 30 000 arrobas (330 000 kg) of *yerba mate* were extracted from the former Missions each year. The production therefore basically tripled, since until then Jesuits were required to limit their production to 12 000 arrobas per year.¹⁹⁴ This intensive extraction both decimated indigenous workers and their *yerbales*. Destroying the very source of the Jesuits' prestige, settlers mostly wasted the opportunity to learn from their experience. They ruined a century of hard work in a few years, turned what had been one of the richest parts of the region into a desolate wasteland. Yields from *yerba mate*'s plantations remained at low until the beginning of the 20th century and *Caá Mini*, vanished from the market and was never to return.

III. YERBA MATE: THE MAIN PILLAR OF THE SPANISH COLONIAL ECONOMY

1) YERBA MATE'S WEIGHT IN THE INTERNAL MARKET

In order to establish the economic importance of *yerba mate* within the domestic market's complex networks, one should analyze the evolution of its commercialized volume during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I will base my analysis on the extensively researched study by Juan Carlos Garavaglia, *Mercado interno y economía colonial*. According to the author, the first recorded mention of Spanish trading *yerba mate* is dated 1567. However, the document attests of the subaltern position of *yerba* in the final decades of the sixteenth century, which was at least partly due to the archaic way it was transported. Indeed, *yerba* was, at that time, still packed in baskets, which did not allow a good conservation of the plant, unlike the later leather wrap which better protected the leaves.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, *yerba* trade was still far less

¹⁹³ Ibid p. 44

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 84. Garavaglia lists here data extracted from the books of La Administración General de los pueblos de Misiones, en AGN, sala IX, legajos: 17-5-1; 17-6-6; 17-5-3; 18-4-5; 17-6-4; 17-7-1; 17-7-3; 17-5-2. The production evolved as followed: 1772-73: 57.363 arrobas; 1774-75: 54.302 arrobas; 1776-77: 56.984 arrobas; 1778-79: 58.696 arrobas; 1780-81: 56.859 arrobas; 1782-83: 72.562 arrobas.

¹⁹⁵ See in ANA-Nueva Encuadernación 381, el registro de salidas para los años 1591/1593

important than that of the two other products wine and sugar.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless by the end of the 1660s *yerba* exports overtook wine exports and when Buenos Aires sought to finance a fort to protect itself, *yerba* was the most important taxable product of the region covering Tucuman, Paraguaya and the Rio de la Plata.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, by the end of the seventeenth century, *yerba mate* was taxed far more heavily than goods produced in other parts of the Spanish American colonial world, from the point of production to the point of consumption in Buenos Aires, Santa Fé and other cities.¹⁹⁸

If in the 1640s *yerba* was still a subaltern product (2.500 arrobas [28.750 kg] traded per year in average), its production quickly began to grow exponentially: the total amount of *yerba mate* transported from Asunción to Santa Fe from 1667 to 1674 exceeded 22.000 arrobas [253.000 kg] per year on average. In less than thirty years, *yerba mate* flooded the colonial market, annual trade rocking from 2.500 to 25.000 arrobas.¹⁹⁹ In 1670, *yerba mate* became the product which connected the Rio de la plata region to the Peruvian economy, and in the first decades of the eighteenth century, its production was close to 55.000 arrobas [632.000 kg] per year. From 1750 to 1770, when trade to Peru was rising particularly, *yerba's* available volume exceeded 100.000 arrobas [1.150.000 kg] for the first time. In the 1780s, annual production kept increasing to nearly 200.000 arrobas [2.300.000 kg]. At that time, *yerba mate* was recognized as the “as the most important product of Buenos Aires’ market”²⁰⁰. Indeed its crucial importance was all evidenced by the fact that *yerba* was even used as a currency. In the course of the eighteenth century, *yerba mate*, along with other products such as tobacco, was exchanged like a currency measured by an imaginary monetary unit, colloquially called the “peso hueco” (the empty peso), and according to Oberti, in the mid-eighteenth century, an arroba of *yerba mate* was equivalent to two “pesos huecos”²⁰¹. Nevertheless, this “empty” and “unreliable” money had many detractors:

« Empty pesos are, in substance, nothing! Paraguayans do empty pesos with abstract metals, they lean on the philosopher’s stone of *yerba mate* from which they make the drinkable gold, which being a *mate* for all, is a death for not a few who, longing for the foundation of this currency in the *yerba mate*, find themselves more melted and hollow than their earnings”.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ Data concerning the year 1608 in de Aguirre, J. F, « *Diario...* », loc. cit. tomo XIX, no. 47_48, p. 355 ; References for the years 1616/1617 in AGI-Charcas, 138 (see in garav)

¹⁹⁷ See Martinez de Salazar’s carta [1674], in AGI-Charcas, 279

¹⁹⁸ Cardozo, E. *El Paraguay colonial*, op. cit. p. 97

¹⁹⁹ And one needs to be aware of the fact that those records did not fully account the *yerba* sent from the Jesuit Missions

²⁰⁰ Garavaglia, 1983. p. 130

²⁰¹ Oberti, F. 1979, *Historia y folklore del mate*, p. 130

²⁰² Manuel Antonio Torres, 1757, Archivo de Indias, 123-2-14, Sevilla.

Yerba mate – which became known as “green gold”- was the main source of Buenos Aires wealth and power. As well as structuring the internal market it was used as an “organic” currency for bartering and constituted a major pillar of the colonial economy. And now that we have discussed its economic importance, it is necessary to investigate its role within the exchanges and commercial balance of the imperial system.

2) YERBA'S ROLE IN THE CRISS-CROSSING EXCHANGES WEFTING THE COLONIAL MARKET

Since it is not possible to clearly map the network of *yerba's* itineraries accross all the regional markets of Peru and the Plata spaces, I shall first trace the main connecting axes for *yerba* transportation, and then analyze its presence in several key economic poles. Since the colonial system was articulated around a few centers linked together by a reticular network, I will approach *yerba's* place within the interactions between those central cities.

Facing the growing demand for *yerba mate* in the Rio de la Plata, Tucumán, Chile, Upper and Lower Peru, merchants from these provinces traveled directly to Paraguay, the heart of *yerba* production, to buy the plant's leaves. In the eighteenth century, those *forasteros* or outsiders had come to control a significant proportion of the Paraguayan export-import trade.²⁰³ In Asunción and Villa Rica, merchants would exchange a variety of commodities they brought from all over Spanish South America for the *yerba* produced by Paraguayan *yerbateros*. *Yerba mate* was then exported from the Province by boats or carts²⁰⁴:

“The boats carried the commodity to Corrientes, Santa Fé, and Buenos Aires by way of the Paraguay, Tebicuary and Paraná rivers. The carts traveled along the *camino real*, the road which led from Asunción to Corrientes and from Corrientes to the small settlement of Las Bajadas where the crossing of the Paraná was made. On the western side of the river, the road ran southwards to Santa Fé. From Santa Fé, one road led to Buenos Aires, another to Córdoba and Tucuman”.²⁰⁵

The *yerba* which was destined to the provinces of Tucumán, Chile, Upper and Lower Peru was unloaded in Santa Fé and continued by land, pulled by oxen as far as the city of Córdoba.²⁰⁶ From Córdoba, many of these carts continued their journey southwest until they reached Mendoza. There, the *yerba* was transferred onto the backs of mules and carried across the

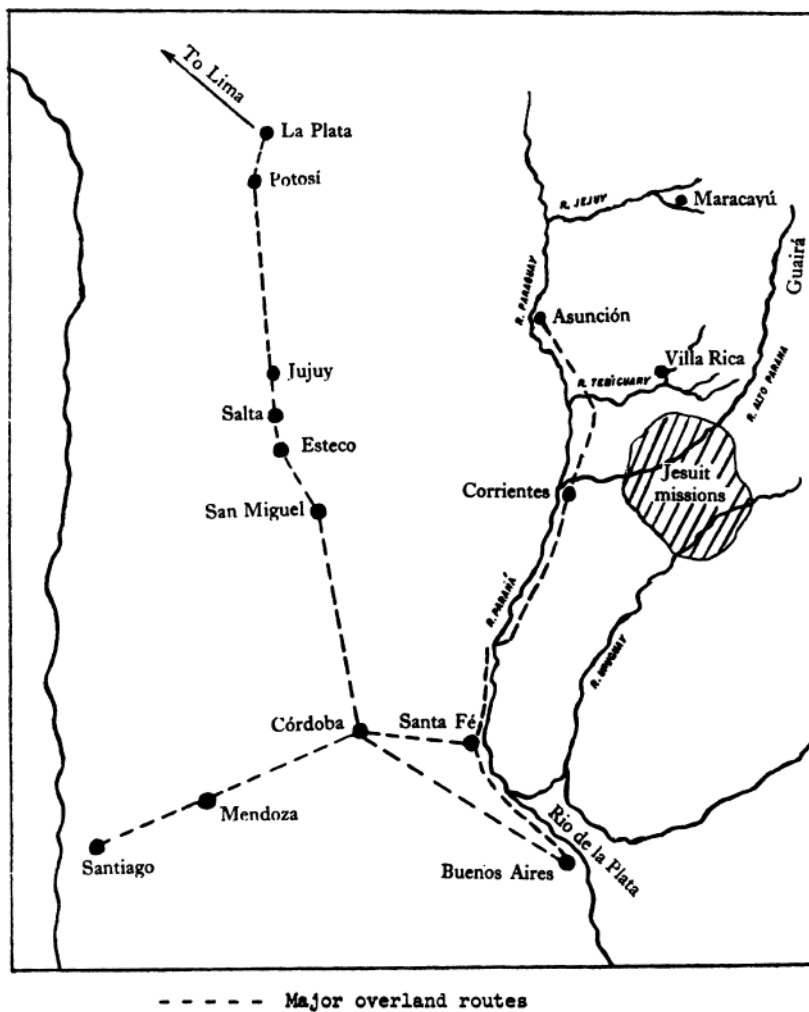
²⁰³ Aguirre, “Diario...”, p. 394

²⁰⁴ In the seventeenth and eighteen centuries, Asunción was the main shipbuilding center of Spanish South America.

²⁰⁵ Lopez, A. 1974, “The economics of *yerba mate*...” p. 502

²⁰⁶ Mörner, « Panorama », p. 204. Accordinf to Oberti the average *carreta* carried close to 150 arrobas of *yerba mate* (See *Historia y Folklore del mate* p. 69)

Andes to Santiago and other Chilean cities.²⁰⁷ Regarding the *yerba* destined to the Upper and Lower Peru markets, it followed the northern road connecting Córdoba to Tucumán. As far as Jujuy, the landscape was flat enough to enable the *yerba* to be transported without difficulty but before the journey could continue it had to be transferred on mules to take it over the mountains to Potosí, Cuzco, Lima and other cities in Lower Peru.²⁰⁸ The map below (Figure 3) summarizes the main axes of *yerba mate*'s circulation.



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Figure 3: The routes of *yerba mate*'s traffic

²⁰⁷ In his *Diario*, (Diario, 2 : pt. 2, p. 286) Aguirre recalled that at the end of the eighteenth century, every year more than 10.000 mules were involved in the transportation of *yerba mate* from Mendoza to Chile.

²⁰⁸ Acarette, *Relación de un viaje al Rio de La Plata y de alli por tierra al Peru*, p. 56-87, and Boxer, *Salvador de Sá*, p. 98-101

²⁰⁹ Map taken from López, A. 1974, "The economics of *yerba mate*..." p. 503

Having mapped *yerba mate*'s routes, it is now time to focus on some of the main economic poles of the colonial market in order to establish the place *yerba mate* occupied within the exchanges framing the internal market. To begin with, records show that from 1703 to 1718, Buenos Aires attracted 20% of the total volume of *yerba* coming from Asunción and the city quickly adapted to put itself in a position to play a central role in the distribution of *yerba mate*. In 1768, more than 60% of the *yerba* transiting from Asunción went through by Buenos Aires which became an unavoidable stopping off point in *yerba*'s transit: *yerba*'s arrobas had to first pass through Buenos Aires before continuing their itinerary towards other cities.²¹⁰ As the most important economic centre of a wide hinterland, Buenos Aires sought to impose its monopoly, especially in the case of *yerba mate* which, at the end of the eighteenth century, constituted the most profitable product of the region. In the years 1770-1790's Buenos Aires had an income of 250.000 pesos per year from the commerce of *yerba mate*, which laid the foundation of the city's wealth. By comparison, the *aguardiente sanjuanino*, Buenos Aires' second most profitable product over the same period, earned the city an average of 40 000 pesos per year.

From 1779 to 1784 almost 50% of the *yerba* transiting through Buenos Aires was sent to Lima via Chile. Capital of the Peruvian vice-royalty, Lima was one of the main centers for *mate* consumption, as testified by a visitor who noticed that: "people are not really keen of chocolate here, they prefer to drink *mate*, at least twice a day, in a unique ostentatious way".²¹¹ In addition to its *mateador status*, Lima was also a strategic site in which *yerba* could stop before being redistributed towards the harbors of Panama, Guayaquil and Arica which absorbed 90% of the *yerba mate* getting out of Lima at that time.²¹² Regarding the place of *yerba* in Potosí and Upper Peru, it is attested that in 1677, 20.000 arrobas of *yerba mate* were sent to Upper Peru from the city of Santiago del Estero,²¹³ and it was commonly known that the plant played a fundamental role in the mines. Indeed, Acarette along with many other authors, asserted that, complementing the coca leaf, *yerba mate* was a key stimulant which gave the miners energy during their exhausting labor:²¹⁴

« The sulfurous vapors prevent miners from easily breathing, and to face such a situation, they did not find a better remedy than *yerba mate*. Minors

²¹⁰ Garavaglia, J. C., 1983. *Mercado interno...* p. 89

²¹¹ Juan, J. y Ullóa, A. de, *Relación histórica del viaje a la América Meridional*, tomo III, p. 138

²¹² Moreyra y Paz Soldán, M. 1943. « El comercio de exportación en el Pacífico a principios del siglo XVIII ».

²¹³ Report made in Santiago del Estero on the 30/11/1677 in AGI-Charcas 283

²¹⁴ Acarette, [1657] *Relación de un viaje ...* p. 34-35 and 77 ; Coreal, F. *Voyages...*, pp. 329-330 ; la carta del obispo de la Plata [1690] en AGI-Charcas 282 ; Frezier, *Relation du voyage de la mer du sud aux côtes du Chili et du Pérou, fait pendant les années 1712, 1713 et 1714* p. 150

prepare large amount of the infusion in order to refresh and hydrate themselves when getting out of the mines for eating or sleeping.”²¹⁵

Mate, which reached Lima’s reception rooms and the mines of Potosi, was associated with many functions in the realm of its consumption. Concerning its role as a key product of the colonial economy, *yerba mate* provided the empire with an unexpected source of wealth. Originally confined to the wild forests of the Alto Paraná, *yerba mate*, picked in the wild by Settlers or domesticated by Jesuits, became the “green gold” on which the Spanish empire founded its economy. The taxes imposed on the production and commercialization of the plant, turned *yerba mate* into the most profitable product in the colonial marketplace. And the fact that the economic potential of *yerba mate* appeared at a time in which its consumption had already become widespread, explains how the colonial market could simply coopt the plant’s benefits without having to create a demand for it.

²¹⁵ Acarette, [1657]. *Relación...* p. 166

CHAPTER 4

YERBA MATE SITE: A GEOPOLITICAL HOTSPOT

- I. THE EX-JESUIT REDUCTION'S SITE AT THE TIME OF INDEPENDENCE: A COVETED FRONTIER
 - 1) MISIONES: A STRATEGIC CORRIDOR FOR THE FEDERALISTS DURING THE ARGENTINIAN CIVIL WAR

The expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish colonies in 1767 ended the cultivation of *yerba mate* on the Missions' plantations. This caused huge changes in the production of *yerba mate*, as the Missions were transferred into the hands of royal and private individuals who, once having overexploited the plantations, came to essentially harvest *yerba* from Paraguayan wild *yerbales*.²¹⁶ *Yerba mate* thus provides us with an example of a caffeine beverage crop with a unique historical trajectory: "developed as a plantation crop by the Jesuits to supply a South American market, it reverted to a system of commercial harvesting of wild plants after the Jesuit expulsion".²¹⁷ This shift was responsible for the impoverishment and decline of Misiones which went from being one of the wealthiest to one of the most instable parts of the empire. Ruined and plundered, the site of the Missions became a no man's land under short-lived unstable administrations, sometimes working for the Portuguese, sometimes for the Spanish Crown, sometimes linked to Buenos Aires, sometimes to Asunción.²¹⁸ This anarchic management was accompanied by the displacement of the Guaranís who went into exile in Brazil in order to escape the *encomenderos* who massively exploited them, and treated them as slaves as soon as the Jesuits left.

The misdeeds of Misiones' centralized administration led the Crown to gather the thirty "pueblos" under an independent military government, directed by Bernardo de Velasco, in 1803:

«The creation of the political and military government of Misiones' thirty pueblos aimed to emancipate them from both Buenos Aires and Paraguay

²¹⁶ Reeve E. 1993 "Regional Interaction in the Western Amazon: the early colonial encounter and the Jesuit years: 1538-1767" *Ethnohistory* Vol 41, n. 1., p. 128; John Hemming, 1987. *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians*, pp. 108-110. From 1655 to 1680 exports of both privately harvested wild *yerba mate*, and crops from the Jesuit plantations, grew from 30 to 680 tons annually. Export of both crops continued at around 600 tons per year until the Jesuit expulsion from South America in 1767 (Whigham, *Politics of River Trade*, pp. 11, 16, 111-112; Caraman, *Lost Paradise*, p. 129).

²¹⁷ Ross, W.Jamieson, winter 2001, "The essence of commodification: caffeine dependencies in the early modern world", p. 277-278

²¹⁸ Don Diego de Alvear, 1886. *Relacion geografica e historica de la provincia de Misiones*.

which had until then controlled them. These power struggles made it difficult to administer the region ».²¹⁹

This situation did not last long, as Paraguay claimed control on numerous pueblos soon after the Revolution of May 1810. Desiring to control the *mate* market after the expulsion of the Jesuit, Asunción had tried to increase the prices of *yerba mate*'s exportations at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, their efforts were foiled by Buenos Aires which had already previously detached Santa Fe from its role of specific harbor. This interference raised suspicions in the whole Alta Plata, and motivated numerous efforts aiming to thwart the rules Buenos Aires imposed on the market. When the River Uruguay started to be perceived as an axis that could allow traffic independent of Buenos Aires, Misiones was quickly regarded as a strategic site. Having been repeatedly divided in between various powers and structures for more than 30 years, Misiones became an essential corridor, especially at a time of independence, when it constituted a very frontier of the new emerging nations. If Misiones represented the potting soil of the "green gold" in the eighteenth century, it came to become, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a grey zone nourishing alternative routes and ideals.

Following the Napoleonic invasion of the Spanish peninsular in 1808 and the abdication of Fernando VII, there was a power vacuum which affected both Spain and Spanish America. This situation led to the formation of "juntas", ruling groups which took control of different regions, and which refused to recognize the authority of Napoleon. In 1810, as a direct consequence of the failure of the Spanish resistance in Europe, a junta was duly formed within a few days in Buenos Aires, under the leadership of Manuel Belgrano, Juan José Castelli and Mariano Moreno. This historical process was later given the name of the May 1810 Revolution. According to Alfredo Félix Blanco:

"One of the main reasons for drawing up the Royal Decree of August 1, 1776 which created the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata was Spain's need to strengthen its control over these colonies. However, without intending to, it would ultimately contribute to creating the conditions which, together with other external factors, would end Spanish control of the colony."²²⁰

Indeed, the measures which accompanied the creation of the new viceroyalty not only freed Buenos Aires from the tutelage of Alto Peru, but also removed the obstacles that prevented its commercial expansion. One year after the birth of the viceroyalty, the Buenos Aires port was

²¹⁹ AGNA, 1803, p. Sala IX-12-6-4. Exp 250. Fos 1/2

²²⁰ Blanco, Alfredo Félix. 2015. « Some considerations on the influence of economic liberalism in the May Revolution of 1810 in Buenos Aires, Argentina ». p. 36

opened, and this decision affected the interests of the traders from Peru and Chile and benefited the local and newly formed commercial bourgeoisie. In that context, the growing influence of liberal ideas, both in the economic and political fields, played a decisive role in the revolutionary events. Inspired by multiple causes - the French revolution, the independence of the United States, the economical changes in Europe, Napoleon's invasion of Spain were all determinant – the leaders of the May Revolution essentially worked to spread their ideals on liberalism. Along with the crisis of the colonial economy and the gradual emergence of the institutions of modern capitalism, Belgrano, Moreno, and Castelli's opinions influenced and oriented the revolution and its aftermath.²²¹ The fact that the government of the Primera Junta, established in Buenos Aires- cradle of the revolution- on May 25, only included representatives from the city, shows that the liberal program went hand in hand with Buenos Aires' supremacy. If the newly formed government invited other cities of the Viceroyalty to send delegates to join them, it nonetheless imposed itself at the decision-maker of the emerging nation. This resulted in the outbreak of war between the regions that recognized Buenos Aires's power and centrality and those that did not.

Buenos Aires, geographically and culturally distant from the rest of Argentina, was destined "by its privileged location between the rich pampas and the ocean trade routes" to exercise a control over the interior provinces.²²² However, numerous *caudillos*²²³, animated by a strong sense of regionalism, resisted this interference. *Caudillismo*, as a concept, was first used in the former Spanish colonies of Latin America to describe a system of socio-political domination based on the leadership of a strongman, who challenged the authority of the government after 1810. It also referred to the political regimes established by such leaders who, as a consequence of the militarization of politics and society that persisted after the battles for independence were, above all, military men. Thus, where government by the intellectual and urban elite failed, the common people preferred a system in which allegiance was given to a local *caudillo* they felt closer to:

"Even after separating from Spain, the Spanish American elite would remain more attuned to the latest fads from Europe than to the popular culture that was uniquely theirs, and regional distinctiveness that could have formed the basis for national identity. (...) The political reflection of localism was government by a charismatic individual, or *caudillo*, rather than an institution. In a choice between abstract theories of government and the *caudillo*, the masses felt more comfortable with their *caudillos*, who, however primitive

²²¹ Belgrano, Manuel. [1810] 1954. *Escritos económicos*..

²²² Shumway N, 1991, *The invention of Argentina*, preface.

²²³ Caudillo : Spanish term which designates a man who, head of irregular forces, was a political or military leader.

and ruthless their methods, were more sensitive to the fears and desires of the rural masses than the centralist elite".²²⁴

Although many *caudillos* limited their influence zone to a restricted area, others actively engaged in an open war against Buenos Aires, the most notorious detractor of centralism remaining José Gervasio Artigas. Leader of a federalist alliance based in the nearby Banda Oriental, modern Uruguay, Artigas fought the former viceregal capital to the point that Argentina, nearly seven years after the May revolution, found itself slipping into civil war.²²⁵ Artigas's conflict with the government in Buenos Aires exploded in 1813 when he sought to impose conditions on his recognition of the new Constituent Assembly. Claiming his independent authority as "*Jefe de los Orientales*" (leader of the people of the Banda Oriental), Artigas wished to formalise his autonomy within the "Instructions" written by a provincial congress in the Banda oriental in April 1813. This document called for the creation of a confederation of equal provinces in which power would be shared between regional representatives rather than centralized in Buenos Aires.²²⁶ According to Sujay Rao:

"As it emerged in 1813, federalism was a radical movement seeking not only to create sovereign provincial government but also to curtail drastically the power wielded by Buenos Aires. Each province would control its own internal affairs. More importantly, a government dominated by the provinces and residing outside Buenos Aires would administer national affairs".²²⁷

In 1814, Artigas created the "*Liga de los pueblos libres*"²²⁸, showing his influence over the provinces of Córdoba, Corrientes, Entre Ríos, Misiones, Santa Fe and on the Banda Oriental. In 1815, he captured the port of Montevideo and sought to establish an alliance with Paraguay

²²⁴ Shumway N, 1991. *The invention of Argentina*, chapter 1.

²²⁵ See Donghi, Halperin Tulio, 1994. *Revolución y Guerra: Formación de una elite dirigente en la argentina criolla* ; Lynch, J. 1981. *Argentine dictator: Juan Manuel de Rosas, 1829-1852*. A second camp argue that provincial politicians embraced federalism as part of a struggle against Buenos Aires for a more equitable distribution of power. This view is rooted in provincial histories of the nineteenth century. On the littoral, see: Ramón J. Lassaga, 1881. *Historia de López* ; Manuel M. Cervera, 1979-1982 *Historia de la ciudad y provincia de Santa Fe, 1573-1853* ; José Carlos Chiaramonte. July-September 1986 « Legalidad constitucional o caudillismo : El problema del orden social en el surgimiento de los estados autonomos del litoral argentino en la primera mitad del siglo XIX », *Desarrollo económico*, 26 : 102. A third camp, incorporating elements of the other two, stresses the popular roots of federalism. Ricardo Salvatore, "The Breakdown of social discipline in the Banda Oriental and the Littoral, 1790-1820" in Mark D. Szuchman and Jonathan C. Brown (ed.). 1994. *Revolution and Restoration: The rearrangement of Power in Argentina, 1776-1860*.

²²⁶ The "Instructions" is fully transcribed in Chiaramonte, *Ciudades, provincias, estados*, pp. 380-2

²²⁷ Rao, Sujay. 2008. « Arbiters of change : provincial elite and the origins of federalism in Argentina's Littoral, 1814-1820", *The Americas*, vol. 64. No. 4, p. 515

²²⁸ "The league of Free people" also known as the Federal league (gathering the territories of present-day Uruguay, the Argentine provinces of Entre Ríos, Santa Fe, Córdoba, Misiones and Corrientes as well as the state of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil) proclaimed its independence from the Spanish Crown in 1815 and confronted the centralist governments as well as the interests of the cultural and economic elite of Buenos Aires and Montevideo in what later fomented a civil war.

which had already claimed its independence from Buenos Aires in 1811. Having succeeded in rallying the Guaraní people to its cause by nominating Andres Guacurari as the commandant of Misiones, Artigas gained control of a strategic corridor connecting Paraguay to Montevideo. Indeed, mastering both the land route previously known as the *Camino real de los yerbales*, and the fluvial one following the River Uruguay to the port of Montevideo, Artigas was on the verge of breaking Buenos Aires's monopoly by creating an alternative commercial route, passing through *yerbales*-growing territory. Faced with Artigas's rising opposition, Buenos Aires united with the Portuguese in order to prevent him from developing an alternative route. Knowing that this enterprise would fail if Artigas lost control of Montevideo, a crucial gateway to the Atlantic Ocean, which enabled him to undermine the capital's hegemony, Buenos Aires fought to deprive the federalist leader from his control over the Uruguayan port. In January 1817, the Portuguese army, led by Federico Lecor, defeated Artigas in Montevideo. The commandant of the "*liga de los pueblos libres*" was then attacked by both the Spanish and Portuguese forces and in 1820, lacking resources and men, Artigas was forced to give up and left for exile in Paraguay. The strategic corridor constituted by Misiones was deserted by the Guaraní who, as after the Jesuits' departure, found refuge in Brazil. However, this abandoned site remained under the close surveillance of José Gaspar Rodriguez de Francia, the dictator of Paraguay, who wanted this land to remain unexploited so as to ensure that his country would keep its monopoly on the production of *yerba mate*.

2) THE PARAGUAYAN ISOLATIONISM AND FRANCIA'S QUEST FOR THE MONOPOLY OF YERBA MATE: THE CATALYSE OF A BLOODY WAR

While in 1810 *porteños* initially claimed self-rule in the name of the deposed Spanish king, Ferdinand VII, the residents of Asunción were reluctant to join the viceregal capital. Resentment towards Buenos Aires surfaced almost immediately, and Paraguayans rebelled against *porteño's* officials. On May 17, 1811, a group of local elites in Asunción declared independence. In June, a revolutionary congress elected a five-man ruling Junta which declared its intention to maintain harmonious relations with the former viceregal capital, although refusing to recognise its leadership. Dr. José Gaspar de Francia, part of the Junta, was the prime mover and spokesman for the separatist movement and "the Paraguayan government in the years 1811-1813 became more belligerently nationalistic in direct proportion to Francia's rising power within it."²²⁹ In October 1811, Buenos Aires and Paraguay signed a treaty limiting the Port's right to tax Paraguayan trade and containing a clause

²²⁹ Williams, J. H., 1972. "Paraguayan Isolation under Dr. Francia: A Re-evaluation" s

asserting that both parties should come to each other's defense, as "circumstances permit".²³⁰ But within a few months, the treaty was broken by both sides. Paraguay did not help Buenos Aires in its struggles in the Banda Oriental, while the Port refused to send arms to Paraguay and virtually taxed Paraguayan river commerce out of existence.²³¹ This led to the cancellation of the treaty and the convocation of a new congress which met in October 1813 and created the Republic of Paraguay, ruled by Dr. Francia and Colonel Fulgencio Yegros, whose "first care will be the conservation, security and defence" of the new nation.²³² Only a year later, in an atmosphere of deteriorating relations with Buenos Aires and trouble with the Portuguese, Dr. Francia was declared Supreme Dictator of the Republic for a period initially limited to five years. But in 1816, another congress extended his mandate for life, and Francia stood up to Buenos Aires by durably settling the Paraguayan independence into a strict isolationism. According to John Hoyt Williams, although Francia initially completely closed the country, he did however quickly manage to stimulate commercial exchange with his neighbors, relying especially on *yerba mate*:

"If Paraguay endured isolation during the "Franciata" beyond its habitual insularity, it was during the first years of Francia's rule, when international problems were most threatening. Francia faced increasing Porteño belligerence, harassment by Artigas in Misiones and his lieutenants in the Littoral, and armed clashes with the Portuguese on several frontiers. He saw his task as protecting his new nation. When his own rule was more secure and Artigas and the Littoral caudillos were under control, commercial and other contacts could resume. The years 1813 to 1818 were marked by an absence of trade and diplomatic contact between Paraguay and her neighbors, even though Dr. Francia desired to exchange Paraguayan *yerba mate* and tobacco for the armaments necessary to guarantee national survival".²³³

In order to ensure the security of his country, Francia consolidated its borders and provided his army with weapons mainly financed by the production of *yerba mate*. Indeed, after the decline of Misiones, Paraguay remained the sole centre of *yerba* production. Aware of the profits that could be made from the trade of *yerba mate*, Francia got his soldiers to harvest the plant. Thus, Francia not only created a thriving and self-sufficient nation but also restructured its agricultural production.

²³⁰ Williams, J. H. 1969. "Dr. Francia and the creation of the Republic of Paraguay, 1810-1814"; . See also copy of the October 12 Treaty between Paraguay and Buenos Aires:AN-A, Sección historia (SH), vol; 214, fol. 1, p. 154-155 and Julio César Chaves. 1959. *Historia de las relaciones entre Buenos Aires y el Paraguay, 1810-1813*.

²³¹ Báez, C. 1931, *Historia diplomática del Paraguay*, Asunción p. 230-232; and Jesualdo, 1961. *Artigas: del vassalaje a la revolución*.

²³² Bando of the Paraguayan Junta, October 20, 1813, AN-A, SH, vol 222, fol 3, oo. 14-17. And Efraím Cardozo, 1964 "La proclamación de la República del Paraguay en 1813 », *Boletín de la Academia Nacional de la Historia*, 34. Buenos Aires, pp. 771-783

²³³ Williams, J. H. « Paraguayan isolation... », p. 104

The Supreme ruler's land redistribution policies – Francia confiscated large landholdings he then reallocated – combined with his efforts to encourage agricultural diversification, created a healthy, albeit isolated, economy. Yet in 1811, Paraguay had imposed that taxes on *yerba mate* would be paid in Asunción, and Francia, with both the restructuring of the Paraguayan *yerba*'s production and the intimidating raids conducted in Misiones, worked hard to keep the *yerba mate* monopoly. Indeed, although Misiones had been twice devastated, first after the Jesuit's departure, then in the course of Artigas's wars against Buenos Aires, it remained a strategic zone in which *yerba mate* could be cultivated and through which goods could transit. Therefore, in order to guarantee Paraguay's monopoly of the production of *yerba mate*, Francia wanted to keep Misiones empty and dissuaded anyone who entered that region from cultivating *yerba mate*. Notorious kidnappings, including that of the one of the French botanist Aimé Bonpland, was evidence of this policy. In order to study *yerba* cultivation and methods of increasing its productivity, Bonpland, with the permission of the governor of Entre Ríos, entered Candelaria in 1821, after attempting unsuccessfully to also gain Francia's consent.²³⁴ When Bonpland settled there, Francia took a dim view of his interest in *yerba mate* and feared the botanist's investigation. He soon took action to end what he saw as a threat to Paraguayan sovereignty²³⁵. In December 1821, Paraguayan cavalry attacked Bonpland's camp, killing many people who had established themselves there, and abducted the scientist. The French botanist remained captive for ten years and was only able to leave Paraguay in 1831. He then settled in São Borja, Brazil to go back to studying the cultivation of *yerba mate*.

Francia not only wished to maintain Misiones as an unproductive land but also, like Artigas, regarded it as an eminently useful corridor. The control of this territory had represented a twofold geopolitical importance: from the perspective of the site, Francia could prevent *yerba mate*'s production there and keep a stranglehold on a more than coveted product, and from the perspective of its situation, Misiones could constitute a privileged axis of communication with Brazil. Paraguay could not remain fully isolated and Francia sought to create a commercial route connecting Paraguay to Brazil in order to trade national goods such as tobacco and *yerba mate*. It is important to note that Paraguayan trade with Buenos Aires had never been entirely extinguished, unlike the trade with the north. Whereas there had been an informal trade, mostly in arms and munitions between Paraguay and the Portuguese in the Mato Grosso, Francia had been obliged to seal the northern border because of repeated hostilities, which reached

²³⁴ Ricardo López Jordan from Paraná to Amado Bonpland, Sept 11, 1821, AN-A, SH, vol 399, fol. 2, p. 8.

²³⁵ Dr. Francia to Noberto Ortellado, commandant at Ytapúa, nov. 23, 1821, ANA-A, SH, vol 235, fol 2. Pp. 22-25

their apogee in 1815²³⁶. This forced Francia to maintain relations with Buenos Aires with whom exchanges were numerous, as testified by the fact that even in the “dead year” of 1818, “the Porteño customs house recorded the arrival of several ships bearing Paraguayan *yerba*, tobacco and honey”²³⁷. This proves how selectively the blockade was applied. Moreover, the incomplete customs records in Buenos Aires only report part of the Paraguayan export trade, and one must also take into account the primacy of the trade occurring between Buenos Aires and Corrientes, which, as an underpopulated city wracked by civil war, might have just been a way station between Paraguay and the Port²³⁸. A station that might have even become essential for Francia’s exports, when, in 1822, Juan José Blanco, new governor of Corrientes offered the Paraguayans “friendship, open trade and cooperation”.²³⁹ Francia mainly imported arms, munitions and books while his exports were largely confined to *yerba*, tobacco and cotton.²⁴⁰ *Yerba*’s primacy was officially confirmed by the commandant of Pilar who reported, in 1827, that Argentines were ready to exchange arms of all sorts for Paraguayan produce and that “... all those coming from Corrientes now want only *yerba*”.²⁴¹ And “on September 4, 1827, the state collected almost 29000 pesos in duties on 99,500 pounds of *yerba* and 49,875 pounds of tobacco exported by four Paraguayan merchants”.²⁴² Having succeeded in making the *yerba paraguaya* become the most prized *yerba* on the market, Francia also continued to seek alternative routes. In 1823, he signed a treaty with Brazil, reopening the path for northern trade. The Itaipu-san Borja agreement between Dr. Francia and José Pedro Cesar, established for the first time a concrete commercial route fully free of interference from Buenos Aires. A lot of hopes were pinned on this route, which connected Paraguay to Brazil by passing through Misiones, and followed the rivers Parana and Uruguay until they reach the Atlantic Ocean. But the rivalries between Paraguay and Brazil, exacerbated by the development of *yerba mate*’s extraction in the Mato Grosso, as well as territorial disputes soon put an end to this project. In 1864, the regional rivalries opposing Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay culminated in what turned out to become the single most destructive war in 19th-century Latin America.

²³⁶ Dr. Francia to José Joaquín López, commandant of Pilar, July 5, 1815, BN-RJ, Coleção Rio Branco (CRB), room 1, Cabinet 30, shelf 24, leg 19 (1-30,24,19), and R. Antonio Ramos, 1959 *La política del Brasil en el Paraguay bajo la dictadura del Dr. Francia*. Asunción. P. 24

²³⁷ Arrival of Argentina ship *Argentina* in Buenos Aires, July 17, 1818, AGN-BA, X-37-1-16, “Guías de Aduana... 1817-1818” p. 223, quoted in Williams, J. H. “Paraguayan isolation...” op. cit. p. 105

²³⁸ Hector José Tanzi, 1967. « Estudio sobre la población del Virreinato del Río de la Plata en 1790 », *Revista de indias*, 27 : 107-108, p. 147-156

²³⁹ Blanco to Dr. Francia, jan 1, 1822, AN-A, SH, vol 431, fol. 2, pp. 83-84

²⁴⁰ See the reports in AN-A SH, vol 394.

²⁴¹ José Tomás Gill to Dr. Francia from Pilar, aug. 29, 1827, AN-A, SH, vol. 394, fol 1. pp. 696-697

²⁴² Williams, J. C, « Paraguayan isolation... » op. cit p. 108

3) THE WAR OF THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE (1865-1870) AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW BORDERS

Misiones had long constituted a buffer state which, already at the time of the Jesuit Missions, was perceived as an enclave separating the Spanish zone of influence from the Portuguese one. At the time of the independence movements, this impoverished and deserted region remained a grey zone escaping both the administration of Argentina and Brazil and subjected to the arbitrary surveillance of the Supreme dictator of Paraguay. Since borders had not been clearly defined, this region attracted expansionist projects, and those territorial disputes, initially contained, exploded and were only resolved at the end of the bloody War of the Triple Alliance. The origins of the war were complex and varied but it is clear that Brazil and Argentina were competing for Misiones, that Argentina and Paraguay were both claiming sovereignty over the Chaco and Bermejo territories, and that Brazil opposed the Paraguayan attempt to control the Rivers Apa and Branco as well the fluvial route reaching Cuiaba in the Mato Grosso. All those questions increased animosity and tension between rival countries, who seized the first pretext to start the hostilities.

While Francia's earliest policies had shielded Paraguay from much of the regional rivalries, his successor, Solano López formed an alliance with Uruguay's conservative party, the Blanco party, and tried to alter the balance of power in the region. When Brazil supported Uruguay's Colorado Party, helping it to overthrow the Blanco presidency, López reacted by declaring war on Brazil and sent troops to invade its territory. In order to reach Southern Brazil, the Paraguayan army crossed Argentina, something that prompted the Bartolomé Mitre, president of Argentina, to formalize an alliance with Brazil and the Uruguayan Colorado party. The alliance resulted in the Triple Alliance War which resulted in the debacle of López, who lost more than half of his original fighting force in the first year of the war.²⁴³ Faced with a shortage of soldiers, "Solano López even resorted to recruiting children-some as young as 10 years old- into his army."²⁴⁴ By 1867, nearly all Paraguayan were contributing to the war effort, either on the front or on the home front, producing necessary supplies. In 1869, the Brazilian army took Asunción, and on February 14, 1870, a peace agreement brought an official end to the conflict.

²⁴³ See Warren, H. Gaylord. 1949. *Paraguay: An Informal History.*; and Whigham, Thomas. 1991. *The politics of river trade: tradition and development in the Upper Plate, 1780-1870.*

²⁴⁴ Rankin, M. A. 2017 "Paraguay, 1820s to 1900", Rankin, M.A and T. M. Leonards (ed.) *Latin American History and Culture: Encyclopedia of Early Modern Latin America (from 1820s to 1900)*

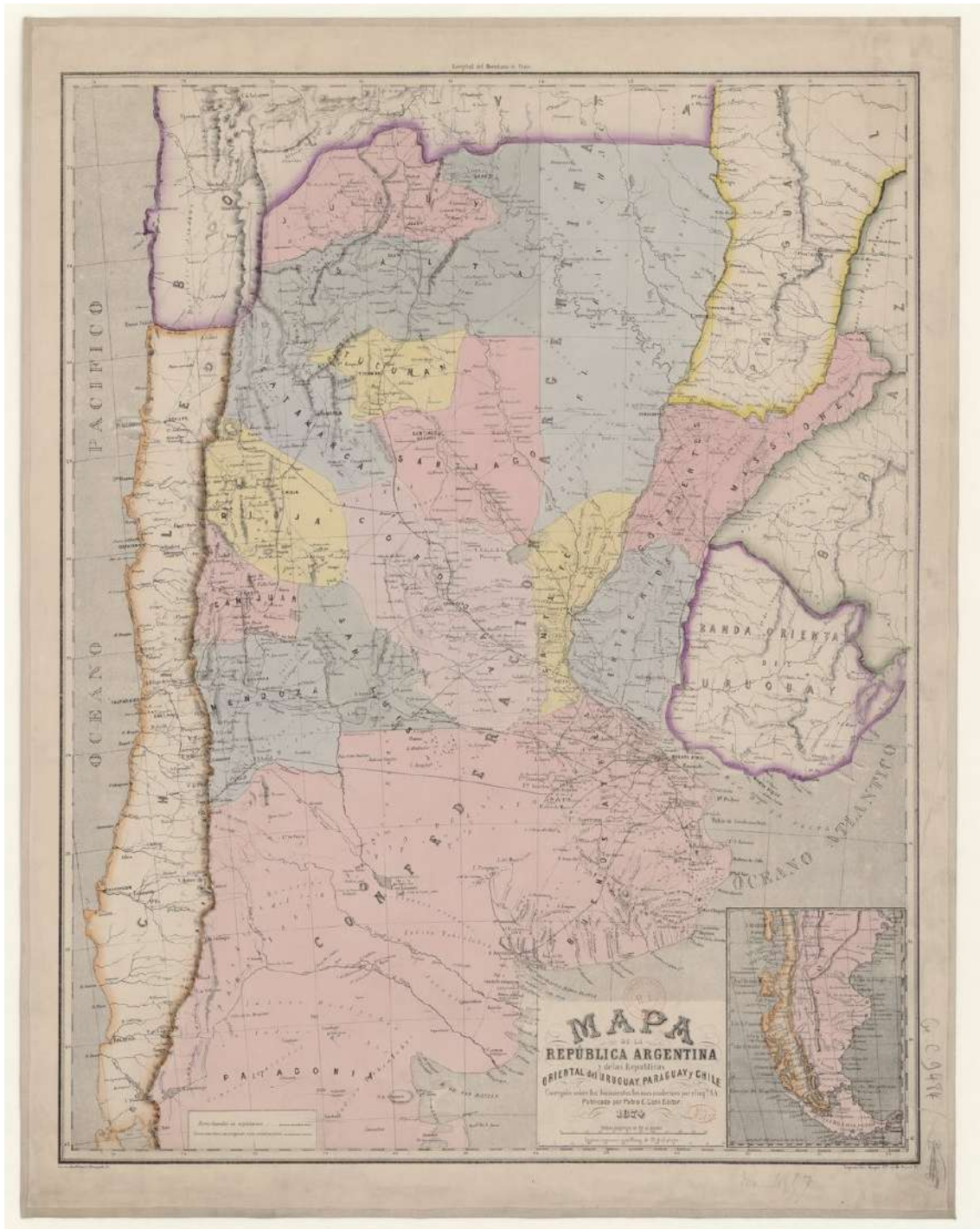
Not only did Paraguay lose half of its population in five years but also had large swaths of its territory confiscated by Argentina and Brazil (Figures 1 and 2), who installed a provisional government on the territory of the defeated nation and occupied it for six years.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France 245

Figure 1: Map of the Republic of Paraguay in 1861

²⁴⁵ Map of the Republic of Paraguay, listing the zones covered by Brazil and Argentina. 1861. Alfred du Graty. Accessed on <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8441240p?rk=21459;2>



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

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Figure 2: Map of the Republics of Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile in 1874

²⁴⁶ Pablo E. Coni (eds.). 1974. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530988017?rk=1459234;4>

In the years that followed the war, Paraguay saw the systematic sealing of its fiscal territories, a politics aiming to quickly pay the state's debts and repair collateral damage. All Paraguayan publicly-owned land was sold off in Asunción between 1885 and 1896, with a lot of investment coming from Argentina and Brazil. Regarding the *yerbales*, they were appropriated by the firm "La industrial paraguaya", which bought 2.500.000 ha of territory covered by the most prolific *yerbales*. Heavily backed by foreign capital (17 foreign countries invested in La industrial Paraguaya) this company, supported by Europeans entrepreneurs as well as by the national government, relied for its profits from the extraction of *yerba mate* by exploiting the labor force in charge of harvesting *yerba*:

«*Yerba's* extraction relies on slavery and murder. (...) the enslavement's mechanism consists in the following process: before being "hired", the worker is given money he usually gives to his family, and he is then due to pay back this loan by working. But once enclaved in the forest, he becomes a prisoner who would never work enough to refund the money he had previously accepted. The system is based on the fact that the amount of work required to pay back the loan is never explicitly said. *Yerbateros* are slaves who sold themselves without knowing it. If ones tries to run away, one is either imprisoned or killed. Guards ceaselessly supervise the workers to prevent them from escaping. This is how *La Industrial* makes profit.»²⁴⁷

Rafael Barrett's who was expelled from Paraguay in 1908 for his incisive reports on the Paraguayan social reality, testifies of the unchanged reality of the *yerbales* which, from the early colonial period to the independence and nation-building movements, remained rooted in forced labor and human exploitation. I consider that the primacy of the debt-peonage system in nineteenth-century Paraguayan *yerbales* recalls the political economy of death that drove rubber's extraction in the Peruvian Amazon region. Indeed, the establishment of debt within the forests of rubber and in the *yerbales* obeyed the same dynamics. It is worth noting that both the growing regions of rubber and *yerba mate* were frontiers prone to warfare and instability since various nation-states claimed their sovereignty on them. On the one hand, Peru and Colombia had never agreed on the "rubber border" since the aftermath of the wars of independence from Spain, and on the other hand Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil's competition for *yerba mate* forests led to the bloody Triple Alliance war. Ground between the rival ambitions of states, rubber and *yerba mate* forests were, in effect, sort of stateless zones

²⁴⁷ Barret R. *Lo que son los yerbales*, 1910 Quoted by Gortari Javier. 2017 « Acumulación originaria : trabajo esclavo y connivencia de gobierno », *Tareferos, vida y trabajo en los yerbales*. p. 64, see also Roa Bastos, 1960 *Hijo de hombre*.

where violence could prosper. In 1912, Roger Casement's Putumayo Report informed Sir Edmond Reay that :

“the number of Indians killed either by starvation- often purposely brought about by the destruction of crops over whole districts or inflicted as a form of death penalty on individuals who failed to bring in their quota of rubber- or by deliberate murder by bullet, fire, beheading, or flogging to death, during the course of these 12 years, in order to extort these 4000 tons of rubber, cannot have been less than 30 000 and possibly came to many more”²⁴⁸

Both Casement and Rafael Barret describe the forests of rubber and *yerba mate* as spaces of death where labor force is imprisoned and killed. The two authors also explicitly associate the system of debt-peonage to that of slavery. In the case of *yerba mate*, Barrett showed that the enslavement's mechanism consists in company's owners giving money to workers without ever telling exactly how much work is required to pay back the “advance”. This resulted in the cooption of the labor force who would never gather enough *yerba mate* to refund the company and would therefore remain captive. As for rubber extraction, Casement observed the system of debt-peonage as slavery, as it was a pretext, he said, that the Indians were in debt, because they were actually bound by physical force to work and could not leave the company. Thus, in both cases, the system of employing natives to extract rubber or *yerba mate* by advancing them goods was a means to definitely retain their labour. Once given an advance, laborers irrevocably became compulsory debtors:

“payment for rubber were not made at a “puesta” but only on completion of a “fabric” (usually every three or four months) and these payments were termed advances, i.e., advances for the “next” fabric. The principle here is that the Indian having accepted an advance must work for it off. He is a “debtor”, on the Putumayo a compulsory debtor, for he could not evade the next “fabric” by rejecting the advance.”²⁴⁹

The fact that laborers could not “evade the next fabric” by being compelled to accept the advance, shows that the enslavement's system was entirely entangled with and driven by debt. In his book *Shamanism, colonialism, and the wild man: a study in terror and healing*, Michael Taussig asserts that “as commodity fetishism was to the discourse of the political economists of Marx's England and France and to the folklore of capitalism there in the heartlands of empires, so we might say “debt fetishism” was to the discourse of the colonizers and the colonized of the Putumayo rubber boom”.²⁵⁰ I argue that a similar statement could be made for

²⁴⁸ Casement, R. “Correspondence respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District”, House of Commons Sessional Papers, 14 February 1912 to March 1913. 68:1-165 (Hereafter referenced as Casement, R. *Putumayo Report*)

²⁴⁹ Casement, R. *Putumayo Report*, 49.

²⁵⁰ Taussig, T. M., 1987. *Shamanism, colonialism, and the wild man: a study in terror and healing*. p. 70

yerba mate debt-peonage system in the Industrial Paraguaya, since this system was built around the “fiction of traders” and not of commodities.²⁵¹ The fiction of *yerba mate*’s extraction depended upon an *appearance* of trade where debtors were not slaves but traders who had the obligation to pay back the advance they had been given. This terminology of “trading relationship” sustained a fictional reality that exercised considerable power while being fundamentally paradoxical. Indeed, although *yerba mate* traders worked maintaining the tale of “trading relationship”, they were also ready to kill their “debtors”. Where was the sense in that? I consider that, like in rubber’s case, the role of terror in the extraction of *yerba mate* worked against business rationality. Indeed to claim economic rationality for this is “unwittingly to claim and sustain an illusory rationality, obscuring our understanding of the way business can transform terror from a means to an end in itself.”²⁵² The numerous murders perpetuated in the *yerbales*, shows that control on the debtors’ bodies and lives might have prevailed on *yerba* gathering, and that debt and terror were two pretexts for enslavement and death. In his introduction to Woodroffe’s book, Harold Hamel Smith comments on the consequences of the political economy of death at work in rubber extraction, saying that: “such conduct, slowly but surely, removes for all time that which we can never replace. To replant the forests may be costly, but it is comparatively easily done. (...). Synthetic labour has still to come; its arrival, I fear will not be just yet”.²⁵³ The way rubber and *yerba mate*’s extractivist industries butchered their “debtors” defy a straight economic rationalism. In the case of *yerba mate*, the unreasoned overexploitation of *yerbales* also worked against business rationality, since contrary to rubber which could be “replant[ed]”, *yerba mate* was not cultivated as a plantation before the turn of the twentieth century. Jesuits, who had been the only one to succeed in developing plantations in the eighteenth century, left with their secret, something which resulted in *yerba mate* being only extracted from its wild state. Thus, both the killing of *mensú*²⁵⁴ and the extinguishment of resources prove how irrational the Industrial Paraguaya’s business was. Moreover Paraguay’s monopoly over *yerba mate* production” quickly had to face competition, with the Brazilian authorities encouraging *yerba mate* extraction in the Mato Grosso as a way to populate its border areas. In the meantime, Argentina, which had annexed the province of Misiones and the routes transiting through it, started thinking about planting *yerba mate* across this territory and actively researched how to (re)develop proper plantations.

²⁵¹ Ibid. p. 70

²⁵² Ibid. p. 53

²⁵³ Bryce, “Foreword on the Latin American Indian” in Joseph Froude Woodroffe, 1915. *The Rubber Industry of the Amazon*, xii-xiii

²⁵⁴ *Mensú* was the name given to people who worked in the forest and *yerbales* of Paraguay and Northern Argentina (Corrientes and Misiones).

II. FROM THE RENEWAL OF *YERBA MATE* PLANTATIONS TO THE FIRST CRISIS OF OVERPRODUCTION

1) "GOBERNAR ES POBLAR"²⁵⁵ : POPULATING WITH *YERBA MATE*

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Argentina embarked on a program that contemporaries called "progress". The greatest problem this policy had to face was the absence of effective institutions and state-building therefore became an absolute priority. The first and most important tasks were to ensure peace and to assert effective control over the national territory. According to Luis Alberto Romero, after the War of the Triple Alliance, Argentina succeeded in establishing a certain stability:

"Some outstanding problems were resolved during and after the Paraguayan War (1865-1870). The province of Entre Ríos, great rival in the establishment of a new state, and then the province of Buenos Aires itself- whose rebellion had been defeated in 1880- both had to accept the transformation of the city of Buenos Aires into the federal capital. The state then established its dominion over vast territories inhabited by indigenous people. (...) the territorial limits of the nation were clearly defined, and domestic problems were sharply separated from the external issues with which they had been traditionally linked. The war with Paraguay contributed to delineating the fluctuating borders of the Río de la Plata basin, and the 1879 Conquest of the Desert guaranteed possession of Patagonia".²⁵⁶

The various wars Argentina conducted against external and internal forces aimed to consolidate the state by ensuring its global territorial control. Before creating institutions and infrastructures, the state had to establish the exact territory on which they would be developed. Once the borders had been clearly delimited and fixed, Argentina could deploy its progressive visions on a secured land. After 1880, a new institutional framework was therefore created. Bolstered by recent military victories, a central power could be implemented and its legal basis recalled the 1853 constitution, which, in Alberdi's words, should uphold "a monarchy dressed as a Republic". Conscious of the long history of civil wars, those who drew up the Constitution linked the rule of law to a political system in which the executive could simultaneously control politicians and political influence. Though the state's basic structure had been framed by 1880, Argentina lacked power to implement projects such as establishing state education system. The state was "at first the preserve of private interests", and it started encouraging immigration only later, when needing the work force to execute projects for building infrastructure.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ To reign is to populate. Slogan coined by Alberdi (1810-1884) who was an Argentine political theorist and diplomat

²⁵⁶ Romero, L. A. 2013. *A History of Argentina in the twentieth century*. University Park, Pennsylvania: the Pennsylvania state university Press, p. 3

²⁵⁷ Romero, L. A. 2013. *A History of Argentina in the twentieth century*. p. 4

In order to facilitate Argentina's integration into the global economy, the state deepened its commercial relations with Great Britain, the foreign country that had been playing the role of mother country since independence in 1810. From 1880 to 1913, British investment in Argentina increased twentyfold. And in addition to the traditional British areas of investments such as banking and public loans, mortgage loans for lands as well as investment in transports, especially railroads, were added. Although the consolidation of borders had provided a first step towards taking full control of the Argentine territory, the state then had to develop a good transport network in order to connect the capital to the remote interior. The efforts made in that direction were illustrated by the rapid expansion of the railway network which passed from 2.500 kilometers in 1880 to 34.000 kilometers in 1916. Many of the big spur lines served to integrate the national territory and guarantee the state's authority within its borders. Such an infrastructure program required a large amount of labourers and from 1880, immigration increased exponentially. While in Europe emigration was linked to strong demographic growth and unemployment, Argentina decided to attract people by modifying the traditionally conservative and selective immigration policy. Thanks to a vivid propaganda campaign and subsidized travel costs, Argentina soon became perceived as an exciting destination. Between 1880 and 1890 more than one million immigrants arrived in Argentina, a considerable number for a country whose population was *approximately* two million. The 1.8 million inhabitants in 1869 became 7.8 million in 1914, and the population of the capital city of Buenos Aires grew from 180.000 to 1.5 million over the same period.²⁵⁸

Whereas the Argentine government officially started to encourage massive immigration in 1875, with the creation of the General Commission of Immigration, some provinces, such as Corrientes, had already attempted to attract European immigrants prior to then. Indeed, as early as in 1853, Corrientes' governor Juan Gregorio Pujol, who aimed to populate and exercise control on the Missions' territory, sealed a contract with the French doctor Augusto Brougues in order to have him introduce 1000 European families into the region of Misiones by offering them free lands. The project was however not successful since European immigrants rather settled around the city of Corrientes²⁵⁹. Thus, the territory of Misiones, ruled by the province of Corrientes since the end of the Paraguayan war, remained a desolate wasteland until 1881, when Argentina turned it into a state dominion. The decision to convert Misiones into a National territory was rooted in the desire to better control a strategic border

²⁵⁸ According to Romero (ibid) in 1895, two of every three residents of Buenos Aires were foreigners and in 1914, at a time in which many foreigners had Argentine-born children, half the population was still foreign.

²⁵⁹ Schaller, E. 1987. "La política colonizadora en la provincia de Corrientes », E. 1995. « La distribución de la tierra y el poblamiento en la provincia de Corrientes (1821-1860) ».

with Brazil. Indeed, while Argentina was engaged in the southern conquest of the Desert, Brazil took advantage of the absence of Argentinian forces in the North to establish various military colonies in the Alto Uruguay. Facing this threat and envisaging that Brazil could easily appropriate a fringe of the Mesopotamia Forest adjacent to its northern border, Argentina decided to federalise the territory of Misiones. The memorandum that the federal government sent to Congress in defense of the creation of the National Territory of Misiones also revealed the irregularity of the procedure followed by Corrientes which sold public land in Misiones.²⁶⁰ When the federalization of Misiones took effect through Law 1149 of December 18, 1881, practically two-thirds of its land had been amassed by a small number of individuals, and “no more was sold, because it was believed that there was no more land; there was no time for surveying, before carrying out this plunder of national assets”.²⁶¹ 2. 101.936 hectares of Misiones’s lands were sold to less than forty people, just before the actual creation of the National Territory of Misiones:

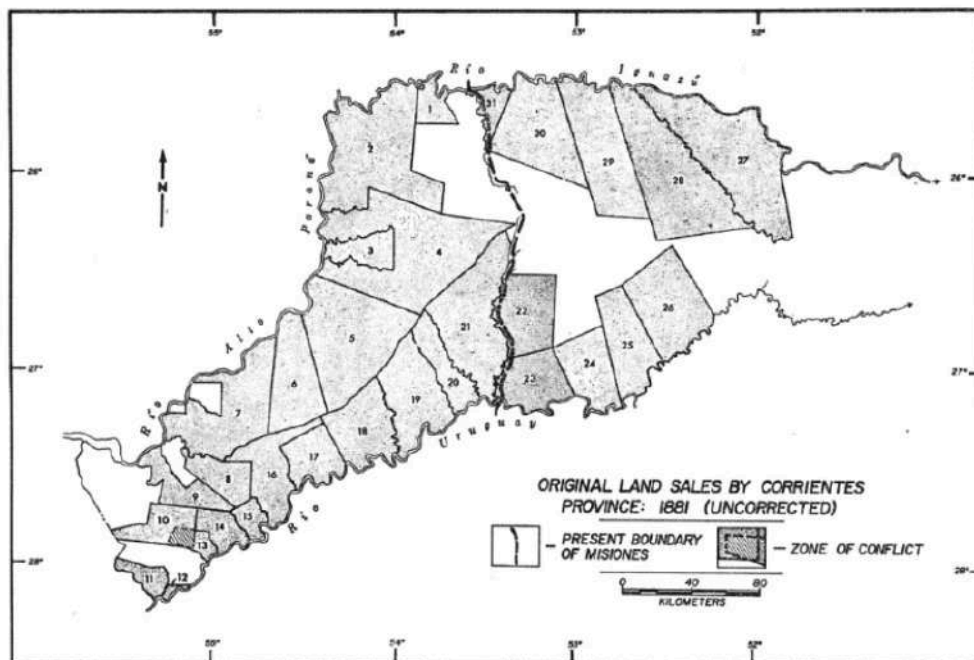
“Outstanding among the buyers were figures with close connections to Argentine politics, as well as those from Corrientes’s own political circle. (...) They included Rudecindo Roca, who acquired 265,180 hectares; and Antonio B. Gallino with 191,990 hectares. The lack of precision with regard to the true dimensions of Misiones meant that the lands situated in the center of the territory went unsold, and subsequently became the main focal points for the establishment of colonies organized by the state.”²⁶²

The following map (figure 3) presents the sale redistribution of Corrientes’ lands at the very moment of its incorporation into the newly created territory of Misiones.

²⁶⁰ Berrondo G. 1947. *Estudio sobre la cuestión misionera*. quoted in Laura Mabel Zang, 2020 “yerba mate as a settler crop: from the decline of old-growth trees to the rise of plantations” *Apuntes* 87. P. 153

²⁶¹ Barreyro, 1919, p. 9 quoted in Laura Mabel Zang “yerba mate as a settler crop...”, p. 153

²⁶² Zang, Laura Mabel, 2020. “yerba mate as a settler crop...” p. 154



Source: Eidt (1971, p. 74).

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Figure 3: Land sale carried out by Corrientes province in the face of federalization

The federalization of Misiones increased the tension concerning the border between Brazil and Argentina and, incapable of coming to an agreement on their own, the two countries resorted to the arbitration of the United-States whose president, Cleveland, adjudicated in favor of Brazil. Justifying his choice by the fact that this contested territory was actually populated by Brazilians – more than 5000 Brazilians and only a few Argentinians were living in the 30.621 km² in question-, Cleveland established the necessity of populating an area in order to reign over it. As a direct consequence of this territorial lost, Argentina motivated the colonization of Misiones by European immigrants²⁶⁴. Although the colonizing process was complicated by the sale of the land that occurred in 1881, the first colonies in Candelaria and Santa Ana developed well. And in 1894, thanks to a new planimetric survey which revealed the absence of precise measurements during the 1881 repartition, the state could appropriate a large amount of the lands that had been sold. In the years that followed, immigrants coming from Poland, Ukraine,

²⁶³ Board extracted from Zang L. M., 2020, “Yerba mate as a settler crop...” p. 154

²⁶⁴ Indeed, from an official perspective, the idea of Misiones as an “empty space” propitious for “lowlifes” and fugitives, and inhabited by “savage” Indians, was promoted- a representation that legitimized occupation by way of “civilizing and modernizing project”. (Alcaráz, 2009, p. 22) quoted in Laura Mabel Zang “Yerba mate as a settler crop...” op. cit. p. 157

Germany, France, Switzerland, England, Scandinavia or Syria, established numerous colonies in Misiones, whose population tripled in less than ten years (Figure 4). Divisions of the territory ranged from relatively large tracts of land in the hands of a few landowners, to thousands of small farms each owned by an immigrant. Initially agriculture was in a first time principally structured around tobacco, rice, manioc, and corn crops, until later *yerba mate* became the most widely grown crop. Given the overexploitation of the primary resources of Misiones, the state aimed to turn the region into a productive territory and *yerba mate* was quickly perceived as the *ultimate* product to cultivate there. Indeed, *yerba* played a key role in Misiones' colonization process and the establishment of agricultural colonies "in the newly created national territory cannot be understood without taking this crop into account".²⁶⁵ Since during the time of extractive front, large native *yerba mate* trees were subjected to "haphazard felling everywhere and at all times" to facilitate harvesting, the "process of their destruction advanced slowly but inexorably" and this deterioration became a matter of concern to the governing elite.²⁶⁶ Initially, people were encouraged to cultivate *yerba mate*, later they were compelled to do so. Such a requirement could not have existed without detailed research into *yerba mate*'s germination, which, once mastered, allowed the creation of new plantations and the production of higher yields.

²⁶⁵ Zang L. M, 2020. "yerba mate as a settler crop..." p. 160

²⁶⁶ Dumas, E. 1930, *El problema de la yerba mate*. p. 6

Table 1
Foreign colonization of Misiones, 1903

Country/region of origin	Families	Hectares cultivated	Averages hectares per family
Poland	810	6,171	7.6
Brazil	502	2,544	5.1
Paraguay	116	458	3.9
Italy	72	584	8.1
Russia	70	363	5.2
Germany	59	322	5.4
Spain	38	240	6.3
France	30	195	6.5
Sweden	15	46	3.1
Oriental	10	54	5.4
Switzerland	6	55	9.8
Arabic	2	6	3.2
Denmark	1	3	3.0
English	1	2	2.0
Greece	1	3	3.0
English	1	5	50

Source: Eidt (1971, p. 93).

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Figure 4: Foreign colonization of Misiones, 1903

²⁶⁷ Board extracted from Zang L. M., 2020, "Yerba *mate* as a settler crop" p. 160.

2) THE RENEWAL OF YERBA MATE PLANTATIONS

All knowledge of *yerba mate*'s germination vanished with the departure of the Jesuits who left Misiones with their secret. And after the productive experience of successful plantations which enabled the Order to prosper during the eighteenth century, *yerba mate* production then remained confined to the systematic exploitation of wild *yerbales*. Its unsystematic extraction led to massive deforestation and provoked the desire to relearn how to domesticate the plant. The increasing interest for *yerba mate* plantations at the turn of the twentieth century was sustained by many politicians who encouraged research and financed experiments. Although previous studies had been made concerning the process of *yerba*'s germination, none of the work conducted by Bonpland ever democratized. The French botanist who did succeed in creating a plantation in Brazil after his forced stay in Paraguay, failed to pass on his discoveries, and investigations started again from scratch in Argentina.

In January 1894, Juan Balestra, governor of Misiones wrote to the National government that "until now, we never found a way to cultivate *yerba mate*".²⁶⁸ On the 27th of August of the same year, Balestra's word were quoted in a column by Luis N. Barbagelate in *La Prensa*, a *porteño* newspapers. Having traveled to Misiones, the author sadly noted that no attempts were being made to properly cultivate *yerba mate* there, and that the established archaic extraction method reflected nothing but an intolerable negligence. Two days later, *La Prensa* published Ambrosetti's response to Balestra. The Italian scientist described the technique he had learned from Telemaco Morosini Borba, a technique actually similar to Bonpland's formula. Once having detailed the process, Ambrosetti explained the economic benefits such a domestication of the plant would imply and ended by explicitly inviting Misiones' farmers to put his words in practice. Some farmers such as Friedrich Neumann in the Paraguayan colony "Nueva Germania", succeeded in establishing plantations yet as early as 1896. But strangely enough, Ambrosetti advice, like the one of Bonpland, did not take root in Argentina.

It is only thanks to the intervention of Louis Charles Thays, official gardener of the Argentine Republic, that *yerba mate*'s plantations in the end settled in Misiones. Designer of the Botanic Gardens of Buenos Aires, which were inaugurated in 1898, Thays conducted many expeditions around the Iguazu waterfalls where he collected *yerba mate*'s seeds which he then studied carefully. As Thays was not aware of previous research, he created a new formula which caught the attention of his peers. He began to study the germination of the seeds he had brought from Paraguay in 1895 in the digestive tract of hens, and then developed a method

²⁶⁸ In Navajas Pau, 2013, p. 243.

that mimicked nature. He could reproduce the action of the birds' stomach by immersing the seeds in hot water for a day to have them germinate²⁶⁹. On the 1st of December 1897, *La Nación* published Thays' results and many farmers quickly carried out experiments following the botanist's vision. Four years later, the Direction of Agriculture reported that attempts to create *yerba mate*'s plantations had met with success in Misiones as well as in Formosa and Chaco.

At the end of the 19th century, president Julio Argentino Roca wrote to the Swiss businessman Julio Ulises Martin who was in Paraguay attempting to rediscover the Jesuit practice of planting, asking him to rather come and work in Misiones:

“You, Mr Martin, propose to do in Paraguay what we need to do here. I have been thinking on this matter for some time. (...) if you truly understand this problem, plant *yerba mate* in our country and start your plantations in our colonies in Misiones”.²⁷⁰

In 1902, Martin set up his business in San Ignacio, Misiones and entrusted the management of his plantations to Pablo Allain, a Montpellier-educated Swiss agronomic engineer. The plantations J. Martin and P. Allain developed there flourished and they were able to harvest their first crop in 1907. News of this success reached farmers residing in Misiones, many of whom rushed to domesticate the plant; *yerba mate* plantations started proliferating in a tremendous way. In addition to that, Misiones' status as a National territory sustained private projects and investments. In the first decades on the twentieth century, European entrepreneurs worked to develop of intensive pioneering plantations, the most successful being situated in La Plantadora, la Maria Antonia, Sol de Mayo, Santa Ines, Puerto Bemberg and Las Marias (figures 5 and 6).

²⁶⁹ Huret, J. 1911-1913. *En Argentine. De Buenos Aires au Gran Chaco*.

²⁷⁰ Martin y Cía. Limitada Sociedad Anónima, 2004, p. 48



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Figure 5: Building plan of a new building for Las Marias



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Figure 6: Worker with packs of yerba mate in Las Marias

²⁷¹ Building plan of a new building for Las Marias, by Emilio Fogerer, 1940. Archivo Las Marias, in Navajas, P. 2013. *Caá Pora...* p. 379

²⁷² Worker with packs of yerba mate 1950's. Archivo Las Marias, in Navajas P. 2013, *Caá Pora....* p. 390

In less than thirty years, Misiones became almost exclusively a centre for the production of *yerba mate*, and the plantations the basis of the economy of the whole region. In 1932, thirty-eight millions kilos of *yerba mate* were harvested in Misiones, and already in 1935, an institution called the CRYM had to be created in order to regulate such a prolific production. Indeed, the exponential expansion of *yerba mate* plantations in Argentina, soon has geopolitical repercussions. Since *yerba* had constituted a key product of the balance of trade between Argentina and Brazil, a series of diplomatic and political readjustments had to be made when the Argentinian *yerba mate* started competing with the Brazilian *yerba*, which had until then been the regional market leader.

3) BRAZILIAN VS ARGENTINIAN YERBA: A GEOPOLITICAL ISSUE

After the War of the Triple Alliance, Paraguay's exportations of *yerba mate* decreased, and its production was only enough to supply the country's domestic market. Brazil, on the contrary, benefited from the situation and quickly imposed itself as an important exporter of *yerba*. Since the 1860s Brazil had promoted *yerba mate* production in order to encourage the colonization of its northern border region, and the rich *yerbales* contained in the Mato Grosso enabled the country to fill the gap in the market left by the drop in Paraguayan *yerba* production. Indeed, Brazilian production increased rapidly passing from 5018 tons of *yerba* in 1860 to 16,000 in 1872, and kept increasing over the following decades, to the point that the Argentinians became almost exclusively dependent on Brazilian exports. Since at the turn of the twentieth century, Argentina's annual production of *yerba mate* was less than a thousand tons, the country massively imported Brazilian *yerba mate* to cope with its internal demand.

Until 1912 *yerba mate*'s Brazilian producers- Argentina's main competitors, and the region's major exporter- had a "lack of faith" in the progress of their neighbor's plantations. But by 1915, *yerba mate*'s cultivation in Argentina had flourished to the point of equaling the supply from well-established trees: from that point on, Brazil grew increasingly concerned with the competition from Misiones. However:

"Powerful reasons of political and strategic nature also encourage the promotion of the Argentine plantation. A small, far-away piece of the homeland, set between two foreign powers: Misiones, devoid of rapid transport links, requires populating, and the most active means of attracting immigration is by providing the resources to those who aspire [to go there].

The crop best suited to the *climate* of the territory and to the soil is, without the slightest doubt, *yerba mate*.²⁷³

Although tensions started appearing in the first decades of the twentieth century between Argentina and Brazil who regarded the successful plantations of its neighbor as threat on its monopoly on *yerba mate* the Argentinian government, rather than limiting *yerba mate* production, on the contrary encouraged its further development. Since *yerba mate*'s plantations ensured Misiones' demographic growth, the state actively engaged in convincing immigrants to the region to enrich themselves by planting *yerba*. Indeed, while in 1919, cultivated *yerba mate* trees were still largely in the hands of five large companies, the situation shifted with the colonization process, and in 1926 the state support for *yerba mate*'s cultivation was explicitly sealed in a decree of President Marcelo T. Alvear. The decree established "as a condition for being awarded lots in Misiones, the obligation of residing on the plantation and planting between 20 and 50 percent of the surface with *yerba mate* trees".²⁷⁴ As a result of this policy, Argentina had to face the paradox of producing large amounts of *yerba* doomed to remain neither sold, nor consumed. Indeed, since the country could not stop importing *yerba mate* from Brazil – if it had done so Brazil would have stopped importing Argentinian wheat-, Argentina ended boosting the production of *yerba mate* without finding a market for it.

The 1933 and 1935 agreements which established Brazil and Argentina's mutual commitment to free yerba and wheat's markets from any type of protectionist regulations left Misiones in a precarious position. Since Argentina's main objective was to keep Brazil as the number one importer of its wheat, it gave priority to the importation of Brazilian *yerba* to the detriment of local producers. The government's priorities were summed up in President Agustín P. Justo's message to the National Congress, soon after its meeting with Getulio Vargas, President of Brazil, in 1935:

"Brazil imports a lot of our wheat, essentially paying for it with its *yerba*. Both countries wish to strengthen their commercial exchanges, and this is why we must enable Brazil to keep a market for its *yerba* in Argentina. This does not mean that the Argentinian *yerba* industry will be neglected, but it is necessary to stop expanding it. We have to limit our production to the plantations which are already established".²⁷⁵

Barely ten years after having imposed the cultivation of *yerba mate* on at least 20% of each available lot in Misiones, the Argentinian government basically pulled the rug out from under

²⁷³ Daumas, E. 1930, *El problema de la yerba mate*. P. 6

²⁷⁴ Rau, V. 2012. *Cosechando yerba mate. Estructuras sociales del mercado de trabajo agrario en el nordeste argentino*. pp. 64 and 79

²⁷⁵ In Navajas Pau, 2013. p. 360

the farmers' feet. As a key product of regional balance of trade, *yerba mate* became a geopolitical stake that took precedence on internal crisis of overproduction. Misiones' farmers who had pinned their hopes on their growing plantations were compelled to stop harvesting their crops, as priority was given to imported Brazilian *yerba*.

In 1935, the creation of the *Comisión Reguladora de Producción y Comercio de la Yerba Mate* (CRYM) aimed to rationalize *yerba mate* production, and to conquer new markets in order to solve the problem of overproduction. Although the CRYM succeeded in promoting *yerba*'s use by for instance managing to have *mate cocido*²⁷⁶ introduced onto the menus of Ferrocarril Nordeste's train network, and by having the Minister of Education encourage *mate* consumption in schools, it however failed to exercise adequate control over the regulation of *yerba* production. In 1937, Misiones' harvests exceeded all expectations, yielding a harvest of 106,000 tons of *yerba mate*. For the first time, the Argentinian industry's production exceeded domestic consumption. In 1937 Argentina consumed 102,000 tons of *yerba*, 40% of which was still imported from Brazil. In 1938 production again increased and the CRYM had to directly intervene to prevent oversupply. Rather than decreasing the imports of Brazilian *yerba*, the CRYM decided to restrict the Argentinian harvests. Misiones' farmers were forced to harvest only 60% of their plantations, and this prohibition to fully exploit their lands continued throughout the following decade.

After ten years of arbitrary restrictions, Misiones recovered its sovereignty in 1951, when farmers were finally allowed to once more harvest their whole plantations. This was made possible by the fact that Brazil cut its production of *yerba mate* and progressively increased its extensive cultivation of soybeans. Since soybean cultivation required the same climate as *yerba mate*, Brazil substituted part of its *yerbales* for soy crops which were, from the years 1930s to the years 1970s, predominantly developed in the southern States of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Parana²⁷⁷. It is only later that the national center for soybean research led the development of soybean varieties suited to different environmental conditions across the country²⁷⁸. The maps that follow (figure7) show the spread of the Brazilian soy industry from its initial epicenter located in the *zona yerbatera*, and convey the increasing importance of soybean between 1975 and 2015. Since the 1970s, given higher prices of the grain in international markets, Brazil came to consider soybean as more profitable than *yerba mate*

²⁷⁶ *Mate cocido* consists in a tea bag filled with *yerba mate*.

²⁷⁷ Da Silva, Ramon F. B., et all. 2020 "The soybean trap: Challenges and risks for Brazilian producers." *Frontiers in sustainable food systems*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2020.00012>

²⁷⁸ Campos, M.C. 2010. "Fatores da expansão do complexo sojicultor no território brasileiro". *Rev. Eletrôn. Assoc. geógrafos Brasil*. 111, 6-33.

which was a major product only in the regional market, and focused on the development of soybean industry across the whole country.²⁷⁹ This shift resulted in Argentina becoming the main player in the *yerba mate* market.

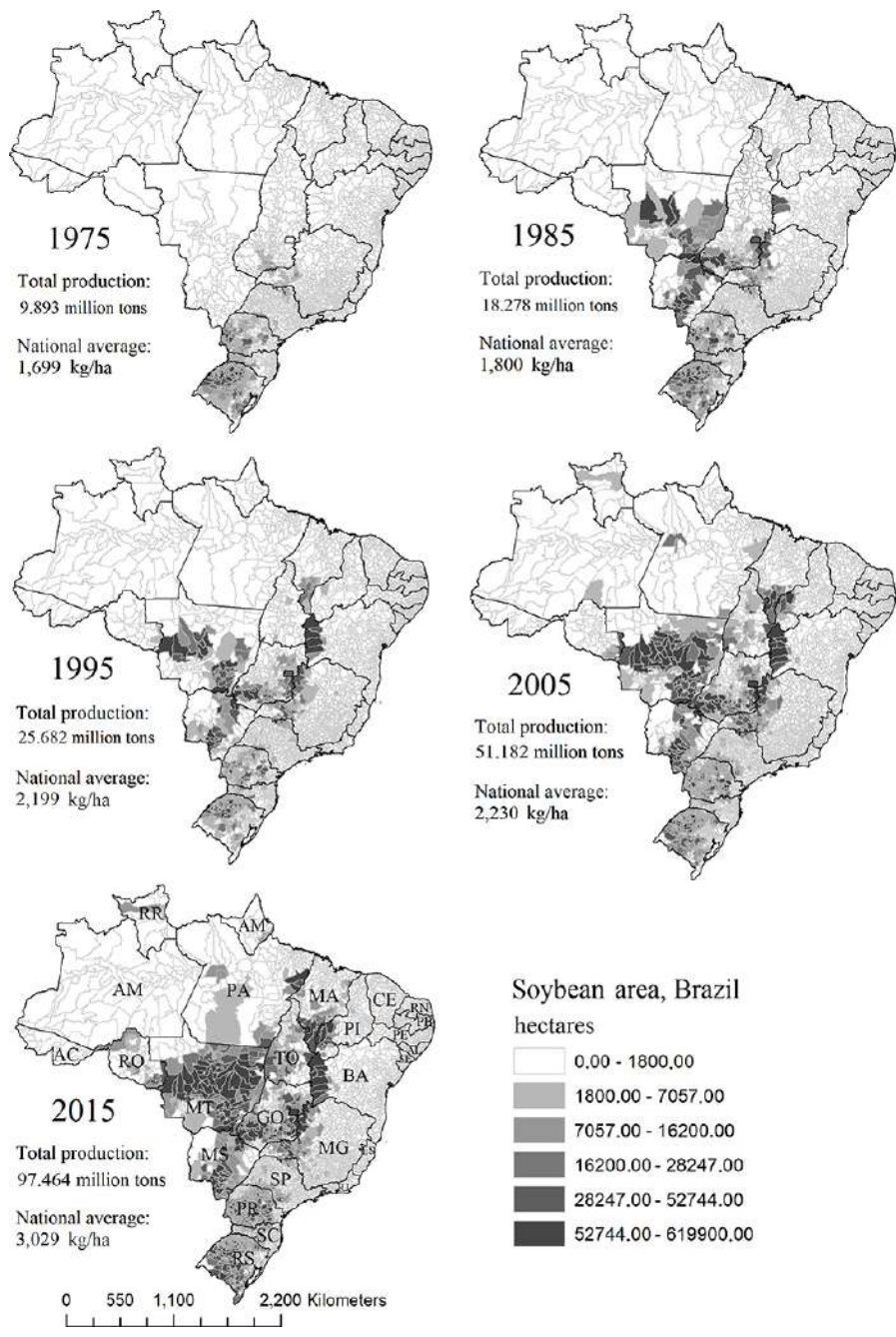
In the 1970s, Argentina established itself as the leading producer and exporter of *yerba mate*'s²⁸⁰. Not only did the country benefit from the decreasing production of Brazilian *yerba* but also from the increasing success of *yerba mate* consumption in the Middle East. The region of Misiones, whose potential had, since the end of the Jesuits' apogee, long been frustrated, has now become the global center of *yerba mate* production: 90% of the *yerba* consumed in Argentina and 60% of that consumed in the world originate from there. And Argentina not only managed to be identified globally as *yerba mate*'s number one producer, it also proclaimed its pride by turning *mate* into an official national symbol. As a profitable product and a symbolic beverage, *mate* has become a marker of Argentinians' identity.

²⁷⁹ Trostle, R. 2008. "Fluctuating food commodity prices: a complex issue with no easy answers." *Amber Waters*, 6, 10-17.

²⁸⁰ According to the *Instituto Nacional de la Yerba Mate* (INYM), Argentina yearly produces 240,000 tons of *yerba mate* in average– Brazil and Paraguay, as second and third producers, respectively produce 187,000 tons and 25,000 tons per year in average-, and 80% of the Argentinian production is internally consumed.

See:

https://www.magyp.gob.ar/sitio/areas/ss_mercados_agropecuarios/areas/regionales/_archivos/000030_Infornes/000061_Infusiones/009999_Perfil%20de%20la%20Yerba%20Mate.pdf Accessed on December 6, 2021



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Figure 7: Maps of soybean cultivation in Brazil

²⁸¹ IBGE (2017). *Produção Agrícola Municipal*. In Campos, M.C. 2010. "Fatores da expansão do complexo sojicultor no território brasileiro". *Rev. Eletrôn. Assoc. geógrafos Brasil*. 111, 6-33.

CHAPTER 5

MATE: NATIONAL SYMBOL, REGIONAL IDENTITY OR PERFORMATIVE RITUAL?

I. *MATE*: AN ARGENTINIAN NATIONAL SYMBOL

1) *MATE*, A “BARBARIC” DRINK RESISTING MODERNIZATION

During the colonial era, *mate* jumped the class divide and was widely adopted as a social rite. However, after Spanish America claimed its independence from Spain, conflictive narratives on how to build the Argentinian nation diverted *mate* from its inclusiveness by turning it into an identity marker. Either observed as the “soul” of the “real” Argentine or as its antinomy, *mate* was worshipped by the nationalists and denigrated by the liberals. I consider that *mate*’s representations in the nineteenth century helps shed light on the two main currents of thought which competed forge the identity of the “real” Argentine and of their “imagined community”.

The conception of nations as “imagined communities” was developed by Benedict Anderson who argued that nations should be observed as “cultural artefacts” capable of being transplanted “to a great variety of social terrains”.²⁸² According to the author, the nation is an imagined political community because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”²⁸³ And since the nation is always conceived as a “deep, horizontal comradeship”, the image of the communion prevails on the inequality and exploitation that may structure the “imagined community”.²⁸⁴ In the second chapter of her book, entitled “Creole Pioneers”, Benedict Anderson both analyzes why Creole communities developed conceptions of their nation-ness before most of Europe and how they did so. Although acknowledging the influence of the spread of the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century and the upper Creole classes’ anger towards Carlos III’s abusive power, the author demonstrates that this does not explain why the Spanish-American Empire ended fragmented into *eighteen separate states*. Recalling that “each of the new South American republics had been an administrative unit from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century”²⁸⁵, she states that the shaping of the administrative units which originally marked the

²⁸² Anderson, B. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and spread of nationalism*, p. 4

²⁸³ Ibid p. 6

²⁸⁴ Ibid p. 7

²⁸⁵ Masur G. 1948. *Simon Bolivar*. p. 678

spatial limits of military conquests, “developed a firmer reality under the influence of geographical, political and economic factors” to the points that these units came to be perceived as fatherlands.²⁸⁶ Therefore, although liberalism and the Enlightenment had an impact in providing an arsenal of ideological criticisms of imperial regimes, they did not “create in themselves *the kind*, or shape, of imagined community to be defended from these regimes’ depredation, (...) none provided the framework of a new consciousness”.²⁸⁷ She stated that it was rather Creole functionaries and printmen who played a decisive role in the creation of the imagined community, since print-capitalism enabled growing numbers of people to “think about themselves and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”²⁸⁸

In Spanish America, the first local presses flourished in the second half of the eighteenth century and early gazettes gathered commercial news with colonial appointments and marriages’ announcements²⁸⁹. Doing so they created an “imagined community” among an assemblage of readers who shared the same information and recognized in them. In time, political elements entered in, and newspaper as well as novels “provided the technical means for re-presenting the kind of imagined community that is the nation”²⁹⁰. According to this idea, I argue that the recurrent mentioning of *mate* in late nineteenth-century nationalist novels and newspapers participated in creating the re-presentation of another Argentinian “imagined community” in reaction to the leading version of a nation that was first imagined as a mimicry of European states.

Before the independence movement, there was no need to imagine an Argentinian community because the people living in the Spanish colony considered themselves “Españoles de America”. But soon after the May revolution, the necessity to define the singularity of a country which had been emancipated from the metropolis, nourished concurrent visions:

« Since the beginning of the Argentine Republic, two broad currents of thought dominated the country’s guiding fictions. The first is a liberal, elitist position centered in Buenos Aires and the educated upper classes that advocated success through imitation of Europe and The United States while denigrating the Spanish heritage, popular traditions and the mixed-blood masses. (...) The other current of thoughts is an ideologically messy, ill-defined, often contradictory tendency which could be populist (Artigas),

²⁸⁶ Anderson, B. 1983, *Imagined communities*, p. 52

²⁸⁷ *Ibid* p. 65

²⁸⁸ *Ibid* p. 36

²⁸⁹ Franco J. 1969. *An introduction to Spanish-American Literature*. p. 28.

²⁹⁰ Anderson, B. 1983. p. 24-25

reactionary (Rosas), nativist (Hidalgo's gauchesque) or genuinely federalist (Alberdi)"²⁹¹

The invention of the Argentinian nation therefore split society into two parts: on the one hand, the liberal "Partido Europeo", in favour of a country populated by European immigrants, and on the other hand, the nationalist "Partido Americano" in favor of an identity rooted in *gauchos*, *criollos* and local folklore. The liberal part quickly succeeded in imposing itself as the leading ideology which reached its zenith with Sarmiento's presidency from 1868 to 1874. Ardent detractor of the *Partido Americano* he explicitly linked to barbarism, Sarmiento wished to spread civilization to "primitive" Argentina by copying Europe modernism. In that context, *mate* ended discriminated against for its indigenous origins since it was perceived as a backward tradition which did not fit the modernist program. In his book *Facundo*, published in 1845, Sarmiento offered a perfect guide to understanding the liberal vision, a program structured around the opposition between civilization and barbary, modernity and traditions, the city and the interior. Willing to build a new nation by denying Argentina's past, Sarmiento worked to frame an identity exclusively rooted in European history and culture. Responding to opponents in favor of the recognition of the country's local particularisms, Sarmiento asserted that:

"They all call us « betrayers ». And of course we are! We betray the American cause, which is absolutist and barbaric. Didn't you hear their primitive words? We only have to choose between being or not being a savage"²⁹²

Sarmiento clearly depicted everything that preexisted a liberal politics modelled on Europe as barbarian. By describing the countryside surrounding Buenos Aires as a no man's land, inhabited by uncivilized *Gauchos* whose principal activities were "relief, idleness and incuria", Sarmiento made a radical distinction between urban and rural Argentina, legitimating the supremacy of the cities' elite he considered as the only guarantor of progress²⁹³. Thus, the ideological "struggle between the European civilization and the Indigenous barbary, between intelligence and immaturity"²⁹⁴ came to be physically grounded in an assumed subjection of the hinterland to the enlightened capital:

« The city is the center of Argentine, Spanish and European civilization There are the workshops of the arts, the stores of commerce, the schools and universities, everything that characterizes, in short, cultured people? The elegance of manners, the European dress, the tailcoat, have there their theatre, their convenient place. But cities are oppressed by the wild desert

²⁹¹ Schumway, N. 1991. *The invention of Argentina*. chapter 9.

²⁹² Sarmiento D. F. [1874] 2019 *Facundo*, p. 46

²⁹³ *ibid.* p. 158

²⁹⁴ *ibid.* p. 78

that surrounds them. Cities are like narrow oases of civilization nestled in an uncultivated plain of hundreds of square miles.”²⁹⁵

Aiming to build a nation from scratch, erasing any potential American roots in order to produce a clone of a modern European state, Sarmiento denigrated anything he regarded as primitive folklore or backward traditions. In this particular context, *mate* could be depicted as a pernicious rite that should be fought against. *Mate* embodied the Other, the “what the nation should not be”, since the Guaraní origins of the beverage as well as its association with the gregarious *Gauchos* contradicted the vision of the modernizers who wanted to make a clean slate of the past.

Sarmiento’s vision of Argentina’s “imagined community” was accompanied by numerous modernizing projects plans. Since civilization could not triumph over barbarism without efficient infrastructures, the “Partido europeo” advocated the development of grounded institutions and well-connected transport networks. Under Sarmiento as well as Roca and Celman’s presidencies the watchword was to reinvent the nation:

“Every project Sarmiento backed, from the societies for the protection of libraries or animals, to national education and scientific institutions embody his will to substitute a new improved reality for the old one. He denied reality and looked ahead. He started building public edifices and railways and fomented the publication of numerous newspapers imitating the authors of the *Analectas*. He founded his enterprise on credit and structured it on an ideological fiction, ceaselessly emitting the values of civilization. Twelve banks were erected under Juarez Celman, and libraries and universities proliferated conveying a physical image of the nation’s improvement. But this was just an imaginative disorder »²⁹⁶

Schools, railways, libraries, universities proliferated so as to inscribe the projected vision into the Argentinian landscape. However, although desiring to turn modernism as the guiding ideology of the nation, the liberals were incorrect thinking that a speculative idea could erase an established reality. Indeed, as pointed by Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, the modern plan was a “trastorno imaginativo” which denied dynamics inherent to a territory already steeped in with history and diverging narratives. Therefore, the neglect and denial of Argentina’s non-European traditions, as well as the measures taken to prohibit them, did not have the desired effect. In the case of *mate*, for instance, numerous attempts were made to banish the drink from Argentinian socializing, and although Sarmiento temporarily succeeded in diminishing its consumption among the urban upper class, he failed to make it disappear from rural homes. Prefacing more contemporary injunctions a hundred and fifty years later, the

²⁹⁵ Sarmiento D. F. [1874] *Facundo*, p. 68

²⁹⁶ Estrada E. M., [1933] *Radiografía de la Pampa*. p. 342-343

yellow fever epidemic of 1871 helped stigmatize and demonize *mate* which was depicted as a non-hygienic drink partly responsible for the spread of the virus. Along with the idea that the nation could only improve by ridding itself of its indigenous inheritance, associating *mate* with that, the pandemic contributed to its stigmatization and a consequent drop in its popularity in Buenos Aires. In his book, *Buenos Aires desde setenta años atras*, published in 1881, Jose Antonio Wilde testified to this decline:

« People used to dance until midnight, while having *mate*. If the party continued until the dawn, hot chocolate was also consumed. (...) People drunk more *mate* before and although it has remained quite popular, its consumption has significantly diminished in many families. Some have totally stopped drinking *mate*, other just have it once a day. Before, it was common to have it throughout the day, and people often drunk *mate* in their bed at a time in which it wasn't necessary to save time.”²⁹⁷

Less than ten years after Wilde's observation, Alfred Ebelot confirmed *mate*'s decline reporting that “in Argentina's large cities, *mate* is dying”²⁹⁸. However, the fact that *mate* started disappearing in urban centers does not mean that this decrease in consumption was a nationwide phenomenon. Indeed, although the liberal elite infused with European values rejected a ritual that contradicted their progressive scheme, rural people, on the contrary, remained attached to the habit of drinking *mate*. This is attested by the note made by Mario Brant, a Brazilian diplomat who visited Buenos Aires in 1910, at the occasion of the city's centenary:

“What do people do with *mate* in this country? Argentinians import three times more *mate* than coffee- 90% of their *mate* and 99% of their coffee comes from Brazil- but in Buenos Aires, *mate* is hidden. They consider it as a clandestine beverage but at the same time luxurious golden *mate* cups are on display in the shop windows of jewelers”²⁹⁹

In 1910, Argentina kept importing three times more *mate* than coffee, something that proves how implemented the tradition had remained in spite of the liberal injunction to reject such a backward sociability. This also indicates how ideological programs and economic issues can contradict one another. Indeed, although *mate* was despised on as a practice, it remained a key product of the commercial balance between Argentina and its neighbors. The “green gold”

²⁹⁷ Wilde, J. A. 1881. *Buenos Aires desde setenta años atras*.

²⁹⁸ Ebelot, Alfred. [1890] 1952. *La pampa, costumbres argentinas*, z

²⁹⁹ Brant M. in Navajas, P. 2013. ,p. 263.

of the colonial economy was still a major concern in the regional market, and the liberal nation-building might have been partially founded by the benefits taken from *yerba mate* trade and exchanges. Therefore, the paradox at work in the liberal “imagined community” is that its program both rejected and relied on *mate*. The deprecatative discourses on *mate* might have however worked to strengthen class distinctions. While *mate* was a cross-class drink in the colonial society, it tended to be rather associated with the rural, “uncivilized” people in the early times of the emerging nation. The decline of *mate* consumption only among the upper class shows that a certain urban, “enlightened” elite was more inclined to adhere the liberal program and that the “imagined community” thought by Sarmiento was quite an elitist and exclusive one. In reaction to the dominant discourse, the nationalist party refused to imagine the nation out of a European model, but rather aimed to root it in a singular and local folklore.

Yet in 1854, Alberdi, pillar of the *criollos* nationalist movement, asserted that Argentina’s essence was not in the *gringos* – term designating European immigrants- but rather in the *criollos*. In his book *Grandes y pequeños hombres*, he expressed his indignation regarding the liberal program saying that:

“The caudillos are the natural representatives of South American democracy... Mitre and Sarmiento want to replace the caudillos in ponchos with caudillos in coattails... the democracy that is really democracy with the democracy that is in fact oligarchy”³⁰⁰

In the same vein, José Hernandez in a newspaper article published on October 3, 1869 in *El Rio de La Plata*, argued that Buenos Aires:

“still shows signs of the monstrous privileges of colonialism. There has emerged here a kind of aristocracy to which the abandoned countryside pays tribute, like vassals of feudal lords in olden times, before the formation of modern societies”.³⁰¹

Alberdi and Hernandez both defended a different vision of the nation which, according to them, should be structured on the revalorization of inherent specificities rather than being a pale imitation of Europe. The insistence on the primacy of the *criollo* depicted as the “Real Argentine”, as opposed to the newly settled immigrant, paved the way for the elevation of the *Gacho* as a national hero. Indeed, the “Partido americano” reacted against the European movement by fomenting a glorification of the rural poor in which the *gaucho* rather than being

³⁰⁰ Alberdi, J. B. [1879]. 1912. *Grandes y pequeños hombres del Plata*, p. 207-209

³⁰¹ Hernandez, J., *Prosas de José Hernandez*, quoted by Shumway N. 1991. *The Invention of Argentina*, chapter 9.

seen barbarian outcast, emerges as a prototype of the authentic Argentinian value and a victim of the oligarchy's selfish ambition.³⁰²

The celebration of the close association of *mate* and the rural poor, was sustained by the development of *gaucho* poetry, which helped democratize nationalist discourses by sensibilizing and aligning the masses to another vision of the nation. Placing the countryside and its folklore to the fore page, the national movement deconstructed the liberal ideology by rediverting the gaze to the "barbarian". Elevating the *gaucho* to the status of national hero, nationalists identified his nomadic life and unique folklore as the founding image of Argentina's society, thus relegating the European urban elite to the status of outsiders. This shift was accompanied by a flourishing literature whose most inspiring piece remains the long epic poem *El Gaucho Martín Fierro*, written by Hernandez and published in 1872. In this work, Hernandez rehabilitated the figure of the *gaucho* by turning it into a symbol of Argentina's soul, and through the poem's hero eponymous Martín Fierro, he not only insisted on the bravery of the *gaucho* but also depicted his rough way of life, and the comfort he found in his most faithful companion: *mate*.

"Entonces... cuando el lucero
Brillaba en el cielo santo,
Y los gallos con su canto
Nos decían que el día llegaba
A la cocina runbiaba
El *gaucho*... que un encanto

y sentao junto al jogon
A esperar que venga el día
Al cimarron³⁰³ le prendía
Hasta ponerse rechoncho
Mientras su china dormía
Tapadita con su poncho »³⁰⁴

I consider that the poem *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* shows "the national imagination at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside."³⁰⁵ We-the-Argentinian-readers are "plunged

³⁰² Shumway N., 1991, *The Invention of Argentina*, chapter 9.

³⁰³ *Cimarron* is another word for *mate*

³⁰⁴ "The stars were enlightening the sky when the cock started to sing the day, and the gaucho, who was snoring in the kitchen, rises with the song and waits for the dawn to break by preparing a cimarron (*mate*) while his wife still sleeps, wrapped in her poncho." Hernandez J., 1872. *El Gaucho Martín Fierro*, stanza 24, 25

³⁰⁵ Anderson, B. 1983. *Imagined Communities*. p. 30

immediately into calendrical time and a familiar landscape”³⁰⁶ described in general detail. This results in a strong identification to the *Gaicho* who becomes part of the collective body of readers and carries an embryonic Argentinian “imagined community”.

The motifs of the *gaucho* and his *mate*, then ceaselessly repeated, became uncontested symbols of the nation.³⁰⁷ It is important to recall that “*Gaicho* poetry” originally designated the *payadas* (“ballads”) traditionally sung to guitar accompaniment by the wandering *gaucho* minstrels of Argentina and Uruguay. It was only later that it became a genre which included the body of South American literature that dealt with the way of life and philosophy of itinerant *gauchos*. Long a part of South American folk literature, *gaucho* lore became the subject of the best verse of the 19th century Romantic period. The *gaucho* properly became established in the national consciousness and received epic treatment in *Martin Fierro*. And his idealization was then further developed in the works of Rafael Obligado, Lugones, Borges or Güiraldes, which marked the apogee of the genre. Thus, *gaucho* poetry, promoted for its authenticity, was actually appropriated by nationalists who perceived it as a powerful medium for promoting a certain Argentinian identity:

« Gauchesque poetry was not written by *gauchos* but rather by a certain lettered elite who for various reasons had knowledge of the *gauchos* and their way of life. (...) The *gaucho* genre is rather a space in which the *gauchos* are constantly appropriated and used to carry out a variety of ideological and aesthetic programs. In *The Gaucho Genre*, Josefina Ludmer analyzes how the figure of the *gaucho* is constructed and manipulated by the lettered elite: “the *gaucho* genre implemented this conjunction: it constituted a literary political language, politicized popular culture and left its founding mark on Argentine culture”³⁰⁸. Masking their place of enunciation under the guise of popular, oral culture, the genre’s canonical authors and critics use the voice of the *gaucho* to speak to the masses of the nation.”³⁰⁹

Although *mate*, unlike the *Gaicho*, was not deliberately promoted as the embodiment of Argentina’s spirit, I argue that its constant association with the “Real Argentine” in *Gaicho* literature and iconographic representations (Figures 1,2 and 3) as well as its wide adoption by

³⁰⁶ Ibid p. 30

³⁰⁷ Although my research has depicted *mate*’s consumption as non-gendered, I think that the linkage between *mate* and gender would be an interesting research to conduct. Indeed, the strong association of *mate* and the *gaucho* in the nineteenth century works representing the drink as a virile one. While during the colonial period *mate* was more often associated to women (see Chapter 2 of this thesis), it tended to become a symbol of the emerging nation by being in hand of the idealized rural, masculine *gaucho*. Thus although *mate* has been consumed by men and women for centuries, the image of the drink seems to have been sometimes more gendered than its practice.

³⁰⁸ Ludmer Josefina, 2002. *The Gaucho genre: A treatise on the motherland*, p. 69

³⁰⁹ Bartles, Jason. A, “ Gaucho at the origins: Lugones, Borges, Filloy “, *Variaciones Borges* 40, 2015, p. 133-134

immigrants participated in crystallizing it as a national symbol.³¹⁰ Being an identifying drink Argentinian could easily recognize in, *mate* was predisposed to also become an identifier symbol that Argentina has recently publicized for commercial purposes.



Figure 1: A *Gaicho* from the province of Corrientes, 1850

³¹⁰ See Días Usandivaras, J. 1925 « La nacionalidad y el *mate* » and Gerchunoff, A. 1930 “Tomemos *mate*”.

³¹¹ « *Gaicho* de la province de Corrientes », drawing by Adolphe d’Hastrel published in *Musée de costumes, Amérique du Sud*, Paris, 1850. The *mate* is visible at the back of the *Gaicho*. On the foreground, one can notice some smoke getting out of the kettle, something suggesting that the cup might have just been filled with hot water.



Figure 2: A Gaucho drinking *mate* in the mid 19th century

³¹² "El Chiripá Colorado". Juan Manuel Blanes, mid 19th century



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Figure 3: Argentinian carters drinking *mate* in the late 19th century

³¹³ "Carreteros churrasqueando". A. Averza. Late 19th century

2) *MATE'S* COOPTION AS A NATIONAL SYMBOL AT A TIME OF GLOBALISM

On the 3rd of July 2013, *mate* was officially recognized as Argentina's national infusion. Law 26.871 not only inscribed *mate* in the pantheon of Argentina's national symbols, but also stipulated that *mate* should be proudly promoted in cultural events and fairs both domestically and internationally. To accompany *mate's* acknowledgement, Argentina even devoted it a specific day: each year, on the 30th of November, people celebrate *mate's* National Day. In an effort to grasp the relationships between *mate* and Argentinian identity, I conducted non-directed interviews in the course of a six-month journey in South America from September 2018 to February 2019. In order not to disrupt my interviewee's spontaneity, I basically recorded the casual conversations we had while having a *mate*. I just asked people: "what does *mate* represent?", letting their own perspectives on *mate* orchestrate the exchange. The choice I made to not prepare questions, was legitimated by the will to discover unpredictable meanings rather than to frame an answer. Rather than limit, and perhaps influence, the interviewees by asking them to answer more specific questions, I wanted to investigate if *mate's* official national identity was felt by individual Argentinians. I always interviewed people by hiding the phone used to record the conversations. In that way, people, although aware of the recording process, soon forgot about it and spoke more naturally. When listening back to the recordings, I noticed that although the notion of identity often came up in the discussion, people seemed to attach more importance to its collective consumption, asserting that "*mate es compartir*"³¹⁴, and describing the drink's tendency to erase hierarchy. The following words, extracted from the conversions I had with the Lombardo family who hosted me in San Rafael, Argentina, for two months in 2019, constitute a good sample of this tendency:

Ana Maria Gombau, 53 years old (January 8, 2019):

"For me, *mate* is like a friend, because, you see, when I drink *mate* alone, I am never alone. And when I travel to a place where there is not the habit of drinking *mate*, I always bring my *mate* with me, in order not to feel lonely. *Mate* represents a faithful company. I like starting the day by drinking *mate*. We are used to drink *mate* when we wake up and if I am upset, I don't give my husband my *mate*. It is like a punishment, you know, not sharing *mate* with him. And I will always remember the first time Nati, my elder daughter, had *mate*, it is one of my most beautiful memories. When I saw her sipping *mate* until she made that little noise, the noise that we hear when the gourd is empty, I felt so proud. It was as if she understood our tradition and that she would always be accompanied, you know. Because *mate* keeps you company. It is a company, it is friendship, it is sharing, it is something that defines us. *Mate* is like an invisible thing that cannot be defined. But it is nice. See, when you arrived, my girls were having *mate* and "we are having *mate*, come with us!" and then you were having *mate* too. Sometimes we have it with biscuits, sometimes we add sugar to it, there are a lot of ways to drink *mate*. But it always represents something more transcendental, something almost magical."

³¹⁴ "*mate* means sharing".

Martín Lombardo, 23 years old (January 22, 2019):

“I think that all Argentinians, including me, consider *mate* as a tradition and as a specific way of sharing. It is something historical. For me *mate* has always been part of Argentina. *Mate* is like an identity which represents us and which will continue to represent us, I think and hope. For me, the one who drinks *mate* alone is confident with himself. But *mate* is before all something that we share, it is like a transmitter which spreads magic around.”

Mauricio Ricardo Lombardo, 54 years old (January 10, 2019):

“*Mate* is sharing. At work we are used to take a break to have *mate*. It generates various conversations, we discuss serious as well as casual things, but it is always a shared moment. I remember that one time we went to Spain, and we couldn't bring our *mate* there because they did not allow us to pass with the metal straw at the airport. And see we were at the beach and we saw people having *mate*. We thought : “They are from Argentina”. When you see people like that, you can be sure they are from Argentina. Well, from Argentina or Uruguay. And you can be also sure that they would share their *mate* with you. *Mate* is like an identity that represents us in the whole world. You see someone with a *mate* and you know he is Argentinian, or Uruguayan, but I mean, it is almost the same.”

Giuliana Lombardo, 22 years old (February 8, 2019):

“*Mate* is a link that fosters relationships. In my school for instance, there are pupils who never speak with one another, but if they share a *mate* once during the break, it is sufficient to start a relationship. “hey, do you want a *mate*? Of course!” and then when they meet again, they are no longer strangers, they say “hello! How are you doing”. *Mate* creates that. One *mate* and all good, people feel close to one another. *Mate* is a link that allows people to share a moment together. Well, *mate* actually represents a lot of things, because you can also have it alone. I like to sit alone in the garden with my *mate*. It makes me think and remember things. You think, you speak with your inner self, let's say. An introspection. But it is true that *mate* means reunion more than anything else. It is more than friendship or fraternity. Basically we are all equal when sharing a *mate*. *Mate* puts everybody on the same level, wealthy and poor people are equal when having *mate*. The other day, for instance, we took the bus with Anita and her green scarf, and the girls we sat in front of us had a blue scarf on their wrist. And nowadays you know how it is with the question of the green or blue scarfs... in favor of abortion or pro-life. People physically fight you know. But see, I offered them a *mate* and they accepted it. *Mate* transcends everything. No matter what you think or who you are, *mate* erases everything. And here, in Argentina, we bring our *mate* everywhere, to school, in the parks, in the streets, *mate* is a part of us.”

Nelida Yanzon, 79 years old (January 9, 2019):

“For me, *mate* above all represents friendship, because it always unifies people. Young people, elder people, children. Children start drinking *mate* really early. And it's a pride for a mother to see her children sipping *mate*. *Mate* represents before all union, friendship. I will tell you something that happened to me, something that really impacted on me. When I went to Tunis to visit my goddaughter, I met a Tunisian woman who once came to her place. She was from a wealthy class. You can imagine that she only spoke Arabic and that I myself only spoke

Spanish. Since I couldn't interact with her, I had the reflex to offer her a *mate*, signing something with my hands. She immediately accepted it. I don't know how she managed to drink it. Later, she invited me to her house, through the intermediary of my goddaughter who spoke Arabic and Spanish. I went to her place, and she offered me a coffee. Coffee is very ritualized, you know, some are better, some are stronger, it depends on the host they receive. So, she offered me a coffee that was so strong that I told my goddaughter "I can't have it!". And she answered me "you must have it, it would be a terrible offense for her if you refuse the coffee she offered you. It is something that represents her". When she told me that, I understood why the Tunisian woman had accepted my *mate*. I don't know how she managed to drink it but it would have been a discourtesy rejecting it. See all the connotations that are in *mate*. To reject a *mate* is to reject the person who prepared it."

Although people often associate *mate* to their Argentinidad, they do not exclusively reduce it to a mark of their national identity but rather insist on the role *mate* plays in gathering people together. I consider that it is worth recontextualizing the government's cooption of *mate*, to understand why the drink was actually turned into an official national symbol. Indeed, if Argentinians *identify with mate*, the nation seeks first and foremost *to be identified with mate*, the main difference remaining that the latter aims to instrumentalize the notion of identity in order to be *distinguished from* more than to *feel part of*. Since identity both implicates an inward introspection and an outward recognition, I consider that in the case of Argentina's identity, the official celebration of *mate* has commercial purposes. Indeed, being the first producer of *yerba mate*, Argentina is looking for other markets. And I argue that the cooption of *mate* as a national symbol shows that Argentina deploys a strategy to be internationally perceived as the "home" of *mate*. It is worth noting that nowadays, the culinary politics of representing communities through food has become central and that along with other foods, such as *empanadas*, *yerba mate* should be observed as a key product of Argentina's culinary soft power politics and gastrodiploacy.³¹⁵ Analyzing how Asian governments were particularly keen to promote national food, Farrer coined the concept of culinary soft power³¹⁶ to describe the "acknowledged attractiveness and appeal of food culture that adheres to a nation, region, or

³¹⁵ See Cheung, Sidney C.H. 2015. "From Cajun Crayfish to Spicy Little Lobster: A Tale of Local Culinary Politics in a Third-Tier City in China" in *The Globalization of Asian Cuisines*, James Farrer, ed. 209-228. Cwiertka K. and Yasuhara Miho, eds. 2020. *Branding Japanese Food: From Meibutsu to Washoku*.

³¹⁶ Regarding the notion of culinary soft power and gastrodiploacy, see Farrer, J. 2015 "Introduction: Traveling cuisines in and out of Asia: Towards a framework for Studying Culinary Globalization." In *The Globalization of Asian Cuisines*, James Farrer ed., 1-19. See also Assman, S. 2017, "Global recognition and Domestic Containment: Culinary Soft power in Japan." In *Feeding Japan: The Cultural and Politics Issues of Dependency and Risk*, Andreas Niehaus and Tine Walraven eds., 113-137; P.S. 2012. "Recipes for Gastrodiploacy". *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 8 (3): 235-246 ; Bestor, T. 2014 "Most F(I)avored Nation status: the Gastrodiploacy of Japan's Global Promotion of Cuisine" *Public Diplomacy Magazine* 11:57-60 ; Pham, M. 2013. "Food as Communication: A Case Study of South Korea's Gastrodiploacy" *Journal of International Service* 22 (1):1-22 ; Zhang, J. 2015. "The Food of the Worlds: Mapping and Comparing Contemporary Gastrodiploacy Campaigns". *International Journal of Communication* 9: 568-591.

locality”.³¹⁷ I consider that in the case of *yerba mate*, Argentina seeks to render the drink attractive by emphasizing its imagined national identity to solve the problem of *yerba mate* overproduction. Indeed, before the twentieth century, *yerba mate* was not cultivated and was exclusively consumed in South America. Now that the plantations have been massively developed, Argentina aims to penetrate foreign markets in order to sell its huge surplus stocks. Being *yerba mate*’s biggest producer and exporter, Argentina cultivates the tree throughout the province of Misiones and in the North of Corrientes. According to the Instituto Nacional de la Yerba Mate (INYM), more than 830 000 000 kilos of *yerba mate* were harvested in 2019 and around 276 000 000 kilos of processed *yerba mate* were distributed in the internal market³¹⁸. Argentinians consume 6,4kg of *yerba* per year and per habitant in average, and *mate* is present in 90% of homes. Regarding *yerba*’s other markets, Syria, which ranks first in Argentina’s exportations, imported 31 248 tons of *yerba mate* in 2019, following by Chile (4 434 tons), Lebanon (751 tons), the United States (646 tons) and France (483 tons).³¹⁹ Yet in the 1970’s, Argentina developed a program to stimulate domestic demand as can be seen from numerous advertisements, such as the video “*Donde hay mate hay amor*” directed by Juan José Jusid, in which *mate* was sensually associated with well-being and love (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7).

³¹⁷ Farrer, J. 2010. “Eating the West and Beating the Rest: Culinary Occidentalism and Urban Soft power in Asia’s Global Food Cities” in *Globalization, Food and Social Identities in the Asia Pacific Region*, p. 13

³¹⁸ <https://inym.org.ar/descargar.html?archivo=L0dIL29OWitlWHYyakU1NkJ6VIRadz09>

³¹⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1055028/argentina-yerba-mate-export-volume-country/>, Accessed on November 12, 2021



Figure 4: Screenshot extracted from "*Donde hay mate hay amor*" by Juan José Jusid



Figure 5: Screenshot from "*Donde hay mate hay amor*" by Juan José Jusid



Figure 6: Screenshot from “Donde hay mate hay amor” by Juan José Jusid



Figure 7: Screenshot from “Donde hay mate hay amor” by Juan José Jusid

³²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kplYKTulfV4>

Nowadays, the focus has turned to the export market, and Argentina seeks to penetrate new foreign markets by publicizing *yerba*'s properties and working to make it more visible. On the one hand, the country makes *mate* a national symbol in order to externally market *yerba*'s *Argentinidad*, and on the other hand it manages to exhibit *mate* in numerous international food fairs. This policy has been put in place thanks to the creation of the INYM in 2002 whose program consists in:

“We sustain, investigate, inspect, develop and promote the consumption of *yerba mate* argentina. Our main objective is to guarantee the sustainability of the *yerba* industry and to stimulate *yerba*'s consumption in Argentina as well as in external markets “³²¹

The creation of an organism tasked to deploying marketing and commercial strategies in order to promote *mate*'s consumption in the country as well as in new markets, allowed Argentina to impose itself as *yerba mate*'s only true home representant. Indeed, while Brazil and Paraguay which also have *yerba* plantations, did not implement any specific program to promote the spread of *mate* abroad, Argentina seized the opportunity to be globally recognized as the *ultimate matero*³²² country. I consider that the decision to market *mate* as being synonymous with Argentina, explains why the country chose to turn it into one of its most important symbols, and how crucial it is for the INYM to have this identity both internalized and performed. The state investment in both national and international fairs shows that the INYM aims to have Argentinians identify with *mate* while making foreign markets associate *yerba mate* with Argentina. Hence the state investment in both national and international fairs.

The logo proposed by the INYM in the course of the first edition of their national *mate* fair “*Matear*”, which took place in 2019 in Buenos Aires, could not have better embodied the state's purpose to identify *mate* as a part of the DNA of the Argentinian people (Figure 8).

³²¹ <https://inym.org.ar/que-hacemos.html>

³²² *Matero* is an adjective meaning “who drinks *mate*, who has a close link to *mate*”

Mi identidad



Figure 8 : “My identity is in *mate*” INYM 2017 Campaign

“My identity is in *mate*”. Representing the national drink within a giant fingerprint, the logo drawn by the INYM supports the idea of an essential identification, to the point of rooting it in a genetical pattern. *Matear*, being the first and most important fair exclusively devoted to *mate*, and more specifically to Argentine *mate*, almost seeks to suggest that *mate* is “genetically” an exclusively Argentinian product. According to the director of the INYM:

“*Matear* is a thematic fair which exhibits our best products and wishes to deepen the link Argentinians have to *mate* by offering them a space where to exchange with both a gastronomic sector and a commercial/cultural one”.³²⁴

If the INYM works to make Argentinians internalize their *mate* identity, converting a grounded tradition into a national pride, it also contributes to the appearance of *yerba* to the international scene. The presence of stands displaying *yerba mate* in food fairs in Dubai, Germany or in the

³²³ <https://inym.org.ar/noticias/yerba-mate-argentina/78367-campana-publicitaria-en-el-mate-estamos-todos-todo-esta-en-el-mate.html>

³²⁴ <https://inym.org.ar/feria-matear.html> accessed on November 12, 2021

United States as well as the promotion of derived products aiming to cater for a wider demand, show Argentina's propensity to re-signify *mate*. Since the main objective is a commercial one, the INYM manages to penetrate new markets by adapting the product to other forms of consumption, detaching the drink from its original sociability. Therefore, the Argentine identity inscribed in *mate* and marketized in international events is a label which actually stresses the geographical origin and health-enhancing properties of *yerba*.

The discourses developed by the INYM during the Gulf Food in Dubai in 2018 and the Summer Fancy Food in New York in 2019 testify of *yerba*'s new flexibility. Indeed, on the one hand, the INYM wished to consolidate an already well-established market in the Middle East, and on the other hand aimed to present *yerba* as a desirable product to western markets. Indeed, since Syria ranks first in Argentina's exports of *yerba mate*, the INYM sees the Middle East as a potential market for *mate* which should be more aggressively targeted. Regarding the United-States, the absence of any consistent *yerba* market led the INYM to stress the properties of the drink, presenting it as the new healthiest beverage and as an efficient substitute to coffee. Therefore, the consolidation of one market and the creation of a new one involved various distinct yet complementary representations of *yerba mate*, promoted here and there for one or another property, according to consumer tastes and expectations. According to Carlos Coppoli, Marketing assistant manager of the INYM, the participation of *Yerba Mate Argentina* at the Gulfood, a huge fair which gathered together more than 5000 exhibitors and 100 000 visitors, constituted an important step forward:

“Argentina sends in average 20 million of its *yerba mate* to Syria per year. Hence the necessity to better know this market by approaching it in situ and by promoting there the benefic properties of our plant”.³²⁵

Thanks to numerous tastings and meetings in which representatives of the main *yerba mate* firms could display a variety of products, the INYM succeeded in making contacts at Dubai's fair:

“We kept in contact with a lot of interested potential clients. The Arab market is already open to *yerba*'s consumption, and we managed to help them get to know our product better.” Eduardo Koropeski, firm Rosamonte³²⁶

“It is the first time that we come here, and we decided to participate to the fair because we know how important *yerba* is in this market. We have made some contacts to try to further develop the market in the United Arab

³²⁵<https://inym.org.ar/noticias/yerba-mate-argentina/78457-balance-positivo-para-la-yerba-mate-argentina-en-dubai.html> accessed on November 12, 2021

³²⁶<https://inym.org.ar/noticias/yerba-mate-argentina/78457-balance-positivo-para-la-yerba-mate-argentina-en-dubai.html> accessed on November 12, 2021

Emirates , Lebanon and Saudi Arabia where *mate* is already consumed in the same way as it is in Argentina” Gustavo Redondo, firm Santa Ana SA (CBSé).³²⁷

Along with the consolidation of its position in the Middle Eastern market, *Yerba Mate Argentina* attempts to penetrate western markets as shown by its participation to the biggest food fair in North America in 2018: the Summer fancy Food which was held in New York City. Here, the strategy of the INYM relied exclusively on the promotion of the plant’s health properties, aiming to make North American consumers more aware of the virtues of a drink they would do well to adopt. In short, the main objective remained to publicise *yerba*’s wide variety of health benefits, showing that it could easily “spread beyond traditional markets and adapt to the habits and demands of North American consumers”.³²⁸ The primacy the INYM gave to the healthy uses properties of the plant, and its multiple ways of consumption was communicated using a website, created especially for the fair, listing its various benefits:

“The INYM’s strategy to promote *yerba mate* in the United-States stressed the properties of the plants and on the derived products that could be made out of the plant. It is important to emphasise the possible variations of *mate*’s consumption and on its multiple positive effects. A list of *yerba*’s properties is accessible on the web site www.sayyestomate.com and it should be put on all social networks to in order to make it visible”.³²⁹

In the Middle East as well as in the western world, the INYM, supported by the *Agencia Argentina de Inversiones y comercio internacional* as well as by the *Ministerio de relaciones Exteriores y Cultos*, basically seeks to persuade people to “say yes to *mate*”. And in order to create a possible future monopoly in the target markets, Argentina not only promotes *yerba*’s benefits but also its Argentinian identity. I therefore consider that the recognition of *mate* as a national symbol was a marketing strategy aiming to make the world regard *mate* as Argentinian.

³²⁷<https://inym.org.ar/noticias/yerba-mate-argentina/78457-balance-positivo-para-la-yerba-mate-argentina-en-dubai.html> accessed on November 12, 2021

³²⁸<https://inym.org.ar/noticias/yerba-mate-argentina/78507-unidos-por-la-misma-pasion-yerbateros-promocionan-el-producto-.html> Accessed on November 15, 2021.

³²⁹<https://inym.org.ar/noticias/yerba-mate-argentina/78507-unidos-por-la-misma-pasion-yerbateros-promocionan-el-producto-.html>, accessed on November 15, 2021

II. MATE'S VARIATIONS: TERERE, CHIMARRÃO AND MATE AFUERA AS OTHER PROCLAIMED IDENTITIES

1) TERERE: A PARAGUAYAN COLD VERSION OF MATE

Mate tends to be globally perceived as an Argentinian drink because Argentina is the country which most successfully promotes this identification. Indeed, Paraguay, Uruguay and Southern Brazil are also intimately connected to *mate* which carries there the trace of singular appropriations. Contrary to Argentina which is eager to corner *mate* by world widely promoting it as a mark of its national identity, the *mate*o neighbors, although identifying with *mate*, do not extensively publicize it. However, *mate*'s regional variations both testify of the centrality of the drink in an area that crosses several national borders, and of *mate*'s propensity to incorporate and convey various identities. Identities that are here more felt and shared than intentionally marketed. It also shows that the meaning Argentina gave to *yerba mate* as well as the country's culinary politics are contested by culinary practices in which various actors participate in re-inscribing social identities for individuals and the collectives:

"Food is an everyday practice; so the governance of food does not merely depends on food policy makers but upon any actors who have a relationship to shaping foodways. State policies have an effect on our relationship with food; yet, they are not totalizing.(...) There are multiple and overlapping interactive spaces for the manipulation of taste and palates, and the reinvention of food traditions associated with nations, regions, and down to the level of individuals and families." ³³⁰

Although presented as an Argentinian national drink, *mate* is rather a regional tradition, and Argentina's neighbors relation to *mate* contradicts its marketing narrative. In Paraguay for instance, the cold version of *mate*, called "terere", is such an integral and prevalent custom that it was declared part of the Cultural heritage of humanity by Unesco in 2020. Traditionally consumed in a *guampa* (cow horn) *terere* is nowadays more commonly drunk in a stainless-steel gourd which helps keep the beverage chilled. A cold variant of *mate*, prepared with ice

³³⁰ Farrer, J. and Yuk Wah Chan. 2021. "Asian food and culinary politics: food governance, constructed heritage and contested boundaries", *Asian Anthropology*. p. 2

rather than with hot water, *tereré* is often flavored with *yuyos*³³¹ that are sold in street stands. According to Viviana Chamorro Urbieta, a Paraguayan woman who I interviewed in September 2020:

“Each one can personalize his *mate*. You can add mint, lemon and thousands of other things to it. There are a lot of people who sell those mixed herbs’ preparations in the streets. In the cities’ street, really early in the morning, grand-mothers come with their grand-children who help them to prepare and sell their own mix of herbs. I love this Paraguayan particularism. It is something that is exclusively ours. Something that does not exist in any other place of the world. Those Guaraní names, those traditions are cultural remains. They enable us not to forget who we are. And we are really proud of our traditions which resisted many prohibitions. For a long time the government had tried to eradicate them, to prevent people from speaking Guaraní. The way Franco did in Spain with Catalan. But if nowadays you get out of Asunción and you don’t speak Guaraní, you are lost! In Guaraní, they are called *yuyos*. I am speaking of the mix of plants that grandmothers do. And the grandmothers are called *yuyeras*. People are really faithful to their *yuyeras*, they truly like them and always buy their *yuyos* at the same place. They stop their car at the street corner and ask “what do you have today?”, and then chat for a bit and leave with the *yuyos* they would add to their *mate* during the day. *Yuyos* are very cheap! Very cheap! And the *yuyeras* have a lot of clients. They are often very old, sometimes even ninety! And they know all the natural properties of the plants. They are very proud of such a knowledge; they explain the medicinal properties of their blends. The aromatic plants that you can buy in supermarkets are not that healthy. There is a growing industry of *yuyos* but it is not the same. Bad quality. Anyway, the *yuyeras* are principally in Asunción because people don’t have room for orchards there. There are also *yuyeras* in smaller towns but people most of the time have a garden and can grow themselves their plants. In Asunción it is more practical to buy the plants to the *yuyeras* who bring them from the countryside.”³³²

Tereré and *yuyos*, which represent a unique appropriation of *mate*, are part of the daily life of Paraguayans, who see in this tradition the mark of cultural identity rather than of a national identity:

“*Tereré* is deeply embedded in our way of being, not because it makes us what we are but because we are what we are when we drink it. *Tereré* has come to be a kind of symbol, a sort of mythological pivot around which the essence of our cultural identity has evolved.”³³³

³³¹ Guaraní term designating aromatic plants

³³² Whatsapp Interview with Viviana Chamorro Urbieta, 16/10/2020.

³³³ Alvarenga, Derlis Benítez, 2012. “*Tereré* as a social bond.” p. 426

The Paraguayan people who consume 38 000 tons of *mate* per year, kept the symbolism of the Guaraní ritual by creating a cold version of *mate* without detaching it from its social function. *Terere*, like *mate*, is a social drink which is passed around from person to person and around which gravitates cultural inheritance.

2) CHIMARRÃO: A SOUTH BRAZILIAN SPECIALTY

Although Brazil is the second largest producer of *yerba mate*, Brazilians consume far less *mate* than their neighbors. This is due to the fact that *mate* consumption is confined to a few provinces of the country. Therefore, one needs to be aware that while *mate* has not propagated throughout the whole country, its consumption is massive in southern states such as Rio Grande do Sul, where people drink 9 kg of *yerba* per year on average. Like in Argentina and Paraguay, *mate* has its own special day in Brazil, where the 24th of April was named the *Dia do Chimarrão* in 2003. However, *chimarrão* remains almost exclusively a marker of a Southern regional identity and pride and slightly differs from *mate* as regards both the object and the beverage. On the one hand, the Brazilian calabash is far bigger than the Argentinian one and the shape of its 'neck' is different. Instead of being thinner at the top, the cup has a wide circular rim which tends to give the gourd a majestic aspect. Moreover, the size of the calabash leads to the beverage being consumed in a slightly different way: the beverage should not be fully sipped before being passed around, but should rather be filled once, and last the whole round. The Brazilian *yerba*, greener than the one produced in Argentina since it is not refined, basically resembles a powder. This texture originates from another way of processing *yerba*: in Brazil, the leaves are not separated from the dusty powder generated by the grinding process. Soft and chalky, *chimarrão* is identified as the Brazilian version of *mate* and the states of Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, Parana and Mato Grosso are proud to preserve this distinctive regional variant of *mate*.

3) URUGUAY: *MATE* AFUERA ³³⁴!

Uruguayans consume the largest amount of *mate* per capita in South America (almost 10kg per year) and 87% of them have *mate* as part of their daily breakfast.³³⁵ Like Argentinians, they regard *mate* as a symbol of their identity. Reflecting on the relationship of the Uruguayan people with *mate*, the anthropologist Daniel Vidart asserted that “*mate* is like an ID card:: it identifies us as a people, as a collective, as a national group, as a “republic of *mate* consumers”.³³⁶ The explicit comparison of *mate* with an ID card shows how intertwined *mate* and identity are in Uruguay. And this pride in this marker of national identity is all the more visible as people tend to enjoy consuming *mate* outdoors. Indeed, in Uruguay, *mate* has invaded the streets and is now inscribed in the urban landscape. People exhibit their *mate* as a grafted member, performing their attachment to *mate* while also confirming its symbolic importance. *Mate afuera* is a way to physically display an identity, a way of embodying the “*mate* republic” or the “imagined community” an attempt to connect with the collective by sharing a common status marker. According to Javier Ricca, this outdoor consumption exploded with the appearance of thermos flasks and of the ubiquitous plastic cups, which enabled people to easily transport and fill their *mate* anywhere:

“*Mate* started to move around, getting out of the kitchen to conquer other spaces. The thermos changed people’s relationships to *mate*. The thermos allowed *mate* to invade the cities’ streets as well as the football stand and terraces and any other public spaces at any time.”³³⁷

Today, people even fit their *yerba* as well as their gourd and thermos in special bags which allow them to carry all their *mate* equipment in a comfortable way. *Mate*, in Uruguay is a nomadic drink constantly conveying a shared feeling of belonging.

It is worth noting here that Argentina seeks to encourage a similar exuberance. In a way, the behavior of Uruguayans provides a model for how Argentina would like its people to act. And unlike Uruguay, where *mate* and national identity became more closely connected through the outdoor consumption of *mate* without any state intervention, Argentina is developing plans to follow the example of its neighbor. The establishment of free hot water distributors in many

³³⁴ “*Mate* outside!”

³³⁵ <https://labombilla.fr/blogs/bombiblog/quel-pays-mate-boisson-nationale>, accessed on December 5, 2021

³³⁶ Vidart, Daniel. 2016 “*Mate e identidad nacional*”, Anaforas, Universidad de la Republica Uruguay: <https://anaforas.fic.edu.uy/jspui/handle/123456789/57519>. Accessed on December 6, 2021

³³⁷ Ricca Javier, 2002. *El mate, historias, secretos y otras yerbas de una pasión rioplatense*.

gas stations by Taraguí (one of the biggest *yerba* producers), for instance, might stem from a desire to boost an open-air consumption.³³⁸

Mate, national symbol and cultural identity, regional tradition and local performance, is endlessly appropriated but at the same time manages to resist any fixed definition. And underneath the various and competing meanings projected on the beverage, the ritual of drinking *mate* has kept the constant agency to bring people together. Indeed, in Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Southern Brazil, in the city as well as in the countryside, *mate* is continuously offered and shared. Antagonist drink which has never been commercialized, *mate* is a fomenter of belonging, and I consider necessary to investigate what, in *mate*, lies beyond the very articulation of identifications.

III. MATE : A PERFORMATIVE RITUAL SUSTAINING IDENTIFICATION

1) MATE: A QUASI-OBJECT CONSTRUCTOR OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Beyond multiple appropriations and regional variations, a constant feature of *mate* consumption in Argentina, as well as in Paraguay, Uruguay, and Southern Brazil, is that it is a social drink shared collectively.³³⁹ When observing, during my journey in Argentina and Uruguay, how a whole circle of people could gather around the same jar, sharing one bombilla passed from mouth to mouth, I became aware of the fact that *mate* was, before all, a means to communicate. And the type of communication it establishes is all the more interesting as it obeys some inherent, almost unconscious rules, while distributing speech and silence. When one drinks, one listens to the others, and turns to speak when passing the *mate* around. *Mate* thus orchestrates the debates it also generates, instituting a time that slows, as if the normalized ritual of *tomar mate* escaped the very logic of capitalism, encouraging inertia rather than productiveness. I consider that the agency *mate* has to both gather people together and

³³⁸ <https://yerbamateargentina.org.ar/es/noticias/marketing/79220-taragui-agua-gratis-para-el-mate.html> Accessed on December 6, 2021.

³³⁹ Being a convivial drink offered and shared collectively in Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Southern Brazil, *mate* well illustrates the role played by food and drinks in assisting hospitality. For more references on food, commensality and hospitality, see: Grignon C, 2001, "Commensality and social morphology: an essay of typology"; Sobal, Jeffery. 2000. « Sociability and Meals: Facilitation, Commensality, and Interaction »; Hirschman A. 1996, "Melding the public and private spheres: Taking commensality seriously"; Fischler, C. 2011, "Commensality, society and culture"; and Kerner, S. (et all.) 2015. *Commensality: from Everyday Food to Feast*.

disrupt the space and time of productivity, shows that the object is ontic. In other words, *mate* should not be reduced either downwards to its pieces or upwards to its effects but should rather be observed as an actor in itself. Graham Harman, one of the leading exponents of the Object-Oriented Ontology's theory (OOO), rejects the idea of human specialness and takes objects to mean the fundamental unit of reality.³⁴⁰ Object, in OOO, has a much broader sense than solid physical thing, it is something that cannot be reduced to its form or to its function. According to Graham Harman, knowledge either works undermining or overmining objects: we undermine objects when we define them in terms of the pieces it is made of, and we overmine them when we approach them in terms of their uses and relational effects.³⁴¹ Objects-whether natural, real, artificial, human or non-human- must be first apprehended as mutually autonomous. I think that this conception of objects provides a good framework to question how *mate*, beyond its aspect and effects, actually *affects* us when leading the ritual of its consumption.

The resilience of *yerba's* use presents the curious case of the revival of a Guaraní practice in a heavily Europeanized region. I consider that *mate* represents "the embodied interface of political economy and symbolic significance" and "both reveals and complicates the interplay between economic forces and the choices of individuals and groups"³⁴². The hybrid "interface" *mate* constitutes as a ritual that preexisted the colonial organization through which it was expanded without being fundamentally altered, is "as an Indigenous cultural trait, the mark of the cultural independence reached by Ibero-American republics which carry both Hispanic and Indigenous roots".³⁴³

Having been re-signified only recently as a national symbol for political and commercial purposes, *mate* actually recalls something that stands behind constructed identities, something that, through the resurgence of a centuries-old transmitted ritual, merely sustains evolving identifications. Driven by implicit rules people have deeply internalized, the ceremony of *mate* remains highly ritualized although routinized. When gathering and sharing a *mate*, people obey and preserve the inner codes of an unquestioned inherited practice. Indeed, when I asked people to explain to me why *mate* was drunk collectively, and what founded its singular pace, they always answered: "there is no explanation, we drink *mate* like that because this is the way

³⁴⁰ Graham Harman . 2018 *Object-Oriented Ontology: A new theory of everything*.

³⁴¹ See Graham Harman. "On the Undermining of Objects: Grant, Bruno, and Radical Philosophy", in Levi R. Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (eds.) *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. See also "For a thought of objects", <https://www.pca-stream.com/en/articles/graham-harman-for-a-thought-of-objects-89>

³⁴² Folch, Christine, 2010. "Stimulating consumption..." p. 8

³⁴³ Rodríguez Pardo, J. M. and Silvero Arévalos J. M. 2002 "la ceremonia del tereré como rasgo de la identidad cultural paraguaya » p. 22

mate is drunk!”. In *El Laberinto de Salsipuedes*, Pereira offers a glimpse into the secret dynamics of *mate*:

“He used to tell me that *mate* was attributed many functions, but that its most important power was to gather people. He said that *mate* gathered people in multiple ways. He told me mysterious things which frightened me a bit. Things like the fact that a man who was drinking *mate* alone was never alone. He could think that he was alone, but was not truly alone, because *mate* always recalls its circle. Around *mate*, there are always more persons than the one who can be physically perceived. This reminded me of the proverb saying that, in a garden, the plants which flourish are not always the one which had been sowed. I will teach you how to drink *mate*, he said. You must listen to the water falling on the leaves. What does it make you think of? Silence. A silence which forces you to listen. The one who speaks is the one who holds the *mate* cup. This means that the speech is balanced, each one has his moment, and respects the words of the others. All people sit in a circle all seek for a common silence. The group remains silent in order to seize the voices of the absent. If in that moment someone is driven by an idea which magically comes to his mind, it is surely a gift of an absent person or of a spirit. We never know.”³⁴⁴

Although the silence pictured by Pereira is not always as central as in this extract, the *mate* ceremony however follows a few unmissable rules, the first one being that the circle is always structured around the figure of the *cebador*, who is in charge of filling the *mate* with water and then distributing it around. *Mate* moves around the circle by always coming back and forth, since each person sipping the beverage has to pass the gourd back to the *cebador* who then gives it to the next participant, until everyone in the circle has participated. In a way, the round of *mate* appears out of the actualization of a circle’s radius. The *cebador* must be the same during the whole ceremony and he is the one who drinks the first *mate*, considered as the most bitter and therefore the least appealing one. *Mate* then circulates, generally counterclockwise, around the persons regardless of their age, sex or status. And one should accept *mate* without saying “gracias”, or one will not be served again the next time the *mate* comes around. Indeed, saying “gracias” means “no more” in *mate*’s vocabulary.

I consider that those implicit, yet structuring rules indicate that *mate*, although sometimes thought of as a routinized tradition, should be regarded as a ritual. Viviana, a Paraguayan woman I interviewed in London in 2020, confirmed this idea by asserting that *mate* was less a ritualized habit than an intrinsically social ritual:

“I would say that *mate* is a ritual, a ritual that could be either collective or individual. And whether or not you can see other person, it is always a social activity. How can I put it? Basically, when you are having *mate* alone, you are actually never exactly alone because in the very moment in which you

³⁴⁴ Porley, R. 1998 *El laberinto de Salsipuedes*, Diario La Republica de Montevideo.

drink *mate*, you are transported to a place where there are other people. It could be dead persons you are thinking of. Or people who are far away. For instance I am sure that when my mother is having *mate* in her house, she thinks of me and therefore brings me there with her. In the same way, when I drink *mate* here, I think of her and she appears to be with me. When drinking *mate*, we are together, we are connected although living in different countries. *Mate* is a mental space which is always social. For me, *mate* erases all the layers we are covered with in our daily life, and turns us into mere persons. Let's say that we simply feel like human beings. *Mate* brings us back to a common human scale. It conveys centrality. »³⁴⁵

Revealing the agency to evoke – etymologically coming from *evocare*, “to call out of”- the absent friends or family members, *mate*, drunk individually or collectively, always links people to a group in which the individual forgets his daily self to experience “interpersonal connections”³⁴⁶. It foments “something invisible that cannot be defined, something more transcendental, almost magical”³⁴⁷. Helping individuals cast off their social personas, *mate* fosters the emergence of a “central” feeling of sameness. It is a quasi-object that orchestrates a ritual in which identities are blurred and identification reconfigured.

In *The Parasite*, Michel Serres presents the “quasi-object” as something that is “not an object, but it is one nevertheless (...) and that it is also a quasi-subject since it marks or designates a subject who, without it, would not be a subject.”³⁴⁸ He, like Herman Graham, reverts the gaze commonly projected on objects, showing that they are not relational only as supports or vectors but also as effective actors. Taking the example of a ball in the course of a football game, he asserts that:

“The ball isn't there for the body; the exact contrary is true: the body is the object of the ball; the subject moves around this sun. Skill with the ball is recognized in the player who follows the ball and serves it instead of making it follow him and using it. It is the subject of the body, subject of bodies, and like a subject of subjects. Playing is nothing else but making oneself the attribute of the ball as a substance.”³⁴⁹

I consider that, like the ball, the *mate* cup should be observed as a quasi-object that “is the subject of circulation” and that turns the drinkers into mere “stations and relay”³⁵⁰. People who drink *mate*, like people who play football, make themselves “the attribute” of the quasi-object (either the ball or the *mate*) which is “an astonishing constructor of intersubjectivity”. And since

³⁴⁵ Viviana Chamorro Urbieto, Goldsmiths University of London, October 26, 2020

³⁴⁶ Ana Maria Gombau, San Rafael, Argentina, January 8, 2019

³⁴⁷ Ibid

³⁴⁸ Serres, M. 1982. *The Parasite*, p. 225

³⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 226

³⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 226

we know, through the quasi-object, “how and when we are subjects and when and how we are no longer subjects”, I consider that the ritual of drinking *mate* reconfigures the individual through the fluctuating moving back and forth of “I”. Indeed, *mate*’s collective consumption is a moment in which the “I” is a token exchanged and that foments the emergence of a “we” that is made “by the bursts and occultations of the “I”. The circulation of the *mate* cup from a person to another participates in fomenting a “we” that “is made by passing the “I.” By exchanging the “I.” And by substitution and vicariance of the “I.” ”³⁵¹

The collective ritual of drinking *mate* requires a gestalt shift, a reversal of perspectives to be apprehended according to Serres’ notion of “quasi-object” and Goffman’s statement that there are “not men and their moments but moments and their men”³⁵².

When gathering to share a *mate*, people experience a phenomenon which can neither be anticipated nor preserved. The encounter simply happens, opening a dimension in which participants see themselves as part of a group they soon merge with. If initially people actively engage in the round, they later become absorbed by the experience which orchestrates the decentering of subjectivities. According to Bataille’s words, “it is the experience that deploys the self. The self neither structures nor masters the experience »³⁵³, and I argue that *mate*, as a quasi-object, has the agency to make people experience a shift from their persona to their person. Once part of the circle, individuals no longer perceive themselves as an old man, a doctor, someone’s wife, or as a student. Detached from the various layers out of which his personality is commonly identified, the individual is turned into a person who feels part of an intersubjective whole. Through this de-centering experience, one can re-activate their connections to co-present participants or absent relatives, to physical bodies or ungraspable memories, to friends, neighbors, family or nation. In other words, *mate* ceaselessly actualizes, revives and interrelates various instances of tangible and “imagined communities”.

Mate produces and re-invents the depth and interiority from which collective effervescence emerges. And in the course of its consumption, interiority does not preexist the gesture, it is rather the gesture, the movement which opens the space of an interiority both felt as unique and common. Unique in the sense that one experiences their singularity as a person, and common in the sense that this very singularity leans on a shared revelation of sameness. Through a de-centering process, individuals connect to similar others to forget and reconfigure

³⁵¹ Serres 1982 p. 227

³⁵² Goffman Erving, 1967, *Interaction ritual*, quoted in Randall Collins, 2004. *Interaction ritual chains*, p. 5.

³⁵³ Bataille, G. 1943. *L’expérience intérieure*, p. 97-110, 144-147

their selves. *Mate*'s collective consumption foment the oblivion of people in the group they identify with. It displays a multiple unity reached out of the communion of the part and the whole, and manifests how individuals both vanish and merge together in a mutual feeling of belonging. *Mate*, in a way, constitutes a center around which people rearticulate their self:

“He was studying *mate*'s extraordinary behavior, listening to the scented breath of the leaves dancing with water. The leaves which, once the beverage sipped, fall back on themselves, deprived of any perfume or brightness and waiting for the water to revive them. Oliveira thought: “this little *mate* could maybe indicate me a center”. “And wouldn't this center, although undefined, be the topographic expression of unity?”. Apprehending unity in plurality. A unity considered as the axis of a whirlwind rather than as the sedimentation of a cold and exhausted *mate*.”³⁵⁴

Mate's « whirlwind » ceaselessly reactivates a connection to the self through its fusion with a physical or imagined group, as if the individual could apprehend its unity by experiencing it within plurality. Thus, when people gather together to share a *mate*, there is something, “some movement, that resembles the abandon of sovereignty”³⁵⁵. The “we” that emerges is not a sum of “I” but rather a novelty made of “the transubstantiation of being into relation”.³⁵⁶ And although *mate*, as a quasi-object, is found to nourish the abolishment of being for the relation, it does not suppress the “I”. On the contrary, the “I” is passed in and by the quasi-object that “is there only to be circulated”.³⁵⁷

2) *MATE'S AGENCY: A PERFORMATIVE RITUAL DISRUPTING THE SPACE AND TIME OF CAPITALISM*

According to Bell, the main problem regarding past appreciations of ritual was the continuous perpetration of the opposition of thought and action embedded in rituals. She asserts that, in *A performative approach to ritual*, Tambiah succeeded in finally valorizing the practical aspect of rituals which had long been neglected:³⁵⁸

“Tambiah explicitly reacts against the opposition of thought and action and suggests that the devaluation of action embedded in the distinction can be

³⁵⁴ Cortázar, [1963] 2020, *Mareille*. p. 98

³⁵⁵ Serres, M. 1982. *The Parasite*, p. 228

³⁵⁶ Ibid

³⁵⁷ Ibid

³⁵⁸ Stanley, J. Tambiah, 1969. “A performative approach to ritual”, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 p. 115 – 127

redressed by a focus on performance. (...) he breaks with the Durkheimian approach developed by Gluck and V. Turner in arguing that ritual does not evoke feelings or express the mental orientations of individuals in any sort of direct and spontaneous ways. Rather, he emphasizes the formalism of ritual as having a distancing effect that serves to articulate and communicate attitudes of institutionalized communication. Tambiah's appreciation for the social dimension also leads him to amend Austin and Searle by explicating the necessary social conditions under which "saying is doing" and ritual is "a mode of social action"³⁵⁹

Since rituals are "a mode of social action" and that "practice is used to denote a dialectic between the *material* and the symbolic, the real and the perceived, the structure and the act"³⁶⁰, I consider that the ritual of drinking *mate* should be first and foremost observed as an impactful performance. Following Tambiah's thought, I will approach *mate*'s collective consumption as a performative action that has the agency to counter-map and reinvent the public space. The collective ritual of drinking *mate* cannot be reduced to a mere habit because it is a practice that is situational and consists of a happening where participants mutually create forms. Sharing *mate* is never simply or solely a matter of routine or the "dead weight of tradition". On the contrary, it implies that people engage in ritualization as a practical way of dealing with some specific circumstances and requires "some consensus concerning the opposition and relative values of personal sincerity and intimate participation vis-à-vis routinized and impersonal participation"³⁶¹. When drinking *mate*, co-present participants do *intimately* engage in a concerted action that establishes its own space and time. And while the ritual of drinking *mate* revives the past through the repetition of an age-old collective gathering, it also and mainly improvises new dispositions by ceaselessly producing performative halos which impact the reality they are interfering with.

Mate, as an object, undergoes a metamorphosis as soon as it is filled with *yerba* and passed around, becoming a poetic and philosophic action which turns each gesture into an interrogation of the sense of being. It is a thing that bursts into events, that has a transformational power, a movement that shapes another form of time. Indeed, since *mate*'s ceremony occurs at a certain time and in a certain place, it "establishes a break between the time of daily life and the time of the ritual".³⁶² When entering the circle of *mate*, people also join its movement and since "to be within movement is to be outside of the things, to stand away from the usual frameworks where things are distributed in space with more or less stability", they participate in the ephemeral establishment of a parallel order.³⁶³ I consider that the

³⁵⁹ Bell C., [1992], 2009. *Ritual theory, ritual practice*. p. 76

³⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 76

³⁶¹ Ibid. p. 92

³⁶² Yannic Aurélien, 2009 *Le rituel*. P. 12

³⁶³ Didi-Huberman, 2006, *Le danseur des solitudes*, p. 25

subversive agency of the round of *mate* has a lot in common with the phenomenon described by Canetti regarding the microcosm created in arenas during bullfight's ritual:

“Arenas display a twofold enclosed mass of people. Outside, the arenas present a dead wall to the city. Inside, they present a wall of people. All the persons gathered turn their back to the city. They escaped the city's context, streets and walls. During their stay in the arenas, people forget the city. They also forget the role they are used to play in it, abandoning their usual relationships, codes and habits. The mass of people is seated facing itself. The circle made of the sows of faces seems strangely homogeneous. It encircles and contains everything that is happening below. Nobody's concentration is broken. Any breach in the circle of individuals could be the start of its breaking up, and the dispersal of the constituent members. But there is no breach: the group is closed to the outside world and on itself”.³⁶⁴

During the *mate* ceremony, the same state of oblivion to the outside world is established. People turn their back to the city and abandon themselves to the circle as it forms, forgetting everything about the “relationships, rules and habits” of their lives. The ring drawn by the ritual of drinking *mate* resembles the one rising from arenas, but it is much more subversive as it does not lean on any wall. Indeed, the *mate* ritual is not ascribed a specific place, and nothing but the joined backs of participants separate the space of the ritual from the space of the city. The circles in which *mate* turns, “contain all that is happening” inside, autonomous yet unseizable entities which appear and vanish, to be reincarnated elsewhere. And the ring of faces ephemerally attached never fully disintegrate, remaining invisibly part of the space they occupied and counter mapped. Indeed, *mate*'s fluctuating frontier impacts on space, displaying an antagonistic setting which disrupts the normative pace and place of capitalism.

Since *mate* has until now never been capitalized as a beverage in South America, its consumption remains there detached from any circumscribed place. Something that is all the more intriguing as all other similar stimulant or social beverages were on the contrary world widely attributed specific places. According to Ray Oldenburg:

“great civilizations, like great cities, share a common feature. Evolving within them and crucial to their growth and refinement are distinctive informal public gathering places. These become as much a part of the urban landscape as of the citizen's daily life and invariably, they come to dominate the image of the city. Thus, its profusion of sidewalk cafés seems to be Paris, just as the forum dominates one's mental picture of classic Rome. The soul of London resides in her many pubs (...). Vienna's presence is seen and felt most within those eternal coffeehouses encircled within her Ringstrasse. The grocery store-become-pub at which the Irish family does its entertaining, the bier garden that is father to more formal German organizations, and the Japanese teahouse whose ceremonies are the model for an entire way of life, all represent fundamental institutions of mediation between the individual and

³⁶⁴ Canetti. 1960. *Masse et puissance*, p. 26-27

the larger society. In cities blessed with their own characteristics of these Great Good Places, the stranger feels at home, whereas in cities without them, even the native does not feel home. Without such places, the urban area fails to nourish the kinds of relationships and the diversity of human contact that are essence of the city. Deprived of these settings, people remain lonely within their crowds.”³⁶⁵

Whereas coffeeshops, teahouses or biergarten have shown the tendency to spread around the globe, *mate* represents the perhaps unique case of a beverage that has until now never been appropriated by the logic of consumerism as a beverage. I argue that *mate* has never entered a coffeeshop-like place because of an inherent symbolism which clearly resisted capitalism. As *mate* continues to be drunk collectively and its shared consumption can last for several hours, such a beverage is intrinsically anti-profitable. *Mate* could only have generated profit if its means of consumption had been changed. However, unlike coffee which was introduced into South America within coffeeshops, *mate*'s transmission from the Guaraní to the conquistadores shortly after the Spanish conquest, and its exponential spread during the colonial era, was prior to the development of “Great good places” which it was therefore not initially pressured to adapt to. *Mate*'s practice was too well-established to be dislodged and replaced. And while I agree with Ray Oldenburg's argument that places of sociability are central for the cohesion of people in big cities, I would refute the idea that they constitute the only site on which “relationships and the diversity of human contact” can be nourished. *Mate*'s autonomy from secluded places exemplifies how a social drink can inscribe “human contact” in space, rather than constraining it to a place. Having not been ascribed a definite venue, *mate* can inscribe the space it opens wherever it wants. *Mate*, as an ephemeral but continuous happening, proliferates in the public space and countermaps the city by diverting its streets and parks from their enshrined function. Indeed, by occupying space according to its own rules, *mate* participates in detaching space from its rationalized distribution and revisits its borders. The evanescent appearance of elusive encounters punctuates the city with antagonistic dots responsible for a dis-location of space. The ritual of drinking *mate* defines its own field, superimposing its own framework on the area it annexes. In a way, *mate*'s performances show the same agency as children's games in that they break the pace of “ordinary life” both in their locality and duration, and deliberately misuse space so as to “create a new order”³⁶⁶. I argue that *mate*'s capacity to set its own order of sociability, confirms the drink's subversive agency. Resisting the coffeeshop's doors, *mate* also breaks its walls by succeeding in both reinvesting and reinventing the public space. Indeed, the very enactment of the practice of drinking *mate* at any street corner works reconfiguring people's perceptions and use of the streets. When drinking *mate* in one of Buenos Aires' avenue, people no longer understand the streets as a

³⁶⁵ Oldenburg R. 1999. *The Great Good Place*. p. xxviii

³⁶⁶ Huizinga J., [1938], 1971 *Homo Ludens, A study of the Play-Element in Culture*. p. 19

rationalized space that they should cross or transit through, but rather inhabit them by establishing a pause in the very place where they normally circulate. In other words, the public space is diverted from its functional use by *mate* which occupies and misuses predefined ways.

Not only does *mate* escape the place of capitalism but also disrupts its pace, since its collective and long-lasting consumption promotes inertia rather than productiveness. The ritual indeed reveals an antagonist force which slows down the frenetic impetus for efficiency by manifesting indolence. In the hustle and bustle of capitals such as Buenos Aires or Montevideo, *mate* disrupts chronological time by imposing the antagonistic pace of the ritual. Having traveled unchanged through space and time, the ritual of *mate* is still “linked to a specific life’s pace. One cannot have a *mate*-to-go. *Mate* and his preparation require time; it is synonymous with conversing and spending some time together”.³⁶⁷ Long associated to laziness, *mate*’s consumption suspends time. It requires the interruption of daily life activities, establishes a pause. *Mate* is not something that is drunk in transit, it is a beverage that invites one to stop. It is sipped as a relaxing rather than as a stimulant drink. When meeting around the gourd, people turn their back to the outside world and open themselves to the static dynamism of *mate*. Through the vivid inertia created by the round, drinkers fill themselves with an energy they merely want to feel, not use. *Mate* doesn’t work for productivity. It does not resist productivity either. It is simply a drink that “fills the hours”³⁶⁸ and which offers here and there an alternative pace, a possible shift into a parallel dimension. *Mate* counterbalances capitalistic pre-visions by bringing back an ancient rural pace into cities’ epileptic avenues and by foreseeing an interstice in which people merely “do not see what they do”.

Although multiple national, regional and individual identities were and still are projected onto *mate*, the ritual does not correspond to any one of them in particular. Representing a process more than a state, an experience more than an evidence, a phenomenon more than a symbol, *mate* recalls something that resides beyond identities. *Mate*, as a quasi-object, leads a collective ritual which catalyzes evolving feelings of belonging and improvises ungraspable yet constitutive identifications by de-centering individuals and connecting them to familiar alter-egos. It is, above all, a performative convolution ceaselessly producing antagonistic lines of circumvallation.

³⁶⁷ Barretto M., *El Mate, su historia y cultura*, .p. 22

³⁶⁸“Mate mide las hojas” Borges, quoted in Luzán del Campo, *El Cancionero del mate*, p. 26

PART II
MATE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

“What does *mate* mean for me ? I guess that the first word that comes to mind is “Massassa” which translates as straw, in English, the straw that people use to drink *mate*. Also mountains, because the majority of *mate* consumers in Syria live in the mountainous regions: in Swaida- South of Syria-, in Qalamun, and Lattaquia which is on the West coast of Syria. Also what comes to mind is sugar, because most people drink it with a lot of sugar, and also with milk sometimes. Mmmhh... The last thing that comes to mind is law enforcement agencies or Mukhabarat because lots of the law enforcement personnel can often be seen sitting outside of their buildings, on plastic chairs, drinking *mate* with a massassa and having a laugh. Yeah! That’s it.”³⁶⁹

³⁶⁹ Author's interview with S.G. a Syrian artist based in London. 20/09/2020

CHAPTER 6

HOW DID LEVANTINES ENCOUNTER *MATE*? A HISTORY OF THE SYRIAN AND LEBANESE MIGRATIONS TO ARGENTINA

While Argentina is the largest producer and consumer of *yerba mate*, Syria is the largest importer of Argentine *yerba*. In Syria and Lebanon, *mate* is, like in the Southern cone, synonymous with sociability and hospitality. In both South America and the Middle East, it has kept a collective highly ritualized consumption. I argue that *mate* is a *material* trace of the migration of Levantines who traveled to South America in the nineteenth century and who returned home, whether to visit or to stay for good. Existing literature on the Syrian and Lebanese emigration to America is limited in quantity and scope and I consider necessary to trace back the little-studied historical link between South America and the Middle East in order to consistently question the current distribution and appropriations of *mate* in Syria and Lebanon. One cannot state that the Syrian and Lebanese people now drink *mate* because they got accustomed to it in Argentina without first establishing to what extent those people did migrate and settle in the Southern cone. Indeed, it is only by contextualizing the factors and circumstances of the Ottoman emigration to Argentina that one can investigate who the generic denominator “Turcos” actually referred to what this stigmatization presupposed and why “Turcos” were particularly inclined to stick to *mate*.³⁷⁰ In other words, since one cannot rely on Argentina’s migratory survey to grasp the origin of the Ottoman migrants who reached the country at the turn of the twentieth century, one should rather analyze who were the populations impacted by the reforming of the Ottoman Empire so as to understand who migrated and why. By coming back to the history of the Tanzimat, one can approach the sources of the Ottoman emigration and better locate where it originated from. The first chapter of this second part will provide a detailed account of the history of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century that will help demonstrating that the generic category “Turcos” included a majority of Syrian. I consider important to extensively develop on this historical background since it is what allows one to draw a lineage between the current consumption of *mate* by the Syrian and Lebanese people and their past migrations. Before questioning how Syrian and Lebanese might have encountered and adopted *mate* in Argentina, it was for me important to first document the arrival of those populations in South America. And if I made the choice to devote a large part of chapter 6 to what made Syrian and Lebanese become immigrants, instead of directly questioning what made them become *mate* consumers, it is because the history of the Syrian and Lebanese emigration, like the one of *mate* consumption, is still barely studied and I wanted to partially fill this lacuna.

³⁷⁰ Before World War I, all Ottoman immigrants were categorized as “Turcos” regardless of their regional or religious backgrounds by Argentinian migratory surveys.

I. THE OTTOMAN EMIGRATION TO AMERICA

1) THE PUSH FACTORS³⁷¹: WHAT MOTIVATED OTTOMAN PEOPLE TO LEAVE?

The standard European version of the Syrian emigration which portrays the Christians as defenseless victims forced to emigrate because of Druze uprisings, is not supported by facts³⁷². Indeed, the chief “push” factor in the Syrian emigration was the deterioration of the socioeconomic conditions in the Ottoman state after 1860 which affected all population groups, Muslims as well as Christians. In the case of the Muslim emigration for instance, the introduction of compulsory military service as well as the discriminations in the enforcement of army duty motivated people to leave. The reforms edited and established by the Ottoman government during the 19th century were responsible for many social and structural changes which impacted the population’s organization and coexistence. The modernization and centralization of the empire shook the feudal past order without succeeding in implementing a new durable balance.

The first wave of reforms was conducted by the sultan Mahmud II in a very violent and tense context. In 1826, he suppressed the Janissary army, notably because of multiple rebellions in the Balkans regions and the increasing rivalry with Mehmed Ali Pacha of Egypt. The abolition of the Janissaries represented a drastic change in the organization of the Empire and marked the establishment of a pre-modern state which originated numerous socio-political consequences. The objective was to replace a small professional army with a wider conscription army which totally reverted the organization of the society. The adoption of the European model of universal conscription contradicted the previous system which was based on the traditional *djihad*, and the modernization of the Ottoman Empire triggered vivid contestations.³⁷³

In 1839, the promulgation of the “Hatt-1 Serif of Gülhane” (“Noble edict of the Rose Chamber”) by the sultan Abdülmejid I, set many of the key provisions of the Tanzimat reforms which, heavily influenced by European ideas, were intended to enable a fundamental change of the Empire from the old system based on theocratic principles to that of a modern state. The

³⁷¹ I borrowed the notions of “Push” and “Pull” factors to Karpat, H. K. 1985, “The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914”.

³⁷² Karpat, H.K., 1985. “The Ottoman Emigration...” p.178

³⁷³ Moreau O., 2020. *L’empire Ottoman au XIXème siècle*, p. 108

Gülhane chart called for the establishment of new institutions that would guarantee security of life and property to all subjects of the empire regardless of their religion. The precepts of the Gülhane chart therefore originated a total upheaval of the relationships between the state and the society as well as between the various communities until then cohabiting. The promulgation of the “Hatt-1 Hümayun” (“Imperial Edict”), on the 18th of February 1856, marked the second step of the Tanzimat. This edict advanced notions of equality and ended the Ottoman Empire’s practice of classifying non-Muslims as dhimmis and requiring them to pay the jizya tax. This reorganization was meant to remove the abuses in the millet system and to inculcate in the non-Muslims a stronger sense of allegiance towards the Ottoman state.³⁷⁴ Freedom of religion was guaranteed to all minorities and all subjects of the empire were proclaimed equal. This edict was adopted under the pressure of Europe and raised the discontent of Muslims who considered that this reform injured the law of Islam.

The suppression of any type of distinction or hierarchy between Muslims and Non-Muslims resulted in the exacerbation of vindicated identities. Along with the implementation of the Tanzimat, numerous latent conflicts came to explode. Indeed, the fact that Christians were recognized with the same rights as Muslims in the Ottoman Empire while also benefitting from the support of France among other European countries, stirred up rivalries. Tensions grew and drastically erupted in May 1860 in Mount Lebanon when Druzes conducted murderous raids into Christian villages:

“In the space of a few weeks between the end of May and the middle of June, Maronite and Druze communities clashed in Mount Lebanon in a struggle to see which community would control, and define, a stretch of mountainous territory at the center of complicated Eastern Question politics. The Druzes carried the day. Every major Maronite town within reach of the Druzes was pillaged, its population either massacred or forced to flee. In July, Damascene Muslims rioted to protest deteriorating economic conditions, targeting and massacring several hundred of the city’s Christian population”³⁷⁵

The growing animosity between communities who had until then cohabited were sustained by European powers who contracted alliances according to their own interests.³⁷⁶ In addition to those internal conflicts, the wars conducted by the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century, notably against Russia, originated territorial readjustment and numerous population’s displacements. Population movements have always played a major role in the life of Islam

³⁷⁴ Roderic H. Davison. 1963. *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876*.

³⁷⁵ Makdisi Ussama, « After 1860 : Debating Religion, Reform and Nationalism” *International Journal of Middle east Studies*, Nov. 2022, vol 34, N. 4. P. 601

³⁷⁶ See Leila Fawaz, 1994 *An occasion for War: civil conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* ; James A. Reilly, 1996. “Inter-Confessional Relations in Nineteenth-century Syria: Damascus, Homs and Hama Compared”, *Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations* 7

and particularly in the Middle East. During the nineteenth century, however, the transfer of vast numbers of people from one region to another deeply altered the religious, ethnic and social structure of the Ottoman state:

“The footloose tribes of eastern Anatolia, Syria, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula were spurred into motion on an unprecedented scale by economic and social events and the Ottoman government was forced to undertake settlement measures that had widespread effects. The ottoman-Russian wars, which began in 1906 and occurred at intervals throughout the century, displaced large groups of people, predominantly Muslims from the Crimea, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean islands. Uprooted from their ancestral homelands, they eventually settled in Anatolia, Syria (inclusive of the territories of modern-day Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel as well as modern Syria), and northern Iraq. These migrations continued until the time of the First World War.”³⁷⁷

Waves of immigrants also came from Algeria and Tunisia after 1830, especially after Abdel Kader ended his resistance to the French. And after 1862, the millions of Muslim refugees who began pouring into Ottoman territories, transformed the remnant of the Empire into a predominantly Muslim state. Moreover, European demand for agricultural products brought about a mini-revolution in the Ottoman agricultural economy. As a result: “large tracts of land in Anatolia and Syria were brought under cultivation and the production of agricultural commodities increased substantially.”³⁷⁸ However, the agricultural revolution did not spread prosperity everywhere: the coastal areas with relatively rich hinterlands and ports developed well while the enclaved interior did not. The drastic transformation of both the religious-cultural structure and the economic conditions in the Ottoman state profoundly affected many of its people—from all religious and ethnic backgrounds— and pushed some of them to leave. Thus, paralleling the immigration into the Ottoman domain, was a movement out of the Ottoman state towards America. The main source of the emigration to the new world was Syria.

2) THE PULL FACTORS: WHY WAS AMERICA ATTRACTIVE?

During the last half of the nineteenth century, changes in the ethnocultural and economic structure of the Ottoman Empire were concomitant with the industrialization of North America and the rise of large agricultural enterprises in South America. Therefore, the emergence of “push” factors in the Ottoman realm enhanced by “pull” factors in the Americas, fomented

³⁷⁷ Karpat, H.K., 1985. “The Ottoman Emigration...”, p. 175

³⁷⁸ Karpat H.K. 1985. “The Ottoman Emigration...” p. 177

outward migrations and the people of Syria and of Eastern Anatolia turned their faces toward the West. The availability of employment in North and South America as well as the high wages paid were powerful attractive factors. Workforce was needed in the fields of Brazil and Argentina and in the factories of North America. Moreover, there were numerous opportunities for artisans and craftsmen in the growing cities of these areas. Thus, although population shifts, military conscription as well as political and religious persecutions within the Ottoman empire constituted internal dynamics that may have convinced Arabs to contemplate emigration from their home countries, people's departure must be understood in conjunction with the perception of political, social and economic development in Latin America that made these emigrants into immigrants:

“with the end of the civil wars that marked the region's post-independence years, and with the dual cooptation of the rural elite by urban centralist and the urban elite by caudillos politicians, Latin America nations began to emerge as carefully constructed entities with a clear vision of the future. (...) The growth of industrial and/or agro-industrial economies not only created a new wealth in Latin America but also a market for the merchant activities in which Maghrebi Jewish, Arabs and Armenian immigrants flourished.”³⁷⁹

In addition to the availability of employment and to the expected opportunities offered by the Americas, technology played an important role in Ottoman emigration. Indeed, from the mid-nineteenth century, steamships on the one hand regularly crossed the seas between the Middle East and Europe, and on the other hand between Europe and Latin America, thereby making it easier, and ever cheaper to migrate. The whole process of emigration was considerably encouraged by publicity from shipping companies and their agents and by Latin-American government-sponsored and private land-settlement and labor-contracting programs that operated in Europe, especially the Mediterranean countries.³⁸⁰

The early Ottoman migrants to the Americas were mainly from the lower socioeconomic classes: some even had had to sell a consequent part of their belongings to pay for their passage. The desire to escape from a condition of poverty by moving to a place that offered the possibility to remedy one's deteriorating economic situation, motivated many departures.

³⁷⁹ Klich I. and Jeffrey Lesser, 1996 “Introduction “Turco” immigrants in Latin America”, *The Americas*, Jul. 1996, vol 53, no. 1 p. 7

³⁸⁰ Glade, W. “The Levantines in Latin America”, *The American Economic Review*, May 1983, vol 73, n. 2.

And as the immigrant colonies overseas became prosperous and well established, “they became themselves a “pull” factor”, attracting those persons who had been less venturesome and for whom the presence of already settled groups of their fellows in the Americas constituted the condition that abet them to leave. Moreover, when successful emigrants returned home from the Americas with the money to build a house as well as to buy land and to become a rural upper class, the argument in favor of emigration turned all the more convincing. Indeed, their tales of America’s wealth participated in stimulating the desire for enrichment even in people of some means. Hence the fact that later emigrants were often people who were not badly off and who sought to increase their wealth in the New World.

3) QUANTIFYING THE OTTOMAN EMIGRATION TO THE AMERICAS

The steady trickle of emigration from Ottoman territories, especially from Syria to the Americas, started in the 1860s. At that time, the number of departures remained however insignificant. The flux consequently increased from 1878 and was first mainly directed towards South America and the Caribbean. From 1891, after the prohibition of Ottoman emigration to Cuba by Spain, the stream turned toward North America and increased in volume, reaching a peak level in the years 1896-1897 when the Ottoman empire lifted its ban on emigration. Despite renewed restrictions, the flux kept increasing after the turn of the century with a final peak from 1908-1914, first fomented by the freedom ensured by the Union and Progress government which followed the 1908 revolution in the Ottoman state, then by the dislocation generated by the Balkan war in 1912- an event that initiated emigration from all the Ottoman provinces.³⁸¹ (Figure 1).

³⁸¹ See Karpát H. K., “The ottoman emigration to Americas”

A. Annual figures			
Year	Number	Place of origin	Place of destination
1885	561		
1886	178		
1887	254		Havana, Cuba ^a
1888	369	Ottoman Empire	
1889 ^b	334		
1890 ^c	22,000		Mostly North America
1893	410 ^d		Melbourne, Australia
1898	7,890 ^e	Syria & East Anatolia	Both Americas
1902–1904 ^f	281	Ottoman subjects	South Africa (Transvaal)
1910	13,099		
1911	13,605	Ottoman Empire	Argentina
1912	19,792		

B. General estimates of the total number of emigrants ^g			
Year	Number	Place of origin	Place of destination
To 1883	1,000,000		North and South America
1881–1901	320,000	Syria	U.S., Brazil, & others
1880–1901	1,000,000+	Entire Ottoman realm	U.S., Brazil, & others

Sources: AFM, fol. 587 (*Idare*), 29 February 1911, 7 March 1890, 4 May 1891; fol. 346 (*Idare*), 13 February 1901; fol. 473 (*Idare*), 31 January 1898.

^aHavana, given as the destination for immigrants of 1885 through 1889, was primarily a transshipping point rather than an ultimate destination.

^bThe statistics are for 5 months of the year only.

^cOf these, 240 were from Mt. Lebanon and Syria, mostly Maronites. The port of embarkation for those going to North America was Barcelona, Spain. Separate figures for June of 1890 give a total of 2,167 who emigrated in that single month; the figure includes 598 Armenians and 1,126 people from European Turkey.

^dThese were listed as mainly Syrians; most were Christians, but some were Muslims from Baghdad and Egypt.

^eThis figure includes 6,287 Syrians and 1,603 Armenians. The departure point for the Syrians was France.

^fThese statistics are for all of 1902 and 1903 and the first 4 months only of 1904. The emigrants were Syrians who were going to join 600 of their fellows already in Transvaal and Orange; of the 600 in South Africa, 500 were from Mt. Lebanon, and 12 of these were Muslims working in the gold mines.

^gThe first of these estimates called the emigrants to 1883 "Arabic-speaking" Ottomans; the second estimate is that of Antun Fares.

Figure 1: Numerical table of Ottoman emigration³⁸²

³⁸² Extracted from Karpát K. H., "The Ottoman Emigration..." p. 201

Syria and Lebanon represented the main poles of the Ottoman emigration. According to Himadeh, 120,000 persons left Syria between 1860 and 1914.³⁸³ As for Karpatt's report, it established that:

"Issawi places the total emigration from Syria and Mount Lebanon at 330,000 for the period 1860-1914, while Ruppin, basing his figures on German consular *estimates*, gives the number of Syrian emigrants living in North and South America in 1912 as 500,000, of whom half were Lebanese³⁸⁴; E. Weakly reports that in 1909 a total of 13,848 embarked from Tripoli and Beirut alone;³⁸⁵ Issawi and Ruppin both estimate the annual outflow to have been 15,000 to 20,000 people³⁸⁶. On the basis of these *estimates*, one may conclude that the total emigration from Beirut and Tripoli only was approximately 280,000 in the period 1900-1914. Taking into consideration also the emigration from other ports such as Izmir, Mersin, and Trabzon, it may be *estimated* that the total Ottoman migration from Asia during that time came to nearly half a million."³⁸⁷

Thus, available evidence shows that the total of Ottoman emigrants to the Americas from 1860 to 1914 approached 1,200,000. Of these, approximately 600 000 were from Mount Lebanon and Syria, and they essentially settled in the United-States, in Brazil and in Argentina.³⁸⁸

II. SYRIAN AND LEBANESE IMMIGRANTS IN ARGENTINA (1880-1920): A DIFFICULT INTEGRATION

1) "TURCOS": A GENERIC TERM DESIGNATING ALL OTTOMAN IMMIGRANTS

Between 1880 and 1914, one third of a million Ottoman subjects left greater Syria and boarded on steamships traveling to the Americas. Coming from Mount Lebanon, small towns in western Syria, and the suburbs of cities like Aleppo, Damascus and Homs, these Ottoman Syrians represented between 18 and 25 percent of the Mashriq's entire population³⁸⁹. After a

³⁸³ Himadeh, 1936. *Economic Organization of Syria*, p. 16

³⁸⁴ Issawi, 1982. *Economic History of the Middle east*, p. 271

³⁸⁵ "Reports on the conditions and prospects of British trade in Syria", Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, house of Commons, *Account and papers*, vol 87 (1911) pp; 7-11

³⁸⁶ Issawi, 1982. *Economic history of the Middle east* p. 271

³⁸⁷ Karpatt, H.K. "The Ottoman Emigration..." p. 184

³⁸⁸ Ibid

³⁸⁹ The Mashriq refers to historical *bilal al-sham*, or the greater Syrian territory comprising modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, parts of Jordan and Palestine. The emigration figures are Charles Issawi's and refers to the rates of emigration from greater Syria (18%) and from Mount Lebanon (25%) respectively. Issawi Charles, "The historical Background of Lebanese emigration 1800-1914," in Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi, eds., *Lebanese in the world: a century of emigration* (London: I. B. Taurus and Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1992), 31.

month-long journey, often spent in a third-class compartment, Ottoman emigrants berthed in New York City, Buenos Aires or São Paulo with the hope to join their fellows already settled in ethnic communities in all three cities. But before that, they had to face the immigration officials:

“First, the muhajirin [emigrant] would face the immigration officials charged with determining their national origins, and as it turned out, these officials were often at a loss for how to categorize Ottoman immigrants.”³⁹⁰

In New York City, they were usually called “Turks”, originating from “Turkey in Asia”³⁹¹. In Brazil and Argentina, they were always designated as “Turcos”, a catch-all pejorative term referring to Arab, Egyptian, Persian, Armenian and Kurdish immigrants.³⁹² The main reason why Ottoman immigrants from Syria were rarely called “Syrians” as such is simple: they had left their homes as subjects of the Ottoman Empire. It is only later that they actually became Syrian, and they did so in America. Thus, before World War I, Ottoman immigrants from Syria were not distinguished from other Ottoman groups, such as Sephardic Jews or Armenian when arriving in Argentina. Denoting a geographical place of origin rather than a nationality or political identifier, the generic term “Turcos” conveyed the:

“Latin American penchant to oversimplify by way of grouping together under a single rubric, immigrants from various even conflicting regional, national and or/ethnoreligious backgrounds (...) [who had] documents issued by the Ottoman authorities, or [were] perceived as hailing from areas that may have been under them.”³⁹³

This restrictive categorization was challenged especially during World War I, which contributed to placing new political and social expectations on the shoulders of Syrian and Lebanese migrants, who wished to free the *Mashriq* from Ottoman control and to commit to the creation of an independent state. This represented a significant break since emigrants who had left the Ottoman Empire and who had been identified as Ottoman subjects before the war started to describe themselves as “Syrian” or “Lebanese” or “Arab” and worked to be also perceived as such.

³⁹⁰ Fahrenthold, S. D, *Making Nations in the Mahjar*, p. 11

³⁹¹ Gualtieri Sarah, 2009. *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Syrian American Diaspora* p. 77.

³⁹² Karam J. T., 2007 *Another Arabesque : Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Newliberal Brazil* p. 26; Jeffrey Lesser, 1999. *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, minorities and the Struggle for ethnicity in Brazil*. P. 58

³⁹³ Klich, I. 1996. « Introduction « Turco » immigrants in Latin America”, p. 4

The lack of complete and detailed statistics prevents us from precisely quantifying the Syrian and Lebanese migrations towards Argentina. It is however established that the year 1890 marks the beginning of the most important migration wave of this group and that by 1950, Syrians and Lebanese' entries widely decreased.³⁹⁴ According to migratory surveys, 672 "Turcos" entered Argentina between 1871 and 1880, and 3557 between 1881 and 1890. When comparing the information given by the 1895 census which stipulated that there were 876 "Turcos" in the whole republic, with Schamun's assessment who considered that, during the same period, 850 Syrians (including Lebanese) were based in Argentina, one becomes aware that Syrian and Lebanese constituted the large majority of the Ottoman migrants. Indeed, according to the data above, only 3% of the "Turk" population of the country would have corresponded to other Ottoman ethnic groups. From 1891 to 1900, the "Turcos" immigration in Argentina kept increasing, and from 1901 to 1910 the arrivals all the more proliferated as the year 1908 represented a shift. Indeed, the Young Turks movement consecrated the reestablishment of the 1876 constitution which was in favor of legal emigration. The number of entries therefore evolved, passing from 7.436 people in 1907 to 9.111 in 1908, 11.765 in 1909 and 15.478 in 1910. In the years 1910, a total of 61470 "Turcos" reached Argentina, with a record of 19.972 people in 1912.³⁹⁵ By 1914, as a direct consequence of the World War I, the number of entries started diminishing. And a few decades later, in the years 1940-1950, the establishment of a severe dictatorship in Argentina made Syrian and Lebanese migrants rather chose to settle in other South American countries such as Brazil, Uruguay or Venezuela.

Having analyzed what the "Turco" category contained and who was actually designated as such, it is worth investigating what this oversimplification concretely meant. Indeed, not only was the term "Turcos" a reductive amalgam, but also a discriminating status.

2) "TURCOS" : FROM STIGMATIZATION TO DISCRIMINATION

The generic term "Turco" which was first affixed to any immigrant reaching Argentina with an Ottoman passport, soon became pejoratively connoted and commonly appropriated as a stigmatizing designation.³⁹⁶ I consider necessary to question the societal factors that created and spread a depreciative image of "Turcos" in the minds of Latin America's elite:

³⁹⁴ Bestene, J. O. 1998 « L'immigration syrienne et libanaise en Argentine 1890-1950 », P. 16

³⁹⁵ Bestene, J. O. 1998, "L'immigration syrienne et libanaise en Argentine, 1890-1950 », p. 16

³⁹⁶ Abdelhawed A. 1991 "La inserción de los inmigrantes árabes en Argentina (1880-1980) : implicaciones sociales » p. 241

“Arabs, of course, were merely one group enmeshed in a larger “immigrant question” that plagued Latin American intellectuals, policy-makers and much of the urban middle class struggling to rise in the carefully constructed social hierarchy.³⁹⁷ The discussion of immigration generally came to the fore in the wake of independence and following the abolition of slavery as the elites simultaneously began encouraging the entry of Europeans while explicitly or inexplicitly attempting to ban undesirables, defined in many cases as “non-whites”. Arabs fell outside of the desirable category and thus posed a particular challenge because, while not banned from entering most Latin American countries until the late 1920s, they were also never expected to migrate. What placed Arabs in such a contradictory and perplexing role is that they were never officially designated as “non-white” since they were not from the Far east or Africa, and instead bore some resemblance to other Mediterraneans, the latter southern Europeans. Thus, by the early 1920’s, Latin America’s elites, who had expected desirable, and thus permitted, immigrants to transform and “whiten” culture suddenly discovered a number of unwelcome groups legally within their midst.”³⁹⁸

Although Arab migrants were not seen so negatively as to be banned, as Africans and Far Eastern Asians were in so many countries, they were however not as considered as Europeans by Argentina’s intellectual elite. In other words, the immigration boom existed in the imagination before it existed in reality, especially in the minds of political theorists and statesmen such as key members of Argentina’s Generation of 1837 intellectual movement- who held in common a vision of mass European migration as the panacea to their nation’s “barbarism” and underpopulation.³⁹⁹ The explicit expression of the state’s preference for European immigrants was however not accompanied by specific restriction or exclusion when it came to immigration policy during the height of Middle Eastern immigration to Argentina from 1880 to 1915.⁴⁰⁰ At that time, Middle Eastern migrants, neither defined as white nor black upon entering the country, were ambivalently perceived by an elite endowed with a myth of racial democracy and lacking pluralist ethnic perspective.⁴⁰¹ Indeed, for one thing, many of Argentina’s political leaders sought to elevate their country by Europeanizing and whitening it; for another, they sought to achieve it without ending the clear economic benefits that Arab peddlers provided. This tension “between economic desirability and social undesirability, meant that the public discussion of “Turcos” was heated and long lasting”.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁷ Schwartz, R. 1988. “Brazilian culture: Nationalism by Elimination”, London: New left Review, 167 pp. 77-90

³⁹⁸ Klich, I. 1996. “Introduction: “turco” immigrants in Latin America”, p. 6

³⁹⁹ Article 25 of Argentina’s 1853 Constitution stated in no uncertain terms that “the Federal Government will encourage European immigration” in particular, despite the constitution’s more generally supportive preamble which invited “all the men of the world with goodwill who wished to inhabit the Argentine land”. *Constitución de la confederación Argentina 1853*. Preamble and Part I, article 25.

⁴⁰⁰ Balloffet Lily Pearl, 2020. *Argentina in the global Middle East*, pp. 20-21

⁴⁰¹ Skidmore T. E., 1992. « Fact and Myth : Discovering a Racial Problem in Brazil”; Jan Fiola, 1990 “Race Relations in Brazil: A Reassessment of the “racial Democracy”, Thesis, “Occasional Papers, Program in Latin american studies,

⁴⁰² Klich I, 1996. “Introduction “turco” immigrants in Latin America” p. 8

“Turcos” immigrants were all the more rejected as they were both considered as non-desirable and non-profitable. Indeed, in the course of the nationalist backlash that peaked in 1910, the anti-Turco reaction was initially attributed to their overwhelming involvement as petty traders in a country that sought to base its development on agricultural labor.⁴⁰³ Contrary to other migrants who enrolled in farms and fields, Syrian and Lebanese migrants were yet, in the years 1860’s assimilated to traders, especially peddlers. According to Argentina’s immigration reports, between 1867 and 1909, 68,1% of the newcomers declared themselves as traders while only 8,3% registered as day laborer.⁴⁰⁴ In 1910, in his report on Argentina’s Syrian and Lebanese traders, Alejandro Schamun wrote that among a community of 53.473 persons, 6.900 were established traders (12,9%), 6.600 were working in association with traders (12,2%), and 15.000 were peddlers (28%). Therefore, 28.500 persons or 53,2% of the Syrians and Lebanese who had settled in Argentina were working as traders at that time.⁴⁰⁵

Early on, Ottoman Syrians therefore gained a reputation for tending to avoid entry into agricultural and industrial sectors and peddling turned to be a prototype of Arab’s economic integration in Argentina. The stereotype of the itinerant and pack peddlers- the *mercachifle*- became omnipresent in critiques leveled against Ottoman immigrants by national press organs. In 1900 for instance, Juan Alsina, director of immigration, lamented that:

“We have all seen them walk down our streets, dirty and ragged, dragging their wretched merchandise, which they offer from door to door. (...) Some move to towns in the provinces, while other risk going to the countryside for the same purpose. Most of these merchants are only agents of companies of the same nationality, which do business with a relatively large capital. The Syrian immigrant does not represent an efficient socio-economic factor (...). His role as a consumer is minimal and the part he plays as a producer is non-existent”⁴⁰⁶

In the first decade of the twentieth century, numerous editorials in Argentina’s national press, published similar critics, notably *La Prensa*, *La Nación* and *El Mercurio*.⁴⁰⁷ And the complaints about Turco peddlers also emanated from private citizens who were afraid of seeing their

⁴⁰³ See Solberg C., 1969. *Immigration and Nationalism*, pp. 132-57; Slatta, 1992 [1983]. *Gaucha and the Vanishing frontier*, pp. 178-179; A. Helg, 1990. “Race in Argentina and Cuba, 1880-1930” in R. Graham, ed. *The idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*.

Bertoni, 1981. “Una colectividad en formación”, pp. 12-13 ; Seluja, *Los libaneses en el Uruguay*, pp. 29-30, 44-47

⁴⁰⁴ Bestene, 1998. “L’immigration syrienne...” p. 20

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid

⁴⁰⁶ Alsina Juan, 1900. *Memoria de la dirección de Inmigración correspondiente al año 1899*.

⁴⁰⁷ See Abdelwahed, 1991. “La inserción de los inmigrantes árabes...” p 238 ; Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism*, 20,88,89 and Steven Hyland, 2001. “Arise from Deep Slumber: Transnational politics and competing Nationalisms among Syrian immigrants in Argentina, 1900-1922” *Journal of Latin American studies* 43:1, pp. 547-574

interest jeopardized by the Turcos' itinerant activities. The discriminations sustained by the press resulted in trivialized aggressions against Syrian and Lebanese immigrants who were not defended the way other citizens were. The diplomatic records issued during Arslan's⁴⁰⁸ five-year stint show that his intercession on behalf of a variety of complainants were almost wholly ineffective, and this was for reasons beyond the consul's control. The officials of the national and provincial administrations as well as the federal and provincial police forces neglected the protection of the Syrian and Lebanese. According to Ignacio Klich:

"Arslan's intervention covered various aspects of Syro-Lebanese disenchantment with Argentine authority, from the minor complaint against employers to the major allegations of negligence and collusion in matters as serious as murder. On the cases which the consul took up with the foreign-ministry on behalf of local Syro-Lebanese, 50 percent were related to the unsolved murders of Arabic speakers and the apparent impunity enjoyed by their assassins. Incident followed incident, and always the apprehension prevailed that the Turcos were second-class residents whose lives and death were really matters of indifference to the police and judiciary."⁴⁰⁹

Most of the time -if not always-, those guilty of crimes against Syrian and Lebanese persons eluded justice, as testified by the following board (Figure 2). Both persecuted by other citizens and discriminated by the police or the judiciary for their "Turco" identity, Syrian and Lebanese peddlers were lacking protection. In effect, "ambulant vendors were victims of aggression at the hands of those with whom they stayed: they were robbed and murdered".⁴¹⁰ And the frequent and common reiteration of those criminal acts was corroborated by the mention of such horror stories into Argentine literature which, even in a pasteurized way, lends support to the idea that they were much more generalized than suggested by the few cases Arslan had to deal with. Rejected by the host society for both their origin and occupation, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants went through a complex integrating process. They however represented the group who had the most important spatial dispersion and who quickly proceeded to mixed union, something that might have participated in introducing them to *mate*.

⁴⁰⁸ Head of the Ottoman consulate-general in Buenos Aires from 1910

⁴⁰⁹ Klich, I 1993. "Argentine-Ottoman relations...", p. 188

⁴¹⁰ Allard Michel, 1973. "Les Libanais en Argentine, de l'immigration à l'intégration", p. 9.

<i>Complainant or Victim</i>	<i>Address*</i>	<i>Date When Case Taken up</i>	<i>Origin of Complaint</i>	<i>Result of Intervention</i>
José Airut	Goya (Corrientes)	Dec. 16, 1910	Judiciary	Unjust. complaint
Hussein Ibrahim	City of Buenos Aires	Mar. 1911	Employer	Unjust. complaint
Salomón Abraham	Pehuajó (Bs. As.)	Apr. 25, 1911	Police	Enquiry ordered
Emilio & Pedro Jorge	Campo Tipán (Catamarca)	May 3, 1911	Judiciary	Unjust. complaint
José Laquin	Victoria (Entre Ríos)	May 20, 1911	Police	Unjust. complaint
Arab community	Villa María (Córdoba)	May 20, 1911	Police & Judiciary	Rejected
Jacinto Almeida	Unknown	May 30, 1911	Unknown	Unknown
Miguel Besteni	9 de Julio (Rio Negro)	June 7, 1911	Judiciary	Unjust. complaint
José Ali	Bahía Blanca (Bs. As.)	Dec. 24, 1911	Judiciary	Unknown
Julián Zuain	Choele-Choel (Río Negro)	Dec. 30, 1911	Police & Judiciary	Unjust. complaint
José Elia	Chacabuco (Bs. As.)	Aug. 15, 1912	Police	Unjust. complaint
Moisés Handal	San Juan (San Juan)	Nov. 13, 1912	Judiciary	Unknown
Feiz Kreidy	Villa Elisa (Bs. As.)	Dec. 28, 1913	Police & Judiciary	Unjust. complaint
Ottoman community	Concarán (San Luis)	Nov. 16, 1914	Police & Judiciary	Unjust. complaint

* Name of province/national territory in parentheses.

Source: AMREC.

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Figure 2: Summary of Interventions by Ottoman Consul General between 1910 and 1915

⁴¹¹ Klich I., 1993. "Argentine-Ottoman relations..." p. 190

3) SYRIAN AND LEBANESE PEDDLERS' ENCOUNTER WITH *MATE*

When reaching Argentina, European migrants usually settled in three main poles which were the city of Buenos Aires, the province of Buenos Aires and the province of Santa Fe. Although a few Syrian and Lebanese established themselves there too, the community was however far less concentrated than other groups and rather tended to enter remote rural regions throughout the whole Argentinian territory. Between 1895 and 1914, "Turcos" were the migrants who had the most uniform spatial distribution.⁴¹² Such a repartition was due to several factors, notably the fact that this group was part of a belated immigration wave: the lack of opportunities in the Littoral region drove Syrian and Lebanese migrants to seek for a better conjuncture in the interior. Indeed, the absence of competition in regions distant from the Littoral's effervescence, and where foreign migrants had hardly penetrated, allowed "Turcos" to trade more easily and to succeed in climbing the social ladder more quickly.

It is worth noting that the Syrian and Lebanese migrants' dispersion throughout the whole territory was rendered possible by the concomitant development of Argentinian railroads which encouraged mobility. In the late nineteenth century, the railroad boom indeed represented a reorganization of rural space part of Argentina's centralizing and modernizing program, which was concurrent with the boom in international migrations to the country. The mobility of Syrian and Lebanese must therefore be examined in tandem with the history of transportation technology in Argentina. Between 1857 and 1920, the Argentine rail system grew from 10,000 to 47,000 kilometers of track⁴¹³ and by 1914 the railroads transported annually 72 million passengers, 10 million tons of cereals and 5 million tons of livestock.⁴¹⁴ By the mid-twentieth century, Argentina had the most extensive railroad system in Latin America⁴¹⁵ and new towns were soon established around the train stations:

"business prospects often depended on the growth of new markets and populations clustered around rail line hubs. Many middle eastern families strategically based their settlement on the path of the railroad, at times even setting up shop beyond the end of a rail line in the hopes that the line would extend"⁴¹⁶

In the vast landscape of Argentina's provinces, the development of a rail system accompanied the migration of Middle Eastern immigrants who then participated in shaping new towns where

⁴¹² Bestene, 1998. "L'immigration syrienne...", p. 19

⁴¹³ Ford A. G. 1958 "Capital exports and growth for Argentina, 1880-1914" *Economic Journal* 68:271, pp. 589-593

⁴¹⁴ Moya José, 1991. *Cousins and strangers : Spanish immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930*. p. 57

⁴¹⁵ Balloffet, 2020. *Argentina in the Global Middle East*, p. 33

⁴¹⁶ Balloffet, 2020. p. 37

they could establish themselves as traders. The confrontation of the drawing of Argentinian railroads with Middle Eastern association nodes, proves how intertwined the boom in technology and the spatial dispersion of “Turcos” were (Figure 3).

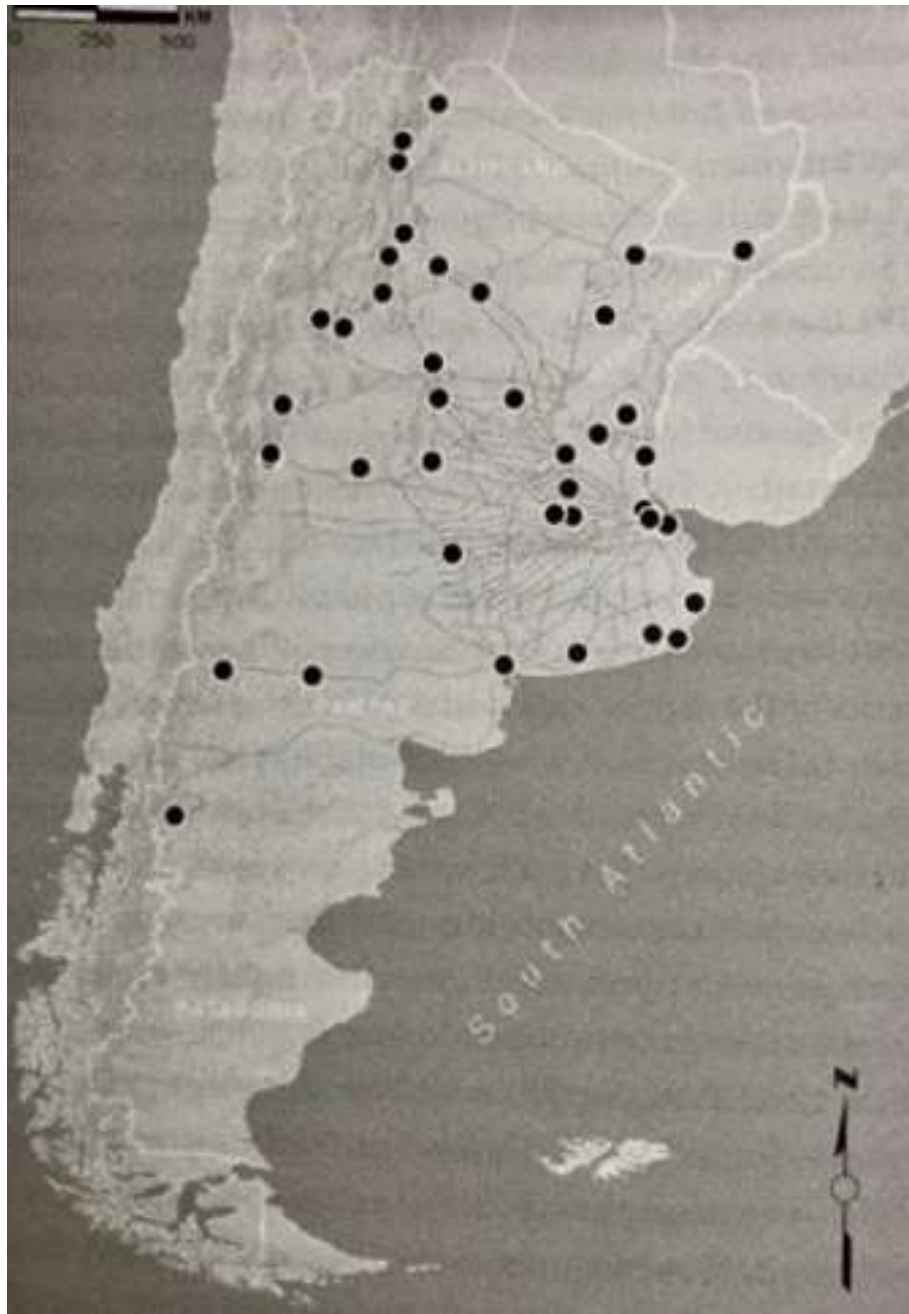


Figure 3: Argentine railway system and Middle Eastern associational nodes by 1940.

⁴¹⁷ Data source: Cartographic rendering based on “Mapa de ferrocarriles de la Rep. Argentina” (Buenos Aires: Dirección General de Ferrocarriles, 1931). Mapoteca, Biblioteca Nacional. In Balloffet, 2020. p. 46

Moving up to the end of the trainlines crisscrossing the country, the early generations of Arab immigrants settled sparsely populated, remote region of the Argentine map. In the case of rugged areas such as the Gran Chaco, Middle Eastern migrants made their way overland to settle in small villages where:

“They opened dry goods shops and general and grocery stores and they established itinerant vending routes that sustained the inhabitants of these rural spaces. They served rural communities-creole, immigrant and Indigenous- and provided them with modest links to consumer culture, in addition to offering basic subsistence provisions for purchase.”⁴¹⁸

I argue that the early connection of Turco peddlers with inhabitants of remote rural spaces might have participated in introducing them to *mate*. Indeed, at the end of the 19th century, although liberal politicians sought to eradicate *mate* which they considered a backward custom, the ritual however remained strongly implemented in Argentina’s rural provinces.⁴¹⁹ While big cities like Buenos Aires rejected *mate* for its indigenous roots, little towns’ populations kept passing the gourd around. And since Middle Eastern peddlers “served rural communities-creole, immigrant and indigenous”, they had surely been more exposed to *mate* than the migrants who had settled in places deemed more “civilized”⁴²⁰.

In addition to geography, I consider that exogamy played a major role in spreading the custom of drinking *mate* among “Turcos” immigrants. Indeed, when analyzing the national census of 1895, 1914 and 1960 as well as migratory surveys, one notices that the ration of men to women among Syrian and Lebanese migrants was far bigger than the one of other groups, as shown by the following table (Figure 4). In 1895, the masculinity index (ration of men to women in a community) was of 335 men for 100 women and in 1914 it passed to 428 men for 100 women. One can deduct from this data that Syrian and Lebanese migrants adopted exogamic behaviors by sealing unions with Argentine women. I argue that those mixed unions must have played a role in making Middle Eastern adopt *mate*. Indeed, if they could encounter the beverage in the rural provinces they settled in, I think that they might have been mostly initiated to *mate* ceremony by the Argentine women they married. In the same way as Guaraní indigenous women transmitted the drink to the settlers who espoused them⁴²¹, Argentine women might have transmitted *mate* to the Syrian and Lebanese migrants who lived

⁴¹⁸ Balloffet, 2020. p. 40

⁴¹⁹ Cf “*mate* and nationalism” in Chapter 5 of this thesis

⁴²⁰ According to Sarmiento, rural landscape was synonymous with barbary whereas cities were hosting civilization, see Chapter 4

⁴²¹ Cf Chapter 2 of this thesis

with them. As a cultural contact zone, the mixed home once again constituted a place where *mate* was both infused and diffused.

Tableau 5 - Indices de masculinité. Recensements de 1895, 1914 et 1960

Nationalités	1895	1914	1960
		99	97,3
Argentins	95	161	103,6
Espagnols	189	124	79,4
Français	148	171	127,4
Italiens	179	142	111
Russes	121	-	147,5
Polonais	-	-	125,7
Turcos	335	428	174,8
Libanais	-	-	215
Sirios	-	-	119,8
Total étrangers	172	172	100
Total général	111	115	

Source : Censos Nacionales 1895, 1914 y 1960

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Figure 4: Table of the 1895, 1914 and 1960 Census' male ratio

Having questioned how Syrian and Lebanese immigrants might have grown accustomed to *mate*, it is worth noting that the beverage must have also represented a useful intermediary in their commercial activities. Memories of the “Turco” peddler’s archetype in Argentina’s countryside appear sporadically in the writings of those who lived in or traveled through these places. Miguel Yapur for instance, a Syrian Journalist speaking on behalf of his community, portrayed the *mercachifle* as someone who “populates with his exoticism and strength the extensive plains of the *patria*. He climbs the higher mountains to bring [his wares] to even the most humble ranches in the *sierras*. (...) with his pack hoisted on his shoulder: he travels to the most remoted regions of the country”⁴²³. Similarly to the *gaucho* who is depicted as a brave man travelling through infinite desert, the peddler is there presented as an

⁴²² The table lists the male ratio among the Argentinians, Spanish, French, Italians, Russians, Polish, Turkish, Lebanese and Syrians. Bestene, 1998 « L’immigration syrienne... » p. 20

⁴²³ Yapur M. A, 1933. *Figura simbólica y digna de respeto : « el mercachifle » : su influencia en el progreso de la Nación argentina*. Tucumán : sociedad sirio-libanesa de Tucumán

adventurous pioneer. Although *mercachifles* might have taken *mate* as company in the course of their expeditions, the way *gauchos* did, I argue that *mate* must have also constituted a useful connecting tool for “Turcos” peddlers. Indeed, when approaching someone or trying to negotiate with him, peddlers must have resorted to *mate* as a mean to start a conversation and hopefully do some business:

“rural people are the most inclined to *mate*, and numerous Syrian, Lebanese and Israelian peddlers who while offering a *mate* to their clients, actually seek to get closer to them and have them buy more things”.⁴²⁴

Strategic tool which helped peddlers to come in contact with their potential clients, *mate* constituted a good intermediary through which *mercachifles* could initiate commercial negotiation. Having said that, it is now worth investigating what made Syrian and Lebanese migrants assimilate *mate* to the point of then exporting it to their home countries. Indeed, the spatial distribution and the occupation of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants help in understanding how “Turcos” encountered and made use of *mate*, but it does not explain the intimate relationship they came to develop with that drink.

⁴²⁴Oberti 1979. *Historia y folklore del mate*, p. 321

CHAPTER 7

WHAT MADE SYRIAN AND LEBANESE IMMIGRANTS ASSIMILATE *MATE* IN ARGENTINA? BETWEEN PERFORMED IDENTITY AND TRANSFERRED NOSTALGIA

In the same way as all the immigrants who settled in Argentina from the mid-nineteenth century, Syrian and Lebanese encountered and adopted the tradition of drinking *mate* when establishing themselves in the country. However, what is interesting in their case is that this assimilation went to the point of then exporting it back to their home country. Indeed, *mate*, following returned migrants, came to infuse part of the Middle East and is nowadays commonly recognized as a social drink in Syria and Lebanon. This raises a simple yet fundamental question: why did Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in particular appropriate *mate* to the point of then travelling back home with it? Although *mate* must have represented a way for Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to perform the Argentinian identity and legitimate their insertion, I consider that the practice of drinking *mate* particularly adhered to this group because the symbolism of its sharing echoed the one of the nargileh ceremony. In other words, *mate* both constituted a marker of belonging to the host country and an object on which nostalgia for the home country could be transferred. By drinking *mate*, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants could perform their insertion and revive the gathering they used to experience when smoking the nargileh. The following chapter will question *mate*'s appropriation by Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in light of the redefining of their identities. Doing so, I want to demonstrate that *mate* was a drink through which Syrian and Lebanese immigrants could at the same time manifest and experience various instances of belonging.

I. PERFORMING ARGENTINE IDENTITY

1) THE LEGITIMATION OF SYRIAN AND LEBANESE'S ARGENTINIDAD⁴²⁵

National identity is “always complicated, situational and historically contingent”⁴²⁶ but what made it particularly so in the case of Ottoman subjects was the fact that they “became” Syrian or Lebanese or Arab in a foreign space, and that there was quite often a disjuncture between the emigrants’ territorial origins and their professed national identity.⁴²⁷ Struggling to identify to a distant home country by experiencing nationalism abroad, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants also had to re-articulate their identity in the space where they had immigrated. Categorized as “Turcos” who were neither considered as white nor black, and defined as “non-European”, Syrian and Lebanese had to re-affirm their identity. “Doomed to the closest of non-nationality”⁴²⁸, they were identified as a diseased, perverse and ultimately threatening other, and therefore not only had to construct their identity but also to deconstruct what essentialized them.

From the 1880s through the 1930s, Argentine intellectuals such as Victor Mercante, Carlos Bunge, José Ramos Majía and José Ingenieros, influenced by the Ideas of Darwin, Comte and Spencer, wrote positivist works about Argentine society. Turning the “scientific” racism of positivism into a central force in Argentina’s politics and culture, they formulated a national identity which was based on the idea that non-Northern European immigrants were an inferior and contaminating presence.⁴²⁹ As Schneider put:

“The very notion of the melting pot, though apparently conveying the meanings of equality and homogeneity among immigrants and their descendants, also contained elements of an ideology of superiority of certain immigrants over others, and was based on a supposition that racial differences would account for social differences”⁴³⁰.

This notion of racial difference provided a means by which to easily denigrate Arab immigrants “regardless of whether it was their affluence and rising influence or their itinerant commerce

⁴²⁵ *Argentinidad* is a word conveying the idea of one’s assimilation of Argentina’s values and identity

⁴²⁶ Fahrenthold, 2014. *Making nation in the Mahjar*, p. 16

⁴²⁷ Khater, A. F. 2005 “Becoming ‘Syrian’ in America: A global geography of ethnicity and nation” p. 304-305. See also Gualtieri, S. 2009. *Between Arab and White* ; and David A. Gerber, Kathleen Neils Conzen et al. 1992. “The Invention of Ethnicity: a Perspective from the U.S.A.,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1, 3-41.

⁴²⁸ Molloy, S. “Too wilde for Comfort: Desire and ideology in Fin-de-siecle Spanish America” p. 45

⁴²⁹ Civantos C., 2006. *Between Argentines and Arabs : Argentine orientalism, Arab immigrants and the writing of identity*. p. 8

⁴³⁰ Schneider, A. 1996. “The two faces of modernity: concepts of the melting pot in Argentina”, *Critique of Anthropology* 16:2, p 173

street that was really the issue”.⁴³¹ And “Turcos” immigrants were for instance arbitrarily denied access to the services of the “immigrants’ hotel” that allocated Europeans immigrants accommodation and boards on arrival.⁴³² Regarding western European immigrants highly, Argentine intellectuals, at the turn of the twentieth century, generally viewed Syrian and Lebanese immigrants “with a dislike approaching disgust” and claimed that this group “could contribute nothing to the improvement of the mestizo”.⁴³³ Journalists fomented this defamation and bitter newspaper articles frequently condemned Syrians, as well as Jews and “Orientals” for their immoral and lazy nature. The stigmatizing representations propagated by the Argentine press and literature was however quickly fought against by Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals who worked to refute those clichés. In a context in which Syrian and Lebanese immigrants faced both a complex identification to their home country and a structural essentializing gaze from part of the host society, intellectuals attempted to re-present their group by reformulating their identity.

Jorge Sawaya, Amin Arsalan and Habib Estefano, among other Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals played a major role in the re-presentation of their group. Standing up against the depreciative discourses which discriminated Middle Eastern immigrants, they influenced the creation of numerous socio-cultural institutions and fomented the creation of specialized libraries as well as the publication of important books and the development of a prolific press.⁴³⁴ Their commitment however hardly changed the attitude of the host society towards “Oriental” migrants that they kept fearing, and in order to legitimize the place of the Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in Argentina, Arab Argentine writers sought to inscribe their blood in the very roots of Argentine nationalism, by theorizing on the figure of the Arab *gaucho*. In other words, instead of spending time in de-constructing the pejorative image put on Syrian and Lebanese to re-present them, they preferred to dissect the mere symbol of the *gaucho* in order to prove that Arab was the very basis of the “ser” (being) Argentine.

At a time in which “even when no longer existing as a social actor, the *gaucho* has continued to function as a potent national symbol, as a national character”, Arab Argentine writers, such as Hallard and Yasser, sought to legitimate their group’s Argentine identity by turning the long-linked figures of the Arab and the *Gaucha* into a genealogically fused Arab-*Gaucha*.⁴³⁵ Through

⁴³¹ Civantos C., 2006. *Between Argentines and Arabs...* p. 10

⁴³² Humphrey, M. “Ethnic History, Nationalism, and Transnationalism in Argentine Arab and Jewish Cultures”. In Klich and Lesser (eds.) 1998. *Arab and Jewish Immigrants in Latin America , Images and realities*. p 170

⁴³³ Solberg, C. 1970. *Immigration and Nationalism, Argentina and Chile 1890-1914*.p. 20

⁴³⁴ See *La Sabiduría Árabe*, José Guraieb, and *Aporte* by Juan Obaid.

⁴³⁵ Civantos C., 2006. *Between Argentines and Arabs...* p. 29

the appropriation and exacerbation of past associations of the *Gaicho* and the Arab in the work of canonical Euro-Argentine theorists like Sarmiento and Lugones, they aimed to inscribe themselves in the lineage of Argentina nationalism's building discourses while reverting it to their advantage:

“Sarmiento and Lugones comparison of Arabs and *gauchos* do not go unnoticed by Arab immigrants to Argentina. In a sort of inversion of Sarmiento's and Lugones's references to Arabs, the two Arab Argentine authors – Ibrahim Hallar and Juan Yaser- make use of the established writer's work as they write Arabs into the early history of the America.”⁴³⁶

According to Christina Civantos, both the history of Arab presence in Spain and the constitution of Argentina as a nation played a part in “the intertwined invocations and representations of the *gaucho* and his pampas, and the Arab and his oriental deserts in the works of Sarmiento and Lugones”⁴³⁷. As part of the Argentine Generation of 1837, Sarmiento had a very conflictual relationship to Spain. Not only did he consider that the political turmoil of the mid-1800s Argentina was due to its colonization by Spain, a backward country he saw as inferior and distinct from Europe, but he also saw Arabs as the erstwhile civilizing barbarian force in Spain. Thus, through textual images, Sarmiento used the “multivalenced figure of the Arab as a way of translating the difference-the cultural identity in formation- of Argentina” and quite often compared him to the *Gaicho* he considered as barbaric a figure.⁴³⁸

A few decades later, when Lugones wrote, the sentiment toward Spain had drastically evolved, and a strong spirit of hispanism participated in revalorizing Hispano-American heritage. At that time, the Argentine's search for a national tradition was influenced by “the Generation of 1898's search for the essence of the Spanish “being” focused on the notion of defining the national “race” or soul of Argentina”.⁴³⁹ Seeking to delineate Argentina's national soul, Lugones looked to the Spanish roots of the country and ended focusing on the Arabs of Spain, so as to give the Moorish element of Spanish cultural history a positive and primary position. This very web of relations between Spanish and Latin America's work-in-progress identities and the Arab images that operate therein, were appropriated by the Arab Argentine writer Ibrahim Hallar, to negotiate an Arab Argentine identity. Hallar's shaping of a Moorish *gaucho*, a concept later incorporated by Juan Yaser, another Arab Argentine writer, allowed him to “use the Argentine search for a national identity to formulate a stronger Arab Argentine identity”.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁶ Civantos C., *Between Argentines and Arabs...* p. 25

⁴³⁷ Ibid p. 25-26

⁴³⁸ Ibid p. 27

⁴³⁹ Ibid p. 26

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid p. 27

In his *El gaucho, su originalidad árabe*, written in 1962, Ibrahim Hallar incorporated Sarmiento and Lugones' argumentation as part of the supporting evidence for his claim that the Argentine *gaucho*, symbol of Argentine nationalism, arose out of the relationships between indigenous women and Arabs from Spain and who had arrived with the Spanish to conquer the New World. This assertion was then reaffirmed by Juan Yaser in *Herencia árabe en America* (1979) and *Fenicios y árabes en el genesis americano* (1992). Hallar and Yaser both relied on the similarities between Arabs and *gauchos* that Sarmiento and Lugones had exposed to narrate immediate heredity. Rather than a genealogy of Arabs intermingling with Spaniards who then carried Arab atavisms with them to Argentina, they argue that Arabs were present among the very first Spanish settlers. Moreover, they claimed that since Arabs were not under the jurisdiction of Spanish laws that prevented Catholic settlers to intermarry with Indigenous people, they were the actual fathers of the first *gaucho* born of their relationships with indigenous women. Thus, according to Hallar and Yasser's narratives, the infusion of Arab blood not only took place in the Iberian peninsula but also more recently and on Argentine territory itself and:

“The portrayal of Spaniards and Moores as a combined racial group could serve to further bolster the idea that Arabs are white” and Hallar's argumentation therefore manipulates Argentine notions of racial purity and patriotic miscegenation for the purpose of bolstering the position of Arab immigrants to Argentina from a variety of different angles. He undoes fear of ruining a preexisting racial purity, makes Arabs more white and European and say that Arabs immigrants helped to whiten Argentina”⁴⁴¹

By demonstrating that *gaucho* have Arab blood, Arab Argentine writers aimed to establish a pre-immigration Arab presence in Argentina able to dissociate Syrian and Lebanese immigrant from the negative image projected on them. The Arab *gaucho* therefore constituted a rhetorical figure that could legitimate Syrian and Lebanese identity by turning them into another kind of white immigrants who fully adopted Argentina as a new homeland. Inserting themselves into Argentina's past, Arab Argentine writers sought to create and claim a space for their group in its present.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ Civantos C., 2006. *Between Argentines and Arabs...* p. 66

⁴⁴² The literary figure of the Arab Gaucho did not remain only a textual assertion of identity but was also appropriated as a public image as testified by Carlos Menem's identification with Juan Facundo Quiroga, famous caudillo of La Rioja province, at the beginning of his political career. In the 1970s, “Menem consciously crafted his public image as a populist to invoke that of the famous caudillo of La Riojas' gaucho militias, Juan Facundo Quiroga, and then beginning in the late 1980s he rounded out his emerging neo-liberal persona of affluence and flashy fun through Arab dance and festivities” (Alsutany E. and E. Shohat, 2013. *Between The Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora*. The University of Michigan Press. p. 114.) During the first two decades of his political career (1970s and 1980's), as governor of La Rioja, Menem dressed like the local caudillo. He used to wear the regional *poncho* associated with *gauchos* and always sported the long hair and bushy sideburns (see picture above). His personal identification to Juan Facundo Quiroga even led him to call his elder son

2) THE PERFORMANCE OF ARGENTINE NATIONAL LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

Having analyzed how Arab Argentine writers legitimated Syrian and Lebanese immigrants' *argentinidad* by theorizing on the figure of the Arab *gaucho*, it is now important to investigate how this group concretely managed to insert itself in a society that rejected it. Although intellectuals succeeded in rooting the Arab blood in the national character of the *gaucho*, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants merely legitimized their belonging to Argentina by assimilating its language and mores. Hiding their ethnic specificities in order to better adhere to a society which discriminated against them, Syrian and Lebanese mimicked Argentina's people to be identified as part of them. I therefore argue that, in order to avoid stigmatization, Arab immigrants worked not to be noticed as different and were inclined to soon speak Spanish and drink *mate*, so as to perform the "real" Argentine.

The question of language is a preponderant one, since it constitutes an indicator of the immigrants' insertion into their host society. Regarding Syrian and Lebanese in Argentina, the Arab language was not transmitted anymore after the third generation, since in all communities, except of the Muslim one, the fourth generation is Spanish monolingual. In her article "Les immigrants arabes en Argentine, comportement du groupe envers sa langue d'origine », Estela Biondi-Assali establishes that in all the communities she has studied⁴⁴³, the first generation of immigrants developed adapting strategies and opted for the adoption of bilingualism in order to find a functional space in the host society.⁴⁴⁴ Learning Spanish was obviously necessary to integrate well. The fact that, yet at the second generation, the children born of mixed-marriage had Spanish as their mother-tongue without speaking Arab fluently shows how prevalent the national language was. The Arab language was only spoken by the first and second generations in the context of inter-ethnic relationships; when addressing someone who was not part of the community, they always spoke Spanish. Between the second and third generations, Spanish language was employed in the daily life exchanges while Arab had been turned into an emblem of the tradition and was only spoken with the forefathers as a sign of affection. This confirms Edwards assertion saying that: "the two aspects of language are separable - the communicative and the symbolic- and it is possible for the latter to retain

Carlos Facundo. Although Menem's sideburns participated in creating his populist image, by connecting him to traditional rural Argentina values, I consider that Menem might have performed this identity to downplay his "turco" lineage and highlight his authentically Argentine attributes.

⁴⁴³ Tucuman- La Angelita, Frias- La Plata, Ing Jacobaci,

⁴⁴⁴ Estela Biondi-Assali, 1998. "Les immigrants Arabes an Argentine... », P. 42

importance in the absence of the former".⁴⁴⁵ Arabic, although not used anymore to communicate, remained however a symbolic element of the group's identity. Syrian and Lebanese migrants inserted themselves into Argentine society by adopting its language and exclusively resorting to it in the communicative realm. By performing the national language, they externally manifested their assimilation and restrained their use of the Arab language to the *intimate* sphere in order not to be differentiated.

The exhibition of one's belonging to the host society through the performance of the national language was accompanied by the assimilation of Argentine literary discourse by Syrian and Lebanese writers. Not only was Spanish *performed* by Syrian and Lebanese people who wished to be identified as Argentine but also *articulated* in the way national discourses were:

"In the first decades of the twentieth century, the Syro-Lebanese who wrote novels in Spanish, rather than try to champion the place of Arabic in Argentina sought to reproduce or participate in the production of popular Argentine literary discourses. By writing texts that bear very few markers of the author's immigrant, Arabic-speaking backgrounds, on the one hand, they seem to distance themselves from Arabic culture, Arabic and the question of language in general. On the other hand by participating to the production and maintenance of correct Argentine speech and morals, they took partake in the configuration of the relationship between language and identity".⁴⁴⁶

In the realm of daily life interactions as well as in the one of literature, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants sought to have their ethnicity go unnoticed and resorted to the national language and its code to perform their integration. And not only did they speak like the "real" Argentine, but also tended to behave as such.

If the performance of sameness obviously presupposes the assimilation of one's language, it also relies on the imitation of one's gesture, and I consider that the adoption of the ritual of drinking *mate* by Syrian and Lebanese immigrants might have been part of their identification process. Moreover, I consider that although *mate* might have represented a means for immigrants to identify with their host country, it mostly constituted a marker of sameness through which they could manifest their integration.

The insertion of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in Argentina differed depending on the place where they had established themselves. In the city of Buenos Aires, the integration of early

⁴⁴⁵ Edwards J. 1985. *Language, society and identity*, p. 102

⁴⁴⁶ Civantos, *Between Argentines and Arabs...*, p ; 164

immigrants showed far more complicated than in Northern provinces of Argentina such as Tucumán, Santiago del estero, la Rioja, Catamarca or Jujuy, where opportunities abounded more. And it is worth noting here that the performance of Argentina's language and identity was only possible when immigrants had the financial means to do so. Indeed, according to Akmir Abdelwahed, there were three levels of social insertion in Buenos Aires. The first group was made of very poor immigrants who hardly spoke Spanish and were confined to the "barrio de los Turcos", located in the Reconquista street from 1880.⁴⁴⁷ The second one gathered enriched immigrants who wished to integrate into the Argentine society and worked for the creation of Arab institutions aiming to compensate the disrepute of "Turcos". As for the third group, it corresponded to the immigrants who arrived in Argentina just before World War I and who were generally literate and wealthy. They used to only interact with enriched Arabs who had passed from the "Barrio Turco" to aristocratic spheres, and whose main objective was to adopt the lifestyle and behaviors of Argentina's high class.⁴⁴⁸ In the Northern provinces of the country, there was not such a division, since immigrants there did not face any solid competition and could climb the social ladder in a quick and easy way. The common point between the city of Buenos Aires and rural Argentina remains that, wherever they are, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants who could economically and socially prosper all manifested the will to look like an Argentine. Indeed, in Salta and La Rioja for instance, "the Arab quickly started to wear *bombachos*⁴⁴⁹, ride horses in the criollo way and get accustomed to *mate*".⁴⁵⁰ In the big city of Buenos Aires too, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants willingly mimicked the attitude of the host society, as proved by the testimony of Amalia, daughter of Arab immigrants:

« On Sundays, my mother and my aunt found a huge pleasure in being driven around by car with their husbands in the park of Palermo. They did that to imitate Buenos Aires' high aristocracy. It was a real spectacle to see all those convertible cars, parked by the lake, with their drivers in uniform. Women, attached to their husband's arms, only wished to exhibit their hats and jewels. I could personally see that spectacle because my mother allowed me to accompany her on Sundays, like Porteñas did."⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁷ Poor Arabs peddlers used to live there in very bad conditions: " it was a single space, there were no rooms or beds. All the floor was covered with blankets. People basically rented part of the space, and the price varied in function of the space occupied. The one who slept on his back paid more than the one who slept on his side, since a back takes more space than a flank. And although having paid, people who arrived too late sometimes couldn't fit their body at all." Oral testimony reported by Abdelwahed : entrevista del autor con Sr. Yussef Karam. Buenos Aires. 17 Septiembre 1986. In Abdelwahed "La inserción de los inmigrantes árabes en Argentina... » p. 244

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid.* p. 245-246

⁴⁴⁹ The *Bombacho* was a specific Argentine pants which could be translated as baggy trousers or Knickerbockers.

⁴⁵⁰ Abdelwahed, "La inserción de los inmigrantes árabes... » p. 248

⁴⁵¹ Abou, Salim. 1978 *Le Liban déraciné. Immigrés dans l'autre Amérique*, p.368

Intrinsically linked to the *gaucho* and therefore to the “ser Argentino”, *mate* was part of all classes of the Argentine society, and I consider that in the same way as Amalia’s mother, in particular, sought to perform her integration into the host society by imitating the mores of women from Buenos Aires, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants, in general, performed their belonging to the nation by assimilating one of its most constitutive symbol. *Mate*, among other practices, constituted a social beverage through which immigrants could blend with the host society. As a gestural language shared across the whole Argentine territory, *mate* might have been an identity marker that Syrian and Lebanese immigrants adopted to be recognized as peers by Argentinian people. Adopting local customs to try getting rid of their pejoratively connoted status, the so-called “Turcos” must have drunk *mate* to claim and perform a desired sameness.

II. QUESTIONING *MATE*’S APPROPRIATION BY SYRIAN AND LEBANESE IMMIGRANTS IN LIGHT OF THE NOTION OF “TRANSFERRED NOSTALGIA

1) APPROACHING THE *MATE* CEREMONY AS A SUBSTITUTION FOR THE NARGILEH ONE

Beyond the fact that the ritual of drinking *mate* must have enabled Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to perform the Argentine identity in order to be perceived as well integrated into a host society which discriminated them for their origins, I consider that it might also have represented a practice through which they could experience a togetherness similar to the one fomented by the nargileh ceremony. In other words, the act of drinking *mate* can, on the one hand, be perceived as a performance of sameness in the eyes of the Argentine society, and on the other hand as a remembrance of nargileh’s resembling togetherness in immigrants’ home countries. I will base this argument on the notion of “transferred nostalgia” which I borrowed from Christina Civantos, who employed it when analyzing how Arab Argentine writers used central Argentinian themes to translate questions that were part of the Arab world. According to the author, the place of women in society was a central theme in both the Argentine society and the Arab world, however:

“Rather than center on morality and the production of national subjects though, the main thrusts of the discussion in the Arab world surrounded the modern (European) education of women and the evils of arranged marriages. Thus, while these writers were attempting to participate in Argentine culture through their choice of language (Spanish versus Arabic or French), of rhetoric and of themes, the rhetoric and themes that they employed resonate with discourses found in Arabic literature at that time. By writing about women in society and questions of morality, but doing so in the way

Argentines were, they can be understood as “translating” themselves into Argentines. While they suppressed differences that would point to the nature of their texts as cultural translations, they used discourses that were familiar to them to insert themselves into the cultural life of the nation to which they had immigrated. In addition, by taking up the nostalgic Argentine mode of writing they translated or shifted from one form of nostalgia to another. Nostalgia is a feeling of longing that arises in response to a real or imagined spatial, temporal, and/or cultural disjuncture. Instead of focusing on the rupture and loss inherent in immigration, these Arab Argentines focused on the rupture and loss perceived by Argentines; in their texts nostalgia for the Arab world seems to be converted into the current nationalist nostalgia for “lost” values. Perhaps Arslan, Achem and Khury transform immigrant nostalgia into nationalist nostalgia in order to participate in mainstream Argentine culture.”⁴⁵²

Not only did Syrian and Lebanese immigrants “translate” their self in the Argentine language but also in its practices. Indeed, I consider that in the same way as Arab Argentine writers who “translate themselves into Argentine” by transferring personal issues on Argentine central themes in literature, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants must have found in *mate* a way to experience their nostalgia for nargileh while “shifting” from one form of socializing to another one. And by transferring their nostalgia for nargileh on a practice that was part of “mainstream Argentine culture”, they could reenact similar togetherness without being noticed. Indeed, since Syrian and Lebanese immigrants suffered from stigmatization, the practice of the nargileh would surely have been badly connoted, and by “translating” its symbolism on an appropriated national drink, they could revive their loss for past gatherings by re-articulating them under another form. Beyond the changing object, the same feeling remained, and by taking *mate* as a substitute for nargileh, immigrants could intimately experience a nostalgia that, “in the eyes of their new countrymen, benefits their new homeland and strengthens their links to it, instead of dividing their loyalties”.⁴⁵³

Although constituting a way to integrate by mimicking the host society, *mate* must have enabled Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to bring back the familiar practice of smoking the nargileh by “disguising” it into the *mate* ceremony. Doing so, they could connect to their roots without being discriminated against. According to Ottoman sources, the tradition of smoking the nargileh was introduced in the Middle East by British sailors staying in Turkish and Egyptian harbors between 1599 and 1606.⁴⁵⁴ This practice then quickly spread across the whole Empire, something that was not well regarded by political and religious authorities which even came to officially prohibit it. Indeed, yet in 1612, sultan Ahmet I temporarily prohibited it, and after a huge fire which burnt a fifth of the city of Istanbul in 1633, Murad IV established that anyone

⁴⁵² Civantos, 2006. *Between Argentines and Arabs...* p. 165

⁴⁵³ Civantos, 2006. p. 178

⁴⁵⁴ François Véronique, 2012 « Objets du quotidien à Damas à l'époque ottomane », Bulletin d'études orientales, tome LXI, IFPO : <https://journals.openedition.org/beo/1038> , Accessed on March 22, 2022

who would be seen smoking would be killed. Tobacco's consumption remained forbidden until 1720, date after which it was officially legalized thanks to the fatwa edited by sayh 'Abd al-Nābulusī in Damas. The *General board of the Ottoman Empire*, written by M. d'Ohsson, testifies of the wide adoption of tobacco by the whole society, yet in the second half of the XVIIIth century:

« Tobacco is of universal use among the Ottomans. Given over to this habit from childhood, there is hardly a Muslim who does not smoke six, ten and even twenty pipes a day. Luxury is combined with voluptuousness: people put as much research into the beauty of the pipes as into the quality of the tobacco. The stems are usually made of jasmine, rosebush, hazel or cherry tree, and are decorated with gold or silver. They are always attached an amber, or coral mouthpiece, very artistically worked. Some people have Persian pipes, which are called nargileh. The common people have only very simple ones, which are more or less long. The nuts that they call lulé, where tobacco is burnt, are made of fine clay prepared with a particular art: there are even some that are golden. As it is polite for them to offer pipes to all those who come to their houses, one sees in the anterooms and even in the salons of the wealthier, twenty, thirty, forty of these long pipes arranged in notches in the shelves made for these objects. Smoking is so common that those who are most devoted to it never leave their homes without taking their tobacco and pipe with them. They put the tobacco in a small silk or satin bag, and the pipe, divided into two or three pieces that are reassembled with silver screws, is enclosed in a cloth case attached to the belt.»⁴⁵⁵

The consumption of tobacco in general, and that of nargileh specifically, spread “universally” throughout the empire and turned to become an essential part of Ottoman sociability. Indeed, “common people” as well as the elite were used to welcome anyone who would enter their house by “offering” them a pipe. Intrinsically linked to coffee, the pipe became a central element of Ottoman hospitality. In 1883, Edmond About, travelling to Istanbul at the occasion of the inauguration of the Orient-Express line, reported that:

“The çubukçu of the house would walk towards you with a long pipe in his hand. He would carefully measure the distance, place a small copper or silver tray on the ground, place the pipe bowl on it, and then skillfully make an arc with the amber tip to bring it just to your lips. Once this work done, he would put the coal on the pipe if he had not started by smoking it himself at the doorway. A whole staff was needed for the pipes in the houses that received a lot of people.»⁴⁵⁶

Offered to the guests as a sign of welcoming, the nargileh was enshrined in a ceremony which required time and preparation. Part of wealthy houses where specific employees were in charge of its maintenance, as well as of any coffeehouse, the nargileh was a vector of

⁴⁵⁵ D'Ohsson, M. 1791, *Tableau général de l'Empire Othoman*, 7 vol. p. 88.90

⁴⁵⁶ About Edmond, 1884 *De Pontoise à Stamboul* quoted in Servantie A., 2016 « Notes sur les objets du tabac dans l'empire Ottoman » : <https://ihcercle.hypotheses.org/258> , Accessed on March 22, 2022

gathering omnipresent in the Ottoman society. Thus, it would have not been surprising that, when travelling to the Americas, Syrian and Lebanese migrants would have taken with them such a central object. However, sources barely mention the presence of the nargileh in Argentina in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and I consider that, constituting an external sign of one's "Turk" identity, the nargileh must have been quickly forsaken by immigrants who instead appropriated *mate*. The testimony reported by Abdelwahed confirms how the enactment of Middle Eastern traditions in Argentina participated in nourishing stigmatization, and I therefore argue that for the sake of keeping their ethnicity unnoticed as much as possible, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants must have conformed to their host country's sociability. In 1986, Yusef Mahrde remembered that:

« When we returned from the field, we would gather at the house of the supplier who would invite us to a banquet. We would eat "kepe neye", a typical Siro-Lebanese dish made of raw minced meat, "laban" and we would drink "arak", a Turkish aniseed while smoking the nargileh. Some of us sang, others played drums or danced with knives, Syrian style. All this attracted the attention of the neighbors, and so it became popular that we, the "Turks", eat raw meat made of children. »⁴⁵⁷

« Turcos », as non-European immigrants, were perceived as a "threatening other" by Argentine society and had therefore their practices interpreted and demonized. Hence the fact that their habit to consume raw meat converted them into "children's eaters". I think that facing such common fabulations, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants must have put aside some of their practices, notably the one of ostentatiously smoking the nargileh. It does not mean however that they got rid of the symbolics that were inherent to it. On the contrary, they replaced it elsewhere, so as to not "draw our neighbors' attention" while internally feeling the same. Part of the sociability of the Ottoman people the way *mate* was for the Argentine one, the nargileh left its trace in the ritual it had been transferred in. And I consider that a comparative study of both the symbolism and of the aesthetics of *mate* and nargileh, helps apprehending that their resemblance goes far beyond the fact that they were two collective social rites.

⁴⁵⁷ In Abdelwahed, "La inserción de los inmigrantes árabes p. 239

2) A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF *MATE* AND NARGILEH'S SYMBOLISM AND AESTHETICS

What might Syrian and Lebanese immigrants have intimately felt when appropriating the ritual of drinking *mate*? What was at play beyond the very repetition of a local custom? To what extent is *mate*'s symbolic charge a translation of that of the nargileh? Which sameness is experienced in a different yet echoing ceremony? *Mate* and nargileh both as objects and practices share a lot of common points, and I argue that Syrian and Lebanese immigrants assimilated *mate* to the point of bringing it back to their home countries because it might have revived the former practice of the nargileh they had deeply internalized (Figures 1 and 2). Thus, *mate* could somehow have adhered to Middle Eastern immigrants' socio-cultural background and could easily constitute a familiar, although foreign, social rite.



Figure 1: Men drinking *mate* at the beginning of the 20th century in Argentina

⁴⁵⁹ Archivo General de la Nación, República Argentina : <https://www.archivogeneral.gov.co>



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France 460

Figure 2: Ottoman men smoking the nargileh in Constantinople, early 20th century

To begin with, *mate* and nargileh are two collective practices, which are articulated around the passing of a pipe or of a straw from one person to another. The promiscuity and proximity generated by the two ceremonies are similar since they both presuppose that the *mate*, as well as the nargileh, circulate from mouth to mouth. In his book, *Le monde du narguilé*, Chaouachi asserts that:

“We insist on the collective form of the practice of the hookah, although this last one is sometimes individual. However, even under this aspect, the use is an expectation of the one who will come to listen and share.»⁴⁶¹

In the same way as *mate*, the nargileh is associated with collective consumption, even when drunk alone. Indeed, nargileh’s individual use must be understood as “the wait of the one to come”, and as seen in Chapter 5, the same situation occurs with *mate*’s individual consumption. Indeed, according to Viviana Chamorro Urbieta, when someone drinks *mate* alone, he is never alone, since the drink always evokes the absent.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶⁰Fasc. 3, f.14. Constantinople. Café turc/ Sebah et Joaillier in Boulanger, L. (Eds.) *Album universel*. Paris. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84789292/f76.item.r=nargileh>

⁴⁶¹ Chaouachi, K. 2002. *Le monde du narguilé*. p. 62

⁴⁶² Cf Chapter 5 of this thesis, interview Viviana Chamorro Urbieta, October 26, 2020

Far from only constituting two look-alike collective rituals, *mate* and nargileh share a resembling symbolism since they are two egalitarian social rites, from a religious as well as a social and gendered points of view. Indeed, the consumption of *mate* and nargileh include all classes of society, and this was already the case under the Ottoman empire or under the colonial order in Latin America, two systems known to be highly hierarchical. Regarding the absence of any confessional differentiation in nargileh's use, Kamal Chaouachi notes that:

“Since always, the nargileh is practised by individuals of any spiritual obedience without one can say that there is a Christian, Jewish or Moslem hookah. Turks, Moors, Arabs, Christians and Jews all met in the same cafes to smoke hookah»⁴⁶³

As for its trans-class agency he asserts that “the practice of smoking the narguileh has established itself in the whole society, regardless of classes. This overcoming or ignorance of social boundaries has given some the illusion of a “classless” society in the Ottoman empire». ⁴⁶⁴ The same report was given by Juan Carlos Garavaglia regarding *mate*'s use under the Spanish Empire in the New world: « Not only the rich master of Indios of Salta, but also the minor from Potosi, the wealthy merchant of Lima, and the farmer of Quito are fervent consumers of *mate*. Sources attest of *mate*'s peculiar social and ethnic diffusion»⁴⁶⁵. It is worth noting here that *mate* and nargileh's propensity to penetrate all classes of highly compartmented societies, was not well received by political authorities. In South America as well as in the Middle East, *mate* and nargileh were respectively prohibited: on the one hand, Sarmiento, among others, was afraid of the social diffusion of a drink he considered barbaric, and aimed at erasing its consumption in Argentina in the nineteenth century,⁴⁶⁶ on the other hand Mûrad IV, perceived the nargileh as a pernicious practice which transgressed the boundaries between social classes and sought to prohibit it.⁴⁶⁷

Last but not least, *mate* and nargileh consumption are similarly non-gendered. The memoirs of the Persian princess Taj-Al Saltana revealed that women used to spend a lot of their time smoking the nargileh.⁴⁶⁸ Moreover, at the turn of the twentieth century, high class Turkish women liked to be photographed with their nargileh, which was always part of mundanities (Figures 3 and 4).

⁴⁶³ Chaouachi, K. 2002. p. 63

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, K., 2002. p. 63

⁴⁶⁵ Garavaglia, J.C. 1983. p. 40, cf Chapter 2 of this thesis

⁴⁶⁶ Cf Chapter 5 of this thesis

⁴⁶⁷ Saraçgil, A. “L'introduction du café à Istanbul (XVI-XVII siècles) » in Desmet-Grégoire H. *Cafés d'Orient revisités*, pp. 25-38

⁴⁶⁸ Taj Al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to modernity; 1884-1914*. Pp. 73-76



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Figure 3 : Women in Constantinople, late 19th century

⁴⁶⁹ Women in Constantinople, post card late 19th century : <https://ihcercle.hypotheses.org/258>



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Figure 4: Woman smoking the nargileh in Smyrne, 1890.

⁴⁷⁰ Rubellin, Femme au narguilé, Smyrne, Turquie. 1890 : <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/4721819-rubellin-femme-au-narguile--->

According to Carla Coco: «outside as well as inside the house, men and women smoke, from their earliest childhood, the long pipe and the hookah. Pastries, sorbets, coffees and tobaccos are the necessary ingredients for long conversations »⁴⁷¹. In the case of *mate*, its consumption was also both feminine and masculine, and women were even considered the mistresses of the ceremony. Indeed, as seen in Chapter 2, women were the ones in charge of orchestrating the circulation of *mate* among the guests during high-class receptions.

Presenting comparable symbolisms as two social rituals which were inclusive from a religious, social and gendered points of view, and inscribed in a similar gesture, since they both required a circular movement, *mate* and nargileh also served political purposes. Indeed, while *mate* was turned into an Argentine official national symbol, nargileh tends to be more and more associated to an Arab identity. In a world which is in the process of uniformization, *mate* and nargileh are instruments through which cultural identities are reaffirmed. But I consider that beyond the various identities that are nowadays projected onto *mate* and nargileh, both practices recall a togetherness that precedes and overpasses later identifications. Rather than expressing a national marker, they sustain community by infusing all the people who take part in the ceremony with a same feeling of belonging.⁴⁷² Being two performative experiences through which the individual de-centers to enter a group he merges with, the *mate* and the nargileh ceremonies first and foremost deploy a feeling of wellbeing together. And the specific conviviality that is part of the two ceremonies, resides in the fact that the circulation of the pipe or of the straw, places *mate* and nargileh at the center of a gift and counter-gift dynamics in which speech and time are shared in a ludic mode.

The comparison of *mate* and nargileh's symbolisms, which share a lot of common points, legitimizes the hypothesis that Syrian and Lebanese immigrants might have found, in *mate*, a way to reactivate a feeling they could have experienced while sharing a nargileh. I argue that this successful transfer was not only due to the meaning attached to both rituals but also to the closeness of the aesthetics of *mate* and nargileh observed as objects. Indeed, surprisingly enough, *mate* and nargileh somehow look alike.

The word "nargileh" finds its origin in the Persian word "nargil" which literally means "coconut", a designation that conveys the idea that nargileh was originally made of the calabash of the coconut its name is derived from. Interestingly, the same phenomenon occurred in the case of *mate*. Indeed, the word "*mate*", which now both designates the drink and the calabash it is infused in, originates from a Queschua word signifying "calabash"⁴⁷³. Therefore nargileh and

⁴⁷¹ Chaouachi, K. 2002 p. 67

⁴⁷² Cf "*Mate*, a performative experience", in Chapter 5 of this thesis

⁴⁷³ Cf Chapter 1 of this thesis

mate were both originally made of calabashes and the following pictures show the curious resemblance noticeable when confronting various versions of those objects (Figures 5 to 13).



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Figure 5: Nargileh stove made out of a coconut



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Figure 6: *Mate* calabashes

⁴⁷⁴ India, coconut hookah <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/14307741-an-indian-islamic-mughal-coconut--->

⁴⁷⁵ <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/17140251-cinq-tasses-a-mate-en-calebasse--->



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Figure 7: Silvered *mate*



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Figure 8: Silvered and golden nargileh

Both originally shaped in calabashes, *mate* and nargileh were also later given a similar function as objects. Indeed, since they both manifested the capacity to penetrate all classes of society as social rites, they quickly became, as objects, two physical surfaces on which distinctions could be inscribed and exhibited. Likewise, the elites of the Spanish colonial order or of the Ottoman empire, although consuming the same product-*mate* or tobacco- as lower classes, could reaffirm their status through the appearance of the object in which they prepared that very product. Hence the apparition of luxurious *mate* cups and nargileh which, decorated with gold, silver and precious stones, became concrete status marker. Turning to become mere pieces of art, *mate* and nargileh were shaped by famous goldsmiths and silversmiths⁴⁷⁸, and their owners resorted to them to express their power. In the case of the nargileh for instance,

⁴⁷⁶ Argentina, 19th century <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/9892797-deux-mates-et-leurs-bombillas--->

⁴⁷⁷ Syria, late 19th century : <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/8272421-narguile-sur-piedouche-le-->

⁴⁷⁸ See Véronique François 2012 « Objets du quotidien à Damas à l'époque ottomane », and Oberti F., 1979. *Historia y Folklore del mate*.

the size of the hookah -pipe-, which could be one to four meters long, was an indicator of its owner's status.⁴⁷⁹



Figure 9: Pieces of nargileh



Figure 10: *Mates* and their *bombillas*

⁴⁷⁹ See; Gosse 2007 pp. 22,23 and 56; Simpson, 2009 p. 72

⁴⁸⁰ Nozzles of 19th century Ottoman nargileh : <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/16078913-embouts-de-narguiles-et-de-tuyaux-de-pipes-chibouk->

⁴⁸¹ <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/14318483-arts-de-la-table>



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Figure 11: Confronting 19th century *mate* and nargileh

⁴⁸² *Mate*, late 19th century. South America <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/4015468-calebasse-a-mate-et-une-bombilla--->

⁴⁸³ Nargileh, late 19th century. Turkey. <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/16953489-travail-d-orient-narguile--->

⁴⁸⁴ Ottoman hookah, late 19th century: <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/13159451-an-ottoman-silver-hookah-19th-20th-century>

⁴⁸⁵ *Mate*, 19th century, Argentina: <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/16196208-calebasse-tripode-a-mate-et--->



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Figure 12 : Silver nargileh and *mate*

⁴⁸⁶ Silver hookah, India 19th century: <https://www.pinterest.fr/pin/821555157030657339/>

⁴⁸⁷ Silver *mate*, Argentina 19th century: <https://www.silvercollection.eu/pagina229.html>

I consider that in addition to their common origins and to the similar function they were attributed to as objects that could embody status, *mate* and nargileh also physically look alike. The bowl on which the hookah is attached reminds one of *mate*'s shape. Both are drunk/smoked from a straw/pipe inserted or affixed (in)to the basis. And it is worth pointing out that *mate* and nargileh's similarities were even more striking when the nargileh's pipe was a rigid one.



Figure 13: *Mate* and nargileh, two resembling aesthetics

To conclude, I wish to elaborate on a last subtle comparison concerning the sound generated by the suction of the smoke and the sipping of the infusion. Indeed, in addition to showing similar symbolisms and resembling aesthetics, *mate* and nargileh also share the same typical bubbling noise. The sound that emanates from the nargileh when someone breathes in the smoke, is very similar to the one produced by someone sipping the last drops of the *mate* infusion. The equivalence of a sound might seem anecdotal, but I consider that in the case of the transfer of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants' nostalgia for nargileh on *mate*, it must have played an important role. Indeed, the bubbling sound might have directly connected immigrants to a sensory memory which might have made them even more inclined to assimilate *mate*.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸ *Mate*, XIX-XX: <https://picclick.fr/Ancien-Maté-en-argent-et-bombilla-Argentine-Pampa-122591387547.html>

⁴⁸⁹ Nargileh, XIX-XX: <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/14916659-un-chicha-ou-narguile-en-argent-et-bois-inde-19eme-2f20eme-siecle>

⁴⁹⁰ The linkages between the sensory aspects of *mate*, memory and identity would be worth investigating. Indeed, sensory anthropology which focusses on the role that sensorial perceptions (such

Along with the symbolism of a practice and the aesthetics of an object, the sound of bubbles must have helped to take back immigrants into an in-between, where drinking and smoking could fuse into a same sensation. I consider that this correspondence is all the more relevant as *mate* and nargileh somehow blur the limits between what is smoked and what is drunk. Indeed, regarding nargileh's consumption, it is commonly said in Arab that one "drinks" the nargileh's smoke⁴⁹¹; as for *mate*, it is a drink that is somehow consumed more like a smokable substance than like a beverage. With its metal straw similar to a pipe (Figures 14 and 15), and its collective circular consumption evoking the gathering proper to the nargileh or to the joint, *mate* could, in a way, be observed as an almost "smokable" drink.



Figure 14: Mouthpiece of a nargileh

as taste, smell and touch) and vivid experiences have in assisting remembrance of the past and structuring personal as well as cultural memory, might offer a good framework to better seize *mate*'s assimilation by Middle eastern immigrants. See for instance: Howes D. 2003. *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*; Korsmeyer C, ed. 2005. *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*; Stoller P. 1989. *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*; Sutton DE. 2001. *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory*; Ben-Ze'ev E. 2004. The politics of taste and smell: Palestinian rites of return. In *The Politics of Food*, ed. M Lien, B Nerlich, pp. 141–60 or Choo S. 2004. Eating *satay babi*: sensory perception of transnational movement.

⁴⁹¹ Chaouachi, 2002. *Le monde du narguilé...* p. 90 and Alain Servantie in « Les objets du tabac dans l'empire ottoman » https://ihcercle.hypotheses.org/258#_ftn7 , Accessed on March 22, 2022

⁴⁹² Nargileh mouthpiece : <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/1639208-embout-de-narguile-en-argent->



Figure 15: *Bombilla* (metal straw from which *mate* is sipped)

Mate's appropriation by Syrian and Lebanese's immigrants in Argentina laid at the junction of performing and remembering sameness. In both cases, I consider that *mate*'s ceremony constituted a practice immigrants could rely on, either to integrate or to articulate various and complementary feelings of belonging. The fact that *mate* turned to be part of Syrian and Lebanese's sociability in their very home countries proves the importance that immigrants granted *mate*, not only as a way to identify with their host country but also as a mean to foster self-identification.

⁴⁹³ *Bombilla* : <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/15517912-deux-bols-a-mate-en-calebasse--->

CHAPTER 8

FROM THE ARRIVAL TO THE APPROPRIATION OF *MATE* IN SYRIA AND LEBANON

I. *MATE'S* ROUTE FROM ARGENTINA TO SYRIA AND LEBANON

1) RETURNING MIGRANTS AND *YERBA MATE* EARLY IMPORTATION TO SYRIA AND LEBANON

According to Karpát, who gathered data from various Ottoman consular reports, most of the emigrants were determined to return to their home country after accumulating some money, "and a third of them did eventually return"⁴⁹⁴:

"In 1899 the ottoman consul in Marseilles reported that during the previous year a total of 29,763 emigrants had passed through that port, 7010 of whom were Syrians, 526 Armenians. Three years later the consul stated that 15 000 Syrians left the country annually to seek their fortunes in the New World and that of these 5000 returned home early."⁴⁹⁵

The number of Ottoman emigrants⁴⁹⁶ who did not settle permanently in the New World was substantial. The rate of return was unusually high as testified by Ruppín's statement who asserted that between 1912 and 1915, the port authorities in Beirut listed departures of 41.752 persons and arrivals of 27.868. As for Himadeh's figures, they show that in the period 1926-1933, the ratio of returns to departures ran from 30% to 60% annually.⁴⁹⁷ Antun Fares who was the publisher of *al-Mercad* in Marseille and who was in charge of providing the Ottoman government with information on Syrian immigrants, also estimated the ratio of returning emigrants at one-third of the departures. Thus, it seems fairly certain that roughly 400 000 Ottoman emigrants (200 000 Syrians) returned to their home-land. This would leave some 400 000 or more Syrian immigrants still in North and South America, a figure that, according to Karpát, corresponds with the total reported in the various sources.⁴⁹⁸

It is worth noting that even those who could not or did not want to come back to their home countries maintained ties with relatives who had remained in the Old World. Traffic between Syria and the Americas was endless, and visiting the family became one of the dominant motives for travel across the Atlantic. This mobility happened in both ways, on the one hand, emigrants were used to visiting their family in their home countries, and on the other hand,

⁴⁹⁴ Karpát, K. H. 1985 "The Ottoman emigration to America, 1860-1914 p. 179

⁴⁹⁵ Archives of the Turkish Foreign Minister, (AFM), fol 177, 14 February 1899, and 5 February 1902

⁴⁹⁶ The source of the emigration to the New World was Syria and to a lesser extent southeastern Anatolia.

⁴⁹⁷ Himadeh, S. 1936 *The Economic organization of Syria and Lebanon*. P. 20

⁴⁹⁸ Karpát, K. H. 1985. "The Ottoman emigration..." p. 185

many Syrian and Lebanese who had not emigrated often travelled to join peers in the Americas. Indeed, according to a report of the U.S. Immigration Commission for instance, out of 9.188 Syrians entering the country in 1908-1909, 95% stated that they were coming to join friends or relatives.⁴⁹⁹ Both the permanent return of wealthy immigrants and the provisory visits on one or another side of the Atlantic participated in putting in contact two distant regions of the world who ended to share a same beverage: *mate*.

The current presence of *mate* in Syria and Lebanon represents a material trace of the migration of Levantines to Argentina and of their return, whether to visit or to stay for good in their home country with a strong taste for *yerba mate*. As Luxner indicates, while Argentina is the first producer of *yerba mate*, Syria is its first importer:

“In fact, of the 200.000 hectares (500.000 acres) that grow *yerba mate* in Argentina, a respectable eight percent are given over to export production, much of it shipped to Arab countries. The biggest customer abroad last year was Syria”.⁵⁰⁰

According to the INYM (National Institute of *Yerba Mate*) Argentine harvested more than 837 million kilos of *yerba mate* in 2019, 277 million of which were sold on the domestic market and another 40 million exported abroad. Syria ranked first in the country's exportations importing more than 31 million kilos of *yerba mate* (78,4% of Argentina's total exports). The second biggest importer, Chile, is far behind since it bought 4 million kilos (11,13%). Then comes Lebanon which imported 751.000 kilos (1,88%), the USA and France which respectively imported 645.000 (1,62%) and 483.000 (1,21%) kilos.⁵⁰¹ This data indicates that 80% of Argentine *yerba mate*'s exports go to Syria and Lebanon, and that Syria is the world's biggest important importer of *yerba mate*.

Introduced to the habit of drinking *mate* by relatives who had migrated to Argentina, Syrian and Lebanese people quickly appropriated it in the Middle East. Indeed, yet in the early 1940s, Syria was at the top of Argentina's *yerba* destination.⁵⁰² Since the 1935 creation of the CRYM (regulatory commission for the production and trade of *yerba mate*) in Argentina- later replaced by the INYM- the entire process of *yerba mate* production and sale have been tracked. And

⁴⁹⁹ Report of the U.S. Immigration Commission, vol 12, p. 59

⁵⁰⁰ Luxner, L. 1995. “The South American leaf”. *Aramco world* 46:6, pp. 28-29

⁵⁰¹ INYM : <https://inym.org.ar> , Accessed on March 22, 2022

⁵⁰² Note that this is prior to Lebanese independence. In this case, “Syria” encompassed both present-day Lebanon and Syria

the figure below (figure 1) shows that in the CRYM's first six years of record keeping, Syria was already at the top of exportations:

COUNTRY	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941
Australia	2991	5848	4593	3791	4162	750
Bolivia	39918	59451	68458	55183	64418	86721
Canada	980	382	1836	0	0	0
Chile	12035	4660	19011	14252	15788	26890
France	3773	15933	4712	4343	0	0
Germany	205	510	6005	245	0	0
Peru	1554	2784	3087	1588	3100	6326
Spain	8769	0	0	0	0	0
Syria	39639	18373	44539	30650	12400	0
Turkey	3136	0	0	0	0	0
UK	6548	6188	8475	5626	12761	4996
Uruguay	0	1160	972	875	920	1640
USA	18239	13181	7195	11090	10627	11015
Others	1857	1886	13749	9337	6260	2871
Total	139644	130356	182632	136980	130436	141271

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Figure 1: Argentina *Yerba Mate* exports, in kilograms

With the exception of Bolivia from 1936 to 1939, Syrian exports- sent to both current-day Syrian and Lebanese destinations- exceeded all other export markets. And although “it is challenging to trace with more precision the moments and capacities of participation of Arab Argentine individuals and firms in the cultivation of taste for *yerba mate* and the set of social practices that accompanies its consumption”, oral histories and individual testimonies however promise the possibility to better link *mate* consumption and migration patterns.⁵⁰⁴ Digging into the set of family memories from both a contemporary Syrian Argentine *yerba mate* grower in Misiones province and a Lebanese trader of *yerba mate* in Kfarhim, one can already detect potential connections between their families’ mobility practices and the growth of *yerba mate* as a desired commodity in the Middle East.

As of 2018, Omar Kassab ran a major *yerba mate* export business that annually exported thousands of tons of product from his *yerbales* to Syria. In 1968, Omar made his way to Misiones, Argentina, where other members of his family had already settled. In a classic example of chain migration, Omar Kassab’s father emigrated first, making the trek from the small city of Yabroud, north of Damascus to Northern Argentina, and was later joined by three

⁵⁰³ Source: Comisión Reguladora de Producción y Comercio de la Yerba Mate

⁵⁰⁴ Balloffet, 2020. *Argentina in the Global Middle East*, p. 169

of his children, including Omar. In a thirty-minute interview with Canal 12, a regional public television and radio channel that serves Misiones, northern Corrientes and neighboring areas of Paraguay and Brazil, Omar Kassab shared his understanding of how the practice of drinking *mate* has diffused in his hometown of Yabroud.⁵⁰⁵ He clearly established a connection between the histories of migrants who moved back and forth between Argentina and Syria during the twentieth century and the increasing trend for *mate* in the Middle East.

After twenty or thirty years spent in Argentina, Omar's father, as well as other emigrants such as the Kabour family – the Kabour group is today one of the large *yerba mate* exporters to Syria-, were doing well economically and started travelling back to Yabroud quite often. When doing so, they brought the practice of consuming *yerba mate* they had grown accustomed to in Argentina to their home village and transmitted it to the relatives they visited there. Omar Kassab remembers that:

“They brought *mate* with them, *yerba*, so that they could continue drinking it there. [they brought] all of the things that they liked, because they were used to it. They shared it with their family, and people enjoyed it... [when it was time for them to return to Argentina] of course each of those travelers left their *mate*, their *yerba* [in Yabroud]. And people started sending requests, letters, saying “please send us some *yerba mate*”, [and they would send this request] when someone was travelling [from Yabroud] back to Argentina.”⁵⁰⁶

According to Omar's testimony, *yerba mate* began to travel back to Syria via informal family and village networks and in the years that followed return migrants' first visits: “many people carried *yerba* in their suitcases, on their travels, in parcels, or [sent it] in the mail”.⁵⁰⁷ By the early 1970's Omar's father must have considered that the taste for *mate* in the Yabroud district and surrounding regions such as the Qalamun mountains, was sufficiently implemented as to create a profitable trade market. Therefore, in the years 1972-1973, he sent its first shipping container of *yerba mate* from Misiones to his Syrian village. As observed in the table published by the CRYM in the years 1940's, the Syrian market was already a well-established front for *mate* in 1972, but personal recollections like those of Omar Kassab help us contextualize and confirm the connections between migrant mobility and *mate*'s diffusion in the Middle East.

Echoing Omar Kassab's testimony, Sheikh Arij Abou Khuzam, whom I contacted in November 2020, described a similar phenomenon regarding the spread of *mate* consumption

⁵⁰⁵Kassab, Omar « De Siria a Andresito”, Interview by Canal 12, “Testimonios de los Cuatros Vientos” Series, Andresito, Misiones, Argentina, June 11, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivjtk87ut3k>.

⁵⁰⁶ Kassab, O. interview to Canal 12, June 2018. Transcription by Balloffet, 2020. *Argentina in the Global Middle East*. p. 170.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid p. 170

in Lebanon.⁵⁰⁸ I consider it relevant to literally transcribe the Sheikh's memories since the tone he adopted is characteristic of return emigrants' storytelling. The very formulation of his discourse, shows how Sheikh Arij Abu Khuzam embeds history with his story:

"In 1956, Mohamed Abu Khuzam, a Lebanese writer and poet, first brought *yerba mate* from the forest of Argentina to the shores of Lebanon. *Yerba mate* was shrouded in mystery at the time, and only handful of people used it medicinally, but Mohamed had faith in this humble plant and believed that his beloved *yerba mate* deserved as much love as the global ubiquitous coffee and tea. Mohamed took it upon him to educate the community about the elusive plant from Argentina, mostly during social occasion as well as stocking it in his Beirut shop, nestled between Debbas Square and Bechara El Khoury street, known today simply as downtown. As the war took its toll on Beirut, Mohamed moved the business away from the conflict to the Beirut suburb of Chweifat for a few years, and then further up to the Al Chouf mountains, to a small town called Kfarhim which Mohamed Abu Khuzam and sons has called home ever since. The founder's eldest son, Arij Abu Khuzam, took over the business in the 1980's, growing it into a regional business and establishing its own facilities including warehouses, offices and a flagship store in Kfarhim."⁵⁰⁹

Depicting his ancestor as the "educator" of the community, Sheikh Arij Abu Khuzam established an explicit link between Mohamed's migrating past and the arrival of *yerba mate* in Lebanon. According to him, Mohamed would have initiated Lebanese people to the consumption of *mate* before developing a business for it (Figure 2). Like in Syria, people were introduced to *mate* by return migrants and Sheikh Arij Abu Khuzam recalled that "most of [his] family learnt to drink *mate* in Lebanon" through the intercession of their "grand ancestors [who] had lived in Argentina early in the 20th century".

⁵⁰⁸ I was put in contact with Sheikh Arij Abu Khuzam by Perla Mazloum, a Lebanese friend who helped me collecting numerous testimonies in 2020 by exchanging with her relatives established in Lebanon. Based in the Chouf Mountains, Sheikh Arij Abu Khuzam sent me a long message on WhatsApp describing the arrival of *mate* in Lebanon by directly linking it to the history of his family. The tone of his messages was really formal, as if he was writing a story (as shown in the extract, he used the third person to speak of himself). And when I asked for more *intimate* details, he gave me the number of his son, Sheikh Hadi Abu Kzham who got back to me with many anecdotes and family archives supporting his father's testimony.

⁵⁰⁹ WhatsApp Interview by the author with Sheikh Arij Abu Kzham. 14/11/2020

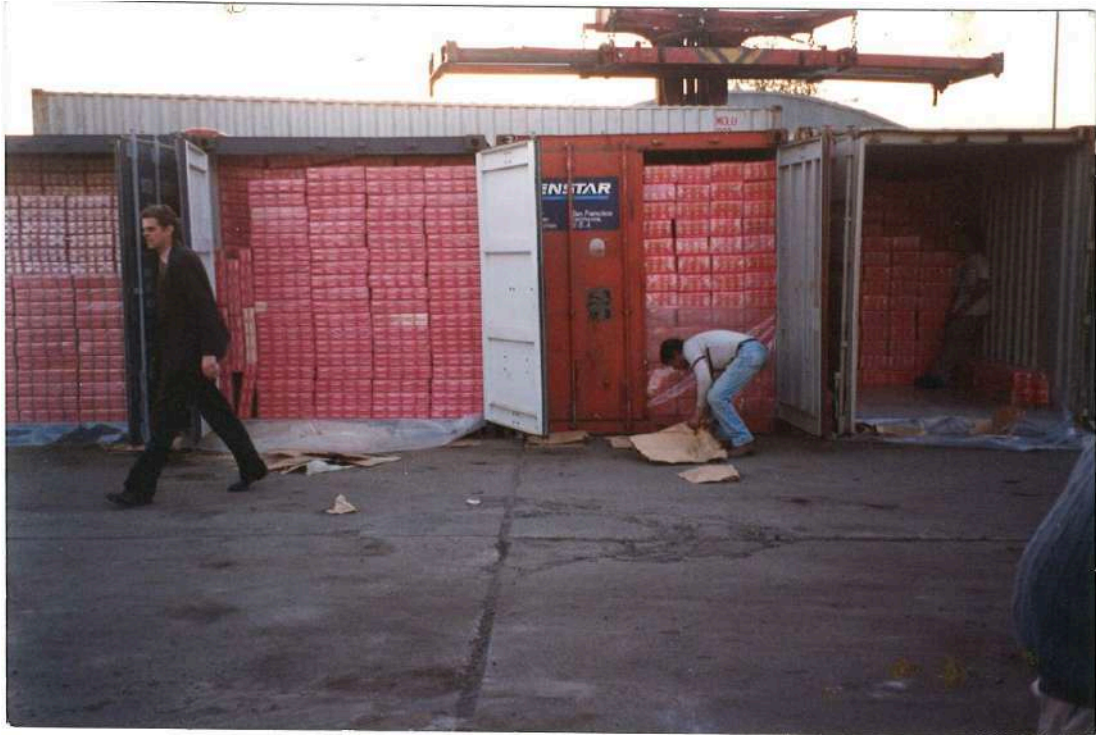






Figure 2: Yerba mate's arrival in Lebanon: Family archives sent by Sheikh Hadi Abou Khuzam (son of Arij Abou Khuzam)⁵¹⁰

Treading on the heels of returning migrants, *mate* as a product and as a practice has durably settled among Syrian and Lebanese people. The beverage represents both a social drink and

⁵¹⁰ Mohamed Abu Khuzam & Sons Co. Archives. All the pictures were taken in the early to mid 1990s.

a memory there, since it constitutes a material trace of an Argentinian past that many people are proud to exhibit. Moreover, *mate* has not been detached from its South American ritualized consumption when reaching the Middle East, and nowadays, according to Sheikh Arij Abou kzhama, *mate* is there mainly “[drunk] collectively. It’s all about the gathering, the bonding between friends and family”.⁵¹¹

2) MATE CURRENT CONSUMPTION IN SYRIA AND LEBANON

Having spread along the paths of transnational migrations to and from the Southern cone, *mate* consumption has remained enshrined in a practice that has travelled almost unchanged. Return migrants transmitted the use of *yerba mate* to their relatives the way they had themselves experienced it abroad. Hence the fact that nowadays, in Syria and Lebanon, *mate* consumption follows a highly ritualized performance that retains many elements of the Argentinian ceremony. In a course of her fieldwork in the Chouf mountains, Christine Folch was offered a *mate* by her Lebanese host Najla, and her account of the episode well testifies of the resilience of *mate*’s collective consumption:

“Before Najla passes me the gourd brimming with *yerba mate*, she makes sure to wipe the end of the metal drinking straw with the fragrant leaves of a local herb. We sit under the welcome shade of a veranda, each taking our turn to drain the gourd and then returning it to Najla to fill once more with warm water from the teakettle.”⁵¹²

Folch’s description of *mate* ceremony in Najla’s house recalls the inherent rules that orchestrates the consumption of *mate* in Argentina and its neighboring countries. Here and there, people sit together around the *mate* gourd which circulates from mouth to mouth as this collective beverage is alternatively sipped from the same straw. Here and there, one person is in charge of filling the gourd with water before passing it around. And here and there, *mate* embodies hospitality and intimate sociability. The reason why the use of the shared *bombilla* has not proven problematic in Syria and Lebanon- contrary to other places-, might stem from a similar notion “of the body, of hygiene and of the social acceptability of passing instruments from mouth to mouth.”⁵¹³ The broad social acceptance of sharing the nargileh, for instance, suggests that Syrian and Lebanese were inclined to easily adapt to *mate*’s traditional use. Moreover, other stimulant beverages have been enshrined in collective consumption in Syria

⁵¹¹ WhatsApp Interview by the author with Lebanese Sheikh Arij Abou Kzhama, on the 11th of November 2020

⁵¹² Folch, 2010. “Stimulating consumption...”, p. 6

⁵¹³ Ibid p. 27

and Lebanon even before *mate*'s diffusion in the Middle East. It is notably the case of the Sheikh coffee which, according to the anthropologist Isabelle Rivoal, is shared at the occasion of funerals:

“In this case, the coffee is pounded in a container as big as a flowerpot, the rhythm produces music and the old shayks who are in charge of this task actually make percussion ; this coffee is served only in men's assemblies- the anthropologist, by virtue of her status, may be invited. Then the coffee is heated in long-spouted coffee pots, usually over ashes in a small ad hoc brazier. This coffee is said to be « bitter ». the person in charge of the coffee- usually an old shaykh of lower rank- has one (sometimes two) cups in his hand which he fills only a quarter full. These cups are passed from guest to guest and can be rotated several times. This is the coffee that is served at funerals- the « bitter coffee »- in Lebanon as well as in Syria.»⁵¹⁴

I consider that, in addition to a notion of the body that must have been close to the Argentine one, the ritualized consumption of other stimulant beverages in Syria and Lebanon must have predisposed people to widely appropriate *mate*'s collective use. And in the same way as in South America, *mate* has until now hardly been commercialized in the Middle East.

Synonymous with long-lasting gatherings, *mate* in Argentina as well as in Syria and Lebanon has somehow escaped capitalization as a beverage. And it seems that its very ritualized consumption has almost entirely kept it off restaurant menus. The logic of it being a shared beverage has not been broken down to individualisable consumers required of capitalist exploitation. According to Dino Ahmad Ali, a Syrian refugee now living in Paris⁵¹⁵:

« *Mate* lasts for an hour, two hours or even more. We drink *mate* at home because it can last the whole evening, especially when we are playing cards. You change the water, you change the *yerba* and you keep drinking while time is going by. *Mate* is link to duration, it's a friendly drink. You are here for *mate*. You are here to stay ». ⁵¹⁶

Dino's association of *mate* with the domestic realm, was also mentioned by Isabelle Rivoal and Cyril Roussel who both met *mate* during their fieldworks and whom I interviewed. Although their research areas do not concern *mate*- there is no existing literature on *mate*'s consumption in the Middle East-, Cyril Roussel and Isabelle Rivoal spent a lot of time in Syria and Lebanon

⁵¹⁴ Isabelle Rivoal. Email interview made on the 26/11/2020.

⁵¹⁵ I first met Dino in 2017 at the artistic festival "Syrien n'est fait" taking place in Les grands voisins in Paris. I contacted him when I started to investigate the consumption of *mate* in Syria and he told me that he started drinking *mate* quite late, because in the region where he used to live (Eastern Syria), people were not used to drinking *mate*. However, he confirmed that on the coast, where he was first introduced to the beverage, people drank a lot of *mate*. He also told me that since he arrived in France, in 2014, he kept the habit of drinking *mate* with other Syrians, that *mate* was always a good occasion to be together.

⁵¹⁶ Dino Ahmad Ali, interviewed by the author on the 4th of February 2020 in Paris.

respectively and shared with me their impressions. Cyril Roussel remembered that *mate* was quite often offered to him as a sign of welcoming and that it was always within the house.⁵¹⁷ He also added that, in his case, he was most of the time served *mate* by a woman. Regarding Isabelle Rivoal, she agreed on the fact that *mate* was essentially part of the home, and that, although non-gendered, *mate* tended to be in the hands of women:

“The practice of *mate* is not gendered. When I mention women, it is because the consumption of *mate* in the neighborhood, after the preparation of lunch, often gives rise to rounds of *mate* between women, in a very informal way. *Mate*, as I could observe it, is generally a drink linked to intimacy and proximity. One shares it with their neighbors or relatives. It is a bit of a hunger suppressant around 12-13 when people are waiting for the 14)15h meal (time of return from school and administrative jobs in Lebanon). People drink it also in the evening when visiting the extended family, in the living rooms or on the balconies. However, in case of a formal visit, *mate* won't be served. I think that *mate* is a proximate drink, that is why you might have felt like I merely associated it to women. It remains true that women remain the ones who are most of the time in charge of serving and distributing the kal'a (gourd) around, but between brothers and cousins, a man can sometimes take responsibility for filling the hot water. But when women are present, they always serve it.”⁵¹⁸

Collective, domestic, non-gendered, ritualized and non-commercialized, the consumption of *mate* in Syria and Lebanon is almost the exact replica of the traditional Argentine version. But *mate*'s wide appropriation was also accompanied by singular variations, such as the replacement of the calabash by a transparent glass.

Although many Syrian and Lebanese still consume *mate* in the traditional dried calabash, it tends nowadays to be more common to prepare it in a glass. Samar El Eid, a Lebanese woman whom I interviewed in Paris in October 2020 told me that in Beirut, people who were fond of *mate* generally had a proper *mate* set devoted to it (Figure 3) and that glass cups were more popular than calabashes because, for her “they look more fancy and [she] personally like[s] to see the water infusing the leaves within the glass, something that is not possible with the calabash”.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁷ Cyril Roussel is specialized on the Druze migrations. See Roussel, C. 2011 *Les Druzes de Syries, territoires et mobilités*.

⁵¹⁸ Email Interview with Isabelle Rivoal 20//11/2020

⁵¹⁹ Interview with Samar el Eid, Paris 27/10/2020. I got in contact with Samar, who lives in Beirut thanks again to Perla Mazloum. We first exchanged through WhatsApp and we could meet in Paris in October 2020 when Samar travelled to France for her work.



Figure 3: Lebanese *mate* set ⁵²⁰

Another specificity is noticeable on the above pictures on which one can see that lemon slices are disposed next to the glasses. This is due to the fact that, contrary to Argentinians who share the *bombilla* directly, Syrian and Lebanese people are used to wash the straw with lemon or sometimes with a local herb between each person. Moreover, *mate* is there most of the time served with little dishes, salty or savory, depending on the time at which it is offered. It is common, for instance, to accompany *mate* with *ka'ak*, a slightly savory biscuit made with rancid butter, which gives it its singular flavor. *Mate's* appropriation in Syria and Lebanon resulted in the singular customization of a South American practice that, in substance, has kept the same symbolic, and the collective ritual of drinking *mate* there sustains other instances of belonging.

⁵²⁰ Picture sent to the author by Samar El Eid on December 26, 2020

II. MATE'S IDENTITIES IN SYRIA AND LEBANON

1) MATE: THE MATERIAL TRACE OF A TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY

When establishing themselves in Argentina, Ottoman emigrants found in *mate* a means to perform Argentine identity. Through the appropriation of a social drink strongly implemented in their host society, they could legitimize their integration and sought to be identified as part of a nation which tended to discriminate against them.⁵²¹ But *mate* not only constituted a tool to manifest one's insertion in Argentina, it also worked as a status marker that return migrant exhibited when coming back to their very home countries. Indeed, I consider that in the same way as *mate* enabled Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to perform Argentinian identity abroad, it also provided them with a means to perform their transnational identity at home. By drinking *mate* in Syria and Lebanon, return migrants who most of the time settled back in the Middle East after enriching themselves abroad, manifested and maintained their Argentine past. I argue that *mate* might have at first worked to distinguish the ones who had left from the ones who had stayed, by embodying a concrete and ostentatious mark of success. By consuming something that was international, with both the leaf and the practice imported, return migrants were able to exhibit and re-inscribe their transnational identity. *Yerba mate* might have functioned as a status marker and by passing the gourd around, past-immigrants could "reference their business acumen, financial success and cosmopolitan background through a habit acquired during a transnational experience connected to successful wealth acquisition."⁵²² Their ability to travel internationally, to build family wealth and to return to their home countries which stands in opposition to the ones who stayed and remained poor, came to be exhibited in *mate*.

Although *mate* might have functioned as a status marker through which past-immigrants could assert their wealth, I think that the transnational appropriation of the practice of drinking *mate*, like the one of any object, tradition or food in returning diaspora points to the:

"transformational power of mimesis: what appears on the surface to be derivative and imitative, taken from elsewhere, engenders authentically felt cultural competences and a sense of ontological presence."⁵²³

⁵²¹ See Chapter 6 and 7

⁵²² Folch 2010. "Stimulating consumption...", p. 29

⁵²³ Werbner Pnina and Mattia Fumanti, 2013. "The Aesthetics of Diaspora: Ownership and Appropriation", *Ethnos*, vol 78:2 p. 149

People do not merely drink *mate* to “replicate a lost ambience” or to exhibit a status, they rather share it to “recreate the pleasure of joint celebration”.⁵²⁴ However, I consider that the recreation and re-actualization of the Argentinian tradition also participates in maintaining a connection to an elsewhere. An elsewhere that people not only associate to the past but also foresee as a potential future. In other words, I consider that rather than a mere memory receptacle, *mate* is a support on which future hopes are also inscribed. At a time in which wars and economic crises render Syria and Lebanon’s future uncertain, *mate* is a sign of belonging. Belonging to a family and to an elsewhere that the object recalls. By ceaselessly reenacting a performance that was not derived from its Argentine ritualization, people feel still part of the country they left and might get back to. Since the ties between the Syrian and Lebanese immigrants who stayed in South America and the one who had returned home are really strong, people might keep in mind- and in hand with *mate*- that the years to come might be spent abroad. According to Cyril Roussel, it is common for former Syrian immigrants to have managed to preserve dual citizenship, because of their will to easily travel. Indeed, the possession of a South American passport provides them with a freedom of mobility that they cannot get with the Syrian passport.⁵²⁵ I see *mate* as an illustration of this dual citizenship, as a vivid sign of people’s transnational self-identification in current Syria and Lebanon. *Mate* does not only constitute the remembrance of a past but also the projection of a possible future, it is, somehow, an implicit passport, bridging yesterday to tomorrow.

2) *MATE*, A DRINK NOWADAYS COMMONLY ASSOCIATED TO THE DRUZE AND ALAWITE PEOPLE IN SYRIA AND LEBANON

According to S. J. a Syrian artist whom I interviewed in London, on September 20th 2020, *mate* is, in Syria, nowadays principally drunk in the province of Sweida, in the center of Syria between Damascus and Homs as well as in the coastal mountains of Syria in the region of Latakia. Going in his sense, Dino Ahmad Ali, I interviewed in Paris on February 8th 2019, told me that in the North of Syria, where he used to live, as well as in the East of Syria, *mate* was not drunk. Regarding *mate*’s consumption in Lebanon, it is today primarily associated to the mountainous Chouf region.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ Ibid p. 150

⁵²⁵ Interview with Cyril Roussel on January 2021

⁵²⁶ Again, fieldworks should be made to better map the area of *mate* consumption in Syria and Lebanon. The development that follows is based on the information I could collect thanks to the participation of Syrian and Lebanese persons who I could contact through social media and on the observations shared by the anthropologist Pr. Isabelle Rivoal, the geographer Pr. Cyril Roussel and the anthropologist Pr. Anna Poujeau, three researchers who conducted long-term fieldworks either in Syria or in Lebanon.

In the course of the conversations I had with S. G., Dino Ahmad Ali, Nathalie Hassanie or Samar al Eid among other Syrian and Lebanese people, I noticed that they all mentioned at some point that *mate*'s consumption was, in their countries, specifically linked to the Druze and Alawite minorities. Willing to dig into this remark, I compared the main areas of *mate* consumption with the Druze and Alawite's settlement zones in Syria and Lebanon. Doing so, I became aware of the fact that the regions where *mate* was said to be most consumed many times correspond to spaces where communities of Druze or Alawite were established (Figure 4). In Latakia, for instance, previously known as the Alawite state, *mate* is highly consumed, and the Chouf region where *mate* is most popular in Lebanon, is considered a Druze region. This observation raised the following questions: Why is *mate* primarily associated to Druze and Alawite communities? Did these minorities migrate more than others to South America to have such a link to *mate*? Were Druze and Alawite communities mainly responsible for *mate*'s diffusion in Syria and Lebanon?

The hypothesis that Druze and Alawite now consume more *mate* than any other people in Syria and Lebanon because they were the ones who most emigrated and therefore contributed to *mate*'s arrival in the Middle East is not supported by sources. Indeed, the *Memorias* of the immigration department in Argentina, show that, from the time the emigrants' religion was mentioned- until 1910, there was not any indication regarding Muslim emigrants who were all blended in the "diverse" category-, Christians were in the majority:

« There are almost no data regarding the religions and beliefs of the migrants who gained Argentina. Until 1910, the *Memorias* of the immigration department neither distinguished the various Christian branches nor gave indications on Muslims. The Druzes never figured on the statistics and we guess that they were put in the Muslim category. Between 1876 and 1907, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants were officially classified as follows: catholics: 34 663 (82,9%) and others: 71606 (17,1%). In 1909, the same source indicates: 48 814 catholics (77%) and 13831 others (23%). On that same year, Syro-Lebanese who arrived to the country were classified according to their religion : 6428 catholics (54,5%) 5111 mahometans (43,4%) and 226 israelites.⁵²⁷⁵²⁸

However, *mate* does not constitute their research object. But since there is a dearth of scholarship regarding *mate* consumption in the Middle-East, I want to start documenting the practice of drinking *mate* in Syria and Lebanon by taking individual testimonies, and ethnographic observations as a starting point source. Of course, this would not be sufficient to precisely evaluate the geography of *mate* in the Middle East, but I consider that this chapter could constitute a first step and would hopefully pave the way for further investigation.

⁵²⁷ *Memorias*, year 1909 p. 118: "Mohammedan" and "Israelite" are the denominations found in the *Memorias*.

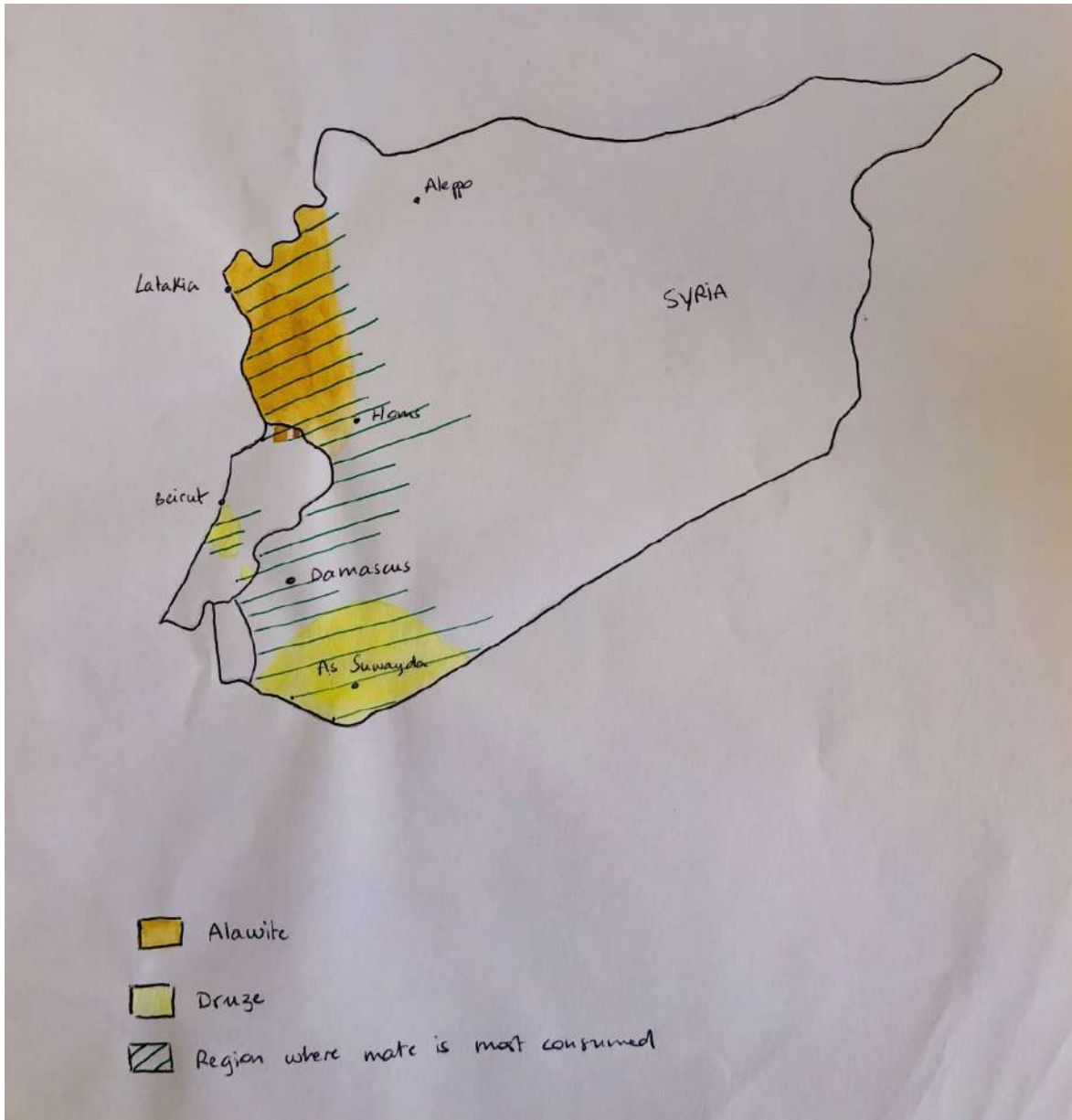
⁵²⁸ Bestene, O. 1998. "L'immigration syrienne..." p 23

Rather than seeking a reason for the Druze and Alawites' acquaintance to *mate* during the emigration of these specific communities, one should instead question why *mate* specifically adhered to them in the Middle East. I argue that all return migrants, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, must have participated in the transmission of *mate* in Syria and Lebanon. However, *mate* then tended to be there especially appropriated by Druze and Alawite communities who must have continued to map its spatial dispersion. I indeed consider that *mate* consumption must have been initially more located on Syria and Lebanon's coastal regions, a gateway to the Atlantic Ocean-and therefore with the Americas- and in the surrounding mountains where minorities lived. It is only in a second phase that, once accustomed to it, Druze and Alawite people might have spread its use around in the course of domestic mobilities, when moving from the mountains to the plains⁵²⁹. In his book *Les Druzes de Syrie, territoire et mobilités*, Cyril Roussel offers a highly documented overview of the Druzes' mobilities across southern Syria, which helps guess that Druzes' networks (Figure 5) might have paved the way for *mate*'s dispersion there, since the Druze settlement areas correspond to the regions where the tradition of drinking *mate* is strongly established.⁵³⁰ The question that remains then is: what made *mate* fit the Druze and the Alawite people so well?

⁵²⁹ The Druzes originally found refuge in the mountains of the "Jebel Druze" located in the south of Syria while the Alawis established themselves in the mountains of Lattaquia, on the western coast of Syria. Throughout the 20th centuries, those minorities started to move from their peripheral mountains to more central regions. The Druze developed important networks of internal mobilities, migrating first towards the city of Sweida and then towards Damascus suburbs. As for the Alawis, they migrated from Lattaquia to Homs, Tartus or Baniyas. It is worth noting that the tradition of drinking *mate* is well established in all those regions.

⁵³⁰ I contacted Cyril Roussel after reading his book, and if I chose to base my argument on his research as well as on our informal conversation – in the same way as I did with Isabelle Rivoal or Anna Poujeau- it is because I feel like it was a good way to "de-monumentalise" knowledge. As explained in the introduction, I want my research to open a space for discussion by including different testimonies without hierarchizing them. This approach was notably influenced by Boaventura de Sousa Santos' words which gave me the will to think of new ways of doing research : "Some of the participants in the conversations are well-known intellectuals with extensive bibliographies. Why do we entertain the conversation? Because when we talk we de-monumentalise written knowledge. We hesitate, repeat ourselves, there are no footnotes. By being oralised, so to speak, written knowledge becomes de-monumentalised and allows for horizontal exchanges in which non-written parts of written knowledge emerge". Boaventura de Sousa Santos. 2016. "Epistemologies of the South and the future", *From the European South 1*, 17-29. p. 27.

For Alawite mobilities see: Wimmen, H. "Syria's path- from civic uprising to civil war" p. 8 and Balance F., 2011. "Géographie de la révolte syrienne" *Outre-Terre 29*, no. 3, p. 445.



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Figure 4: An estimation of *mate*'s main consumption zone as well as the Druze and Alawite people current settlement area in Syria and Lebanon

⁵³¹ Map designed by the author. Data were based on Roussel, C. 2011. *Les Druzes de Syrie, territoire et mobilité*; Rivoal, I. 2016. *Druzes de la montagne libanaise*; Larkin C and Michel E. Kerr, (dir.) 2015. *The Alawis of Syria: War, faith and Politics in the Levant*.



Altitude (en m.)

- de 0
- 0 à 200
- 200 à 500
- 500 à 1000
- 1000 à 2000
- + de 2000

1 lieu de conversion au druzisme suite aux prédications des missionnaires druzes : foyer d'implantation et de développement d'une communauté druze originelle (XI^e siècle)
 ★ présence d'une petite communauté druze originelle (XI^e siècle)
2 à 6 implantation nouvelle à partir d'un ou de plusieurs foyers préexistants par ordre chronologique de création : développement d'une nouvelle communauté
 →^{20e} direction des flux migratoires et date de la migration
 — frontières d'Etats modernes

Sources : PLANHOL, 1997 ; RIVOAL, 2000 ; DENYZER, 1986 & 1991 ; CARBILLET, 1929 ; BOURON, 1930 ; ANDRÉA, 1937 ; WIRTH, 1971 ; SEURAT, 1980

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Figure 5: Druze mobilities in the Middle East before 1950

⁵³² Roussel C. 2011. *Les Druzes de Syrie, territoire et mobilité*. Annexes, fig. 3

The Druze and Alawi doctrines both appeared in the eleventh century as a result of a schism with orthodox Islam. And those two Shi'a sects share a lot of common points regarding their spatial and social organizations. Derived from the Ismaili theory, the Druze religion was first formulated in Fatimid Egypt, under the aegis of caliph al-hakim bi-amr Allah. Strongly impregnated with Sufi mysticism and Aristotelian philosophy, the Druze heterodox doctrine is characterized by a spirituality based on the idea that souls improve themselves through a cycle of reincarnations.⁵³³ As for the Alawi branch, it crystallized in Iraq where the sect was first known as Nusairis (Nusayriyya), a designation issued from the name of the doctrine founder Muhammad ibn Nusayr 'al-Namiri'. The Alawis took over the belief in a system of successive divine emanation and the cult of Ali.⁵³⁴ Highly syncretic, the Druze and Alawi doctrines present a mixture of various Islamic and non-Islamic beliefs and practices. The Alawi use of ceremonial wine and their observance of Christmas for instance, are two examples of such borrowed practices.⁵³⁵

Organized on a tribal mode, the Druze and Alawi communities have mainly remained endogamous and, according to Kassem, their clan solidarity or 'asabiyya still constitute a "captivating enigma".⁵³⁶ The two sects originally looked for refuge and prospered in mountainous regions where they could protect themselves from persecutions. But contrary to the Alawite who have until now kept the coastal mountains of Latakia and its vicinity as their geographic sanctum,- something that made later historians notably refer to the Alawite as a "compact minority"⁵³⁷-, the Druze never observed such a concentration. According to Cyril Rousset:

"The geographical distribution of the Druze people hasn't evolved that much since the Ottoman period. And it is still characterized by the absence of a territorial continuity between the various settlement zones. The bursting of the community does not presuppose the crumbling of the members in space, but rather consists of a set of discontinuous zones in which members of the community are concentrated"⁵³⁸.

Although the Druze do not constitute a "compact minority", they are here and there established in mountainous regions the way Alawites are around Latakia (Figure 6 and 7). Those sites have long provided the sects with natural fortresses, essential to the communities' security,

⁵³³ Rivoal, I. 2012 *Fêtes religieuses druzes: cheminement spirituel et solidarité communautaires*, p. 1

⁵³⁴ Larkin C and Michel E. Kerr, (dir.) *The Alawis of Syria: War, faith and Politics in the Levant*, p. 30

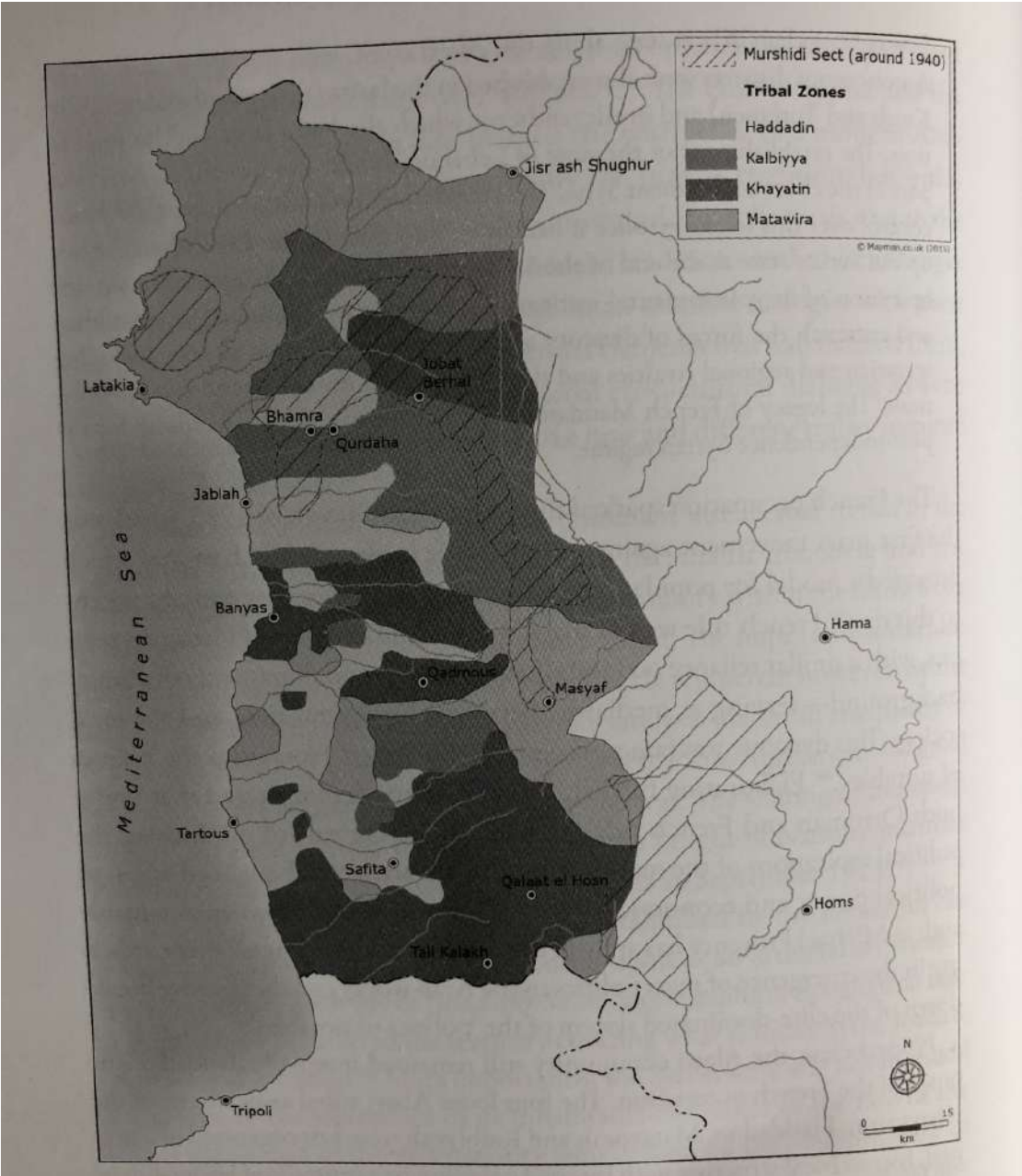
⁵³⁵ Faksh, M. A. 1984 "The Alawi community of Syria: A New Dominant Political Force", p. 135

⁵³⁶ Kassem, L. M. 2005, *The construction of Druze: Druze in Israel between State Policy and Palestinian Arab Nationalism*

⁵³⁷ Itamar Rabinovich explains that this term, coined by P. Rondot, was popularized by Albert Hourani. See Itamar Rabinovich, 1979. 'The Compact Minorities and the Syrian State, 1918-45' *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 14, no 4, p. 710

⁵³⁸ Rousset, C. 2011 *Les Druzes de Syrie, territoire et mobilité*, p. 25

and “exchanges with outsiders were characterized either by clashes and confrontation, mutually beneficial cooperation or attempts to assimilate into the broader fabric of society”.⁵³⁹

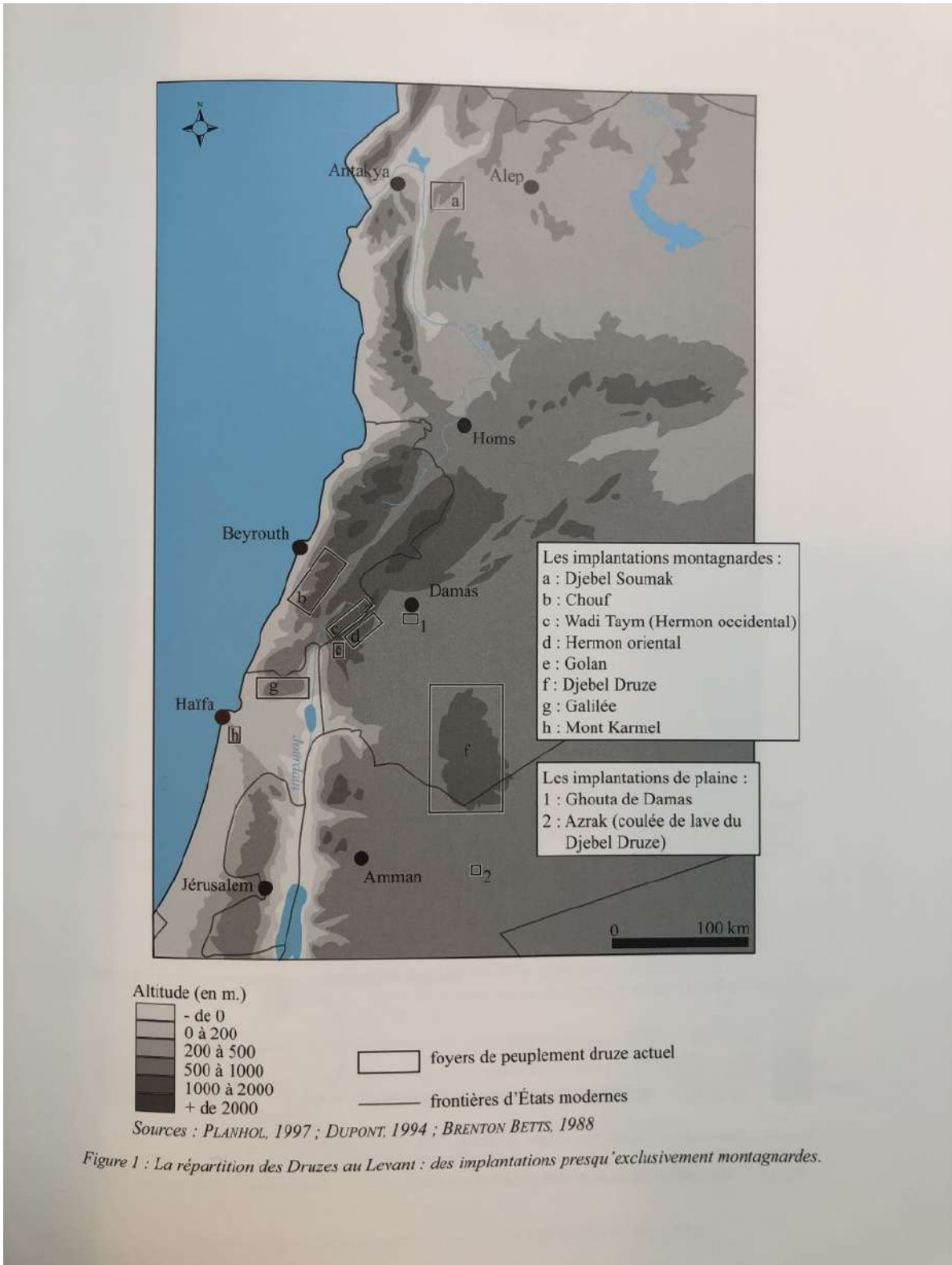


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Figure 6: The Alawi geographic sanctum in Syria

⁵³⁹ Larkin C and Michel E. Kerr, (dir.), *The Alawis of Syria*, p. 31

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid p. 38



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Figure 7: The Druze main settlement areas in the Levant

⁵⁴¹ Roussel, C. 2011. *Les Druzes de Syrie, territoire et mobilité*, p. 209

Observing similar social and spatial organizations as two tribal communities settled in mountainous areas, the Druze and Alawite also share a common belief in metempsychosis and a same appetite for secrecy. Both are indeed inclined to the religious principle of *taqiyya* which consists in dissimulating one's own true religion by ostentatiously professing another faith. According to Fuad Khuri, the principle of *taqiyya*, central for numerous Muslim sects, has largely been instrumentalized to face Sunni domination.⁵⁴² Therefore, the Druze and Alawite used "to practice their Islamic tenets with secrecy and in the meanwhile externally followed some of the religious rituals of the dominant forces in order to protect their communal identity."⁵⁴³ Not only do Druze and Alawi people hide their esoteric religious knowledge and practices to the ones who are not part of the community, but they also keep them secret within the community itself. Indeed, the undisclosed tenets of their religion are unattainable by the masses since they are only revealed to the few who are initiated to the secrets through a lengthy and complex process.⁵⁴⁴

I consider that this overview of the Druze and Alawite characteristics helps apprehending why they were particularly inclined to assimilate *mate*. On the one hand, the symbolic of *mate*'s collective consumption might have well corresponded to their clan solidarity and endogamous behavior as well as to their initiatory principles in which the inter-connections between individuals is central. On the other hand, the circular movement of *mate* which turns around the group from one person to another might recall the motif of the circle, that is central to Druze and Alawi mysticisms⁵⁴⁵. Moreover, I argue that the very geography of these two minorities might have constituted a good potting soil for *mate*. Indeed, most of the time reclusive in mountainous areas, those landlocked communities embrace a rural pace that, contrary to the effervescent hustle and bustle of urban areas, better corresponds to *mate*'s long-lasting reunions.

⁵⁴² Khuri, 2004, *Being a Druze*, p. 41.

⁵⁴³ 'Abd al-Rahman al Khayr, 'Yaqzat al-Muslimin al'Alawiyyin', quoted in Kais M. Firro, "The Alawis in Modern Syria: From Nusayriya to Islam via 'Alawiya". P. 26

⁵⁴⁴ See Lochon, C. 2008 *Secrets initiatiques en Islam et ritual maçonniques : Druzes, Ismaéliens, Alaouites, confréries soufies*.

⁵⁴⁵ Both communities believe in metempsychosis and Druze as well as Alawi are really attached to the notions of equality and reciprocity between their members. According to Eleonore Armanet, the importance and recurrence of circular motives in the organization of Druze's quotidian space, translate as well as create the conditions for such a reciprocity. Armanet, E. 2011 *Le ferment et la grâce. Une ethnographie du sacré chez les Druzes d'Israël*.

I think that an interesting connection can be made between Druze and Alawi adoption of *mate* and the past similar centrality of coffee among Sufi circles. Since the three communities are all embedded in strong mysticism, it is worth questioning the place of social stimulant beverages in the course of initiatory ceremonies. According to Hattox, coffee was first used in the central lands of Islam by Sufis in mid-fifteenth century Yemen.⁵⁴⁶ Placing its emphasis on the mystical reaching out for God, Sufism is characterized by the search for a state of complete obliviousness to the outside world and a sort of spiritual merging with the divine. The dhikrs - the communal worship services - are marked by practices - such as the rhythmic repetition, in unison, of a name or epithet of God, and the swaying of the head, hands, or entire body - designed to encourage a trance-like concentration on God. Since the dhikrs were usually held at night, "anything that could lead them to mental excitement and ward off sleep would be seen as an aid to devotions", and coffee soon became an essential part of Sufi circles for its particularly effective stimulant effect.⁵⁴⁷ By the early sixteenth century, a certain ritual had already come to accompany the distribution and drinking of coffee at the start of the dhikr. Ibn 'Abd al-Ghaffar described one such ceremony among the Yemeni Sufis at the Azhar:

" They drank it every Monday and Friday eve, putting it in a large vessel (majur) made of red clay. Their leader ladled it out with a small dipper and gave it to them to drink, passing it to the right, while they recited one of their usual formulas, mostly "la illaha illa Allah al-Malik al-Haqq al-mubin" (There is no god but God, the Master, the Clear Reality)"⁵⁴⁸

Surprisingly enough, the Sufi collective consumption of coffee had a lot in common with the current Druze and Alawi collective consumption of *mate*. The question is then: Did Druze and Alawi adopt *mate* not only for its symbolic but also for its stimulant properties? Could *mate* be an intermediary in the course of night ceremonies the way coffee was among Sufi circles?

As two Shi'a sects, the Druze and the Alawi give high importance to the Ashoura ceremonies. In the case of the Druze, the commemoration lasts several days prior to the Ashoura, and incantations, in the same way as the Sufi dhikr, happen at night. According to Isabelle Rivoal:

"The cycle of 'ashûr opens on the night of 'ashr. The religious meet in the khalwa-s, which are large rooms which allow the collective recitation of the texts. (...). The "tension" must increase from night to night. Thus the eighth and ninth days are the most important and are respectively designated as the small station (al-waqfa al-saghîra) and the large station (al-waqfa al-kabîra). The sheikhs spend the night begging for forgiveness by repeating

⁵⁴⁶ Hattox, R. 1985. *Coffee and coffeehouses*, p. 25

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid p. 24

⁵⁴⁸ Jaziri, 'Umdat al-sawa, ed. de Sacy, 1:148 quoted in Hattox, R.S. 1985. p. 74

“through the dawn and through the ten nights” (sura the dawn, verse 1), a formula that marks the consecration of their soul.»⁵⁴⁹

Have the Druze and Alawi’s night ceremonies been orchestrated by *mate*? Do sheiks pass the gourd around while chanting in the same way as Sufi leaders did with coffee? Are *yerba mate*’s stimulant properties as important as *mate*’s symbolic for Druze and Alawi? I consider that *mate* might have a close relationship to Druze and Alawite mysticisms and I hope that further research would one day dig into those question marks.

Daily consumed by Druze and Alawi, *mate* now tends to be exclusively associated to those communities. And since food is a powerful vehicle for the construction of personal and community identity⁵⁵⁰, I consider that *mate* as a symbol of group identity can include, exclude and define individuals within a group. This is done both through its consumption as a social ritual that brings people together, and through discourse that “imagines and re-imagines historical narratives, and definitions of boundaries and belonging”.⁵⁵¹ In Syria and Lebanon sectarian identities have crystallized in distinct beverages. In Lebanon, *mate* is today symbolically associated to the Druze, black tea to the Shiite and coffee to Christians⁵⁵². A similar phenomenon is observable in Syria where beverages also tend to connote one’s faction. There, *mate* is linked with Druze and Alawites, tea with Sunnis and arak with Christians and atheists.⁵⁵³ In order to understand the cooption of *mate* as an identity enhancer in Syria and Lebanon, one must recontextualize the mounting tensions and violence, ostensibly along sectarian lines, that have been increasingly dividing the countries.

The Middle East has witnessed the high-pitched politicization of sectarian identities which resulted in some countries in very bloody consequences. In the case of Lebanon, acts of political violence have at times seemed posed to erupt into full-scale civil conflict, and the country has experienced intermittent instability since 2005.⁵⁵⁴ According to Melani Cammett:

“The mere existence of people from diverse ethnic or religious communities living in the same polity does not mean that these identities are a locus of conflict. Many countries encompass people from different ethnic or religious groups but are not divided along ethnic or sectarian lines. Ethnic or sectarian tensions therefore do not automatically arise from the mere presence of diverse cultural communities. Individuals have multiple identities, whether

⁵⁴⁹ Rivoal, I. 2012 *Les Fêtes religieuses druzes...* P.4

⁵⁵⁰ Fochesatto A. 2019 *Yerba mate: National project to Emerging Superfood*, p. 11.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. p. 11

⁵⁵² Rivoal, I. 2016. *Druzes de la montagne libanaise* p. 114

⁵⁵³ <https://fnewsmagazine.com/2013/11/tea-yerba-mate-liquor/>

⁵⁵⁴ Cammett, M. *Lebanon, the sectarian identity test lab*: <https://tcf.org/content/report/lebanon-sectarian-identity-test-lab/>, Accessed on March 22, 2022

ethnic, religious, occupational, social, or otherwise, and these identities are not relevant in all places and at all times.”⁵⁵⁵

Sectarianism therefore refers to the politicization of religious differences and Lebanon represents the example par excellence of a political system structured along explicitly sectarian lines. The 1975 civil war as well as “chronic political tension and episodic political violence”⁵⁵⁶ demonstrate the inefficiency of Lebanese formal institutions. A brief overview of the rise of political sectarianism during the colonial and post-colonial periods shows how sectarian actors in politics participated in consolidating sectarianism in everyday political and social life. According to Makdisi, between 1831 and 1840, sectarianism was initially “actively produced”.⁵⁵⁷ Later, the establishment of the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate created administrative districts that were religiously homogenous and inscribed the notion of sect as the defining element of political and social identity. This cemented what Makdisi views as a “culture of sectarianism”. The post-independence institutionalization of political sectarianism, reinforced the divisions by perpetuating a system of sect-based power-sharing.⁵⁵⁸ And since “sectarian identity is not only enshrined in the political system, but also constitutes the basis for personal status in Lebanese society”⁵⁵⁹, I consider that in the same way official, state-issued identification cards lists the religion of the bearer, *mate*'s essentialization might have served strengthening divisions. I do not say that *mate* now functions as a *material* status marker through which one can exhibit one's affiliation, I rather think that everyday practices were politicized and that the prevalence of *mate* consumption among the Druze community contributed to the spread of a cliché claiming that *mate* is exclusively a Druze beverage. In a country divided along sectarian lines, identification goes hand in hand with differentiation and beverages are being re-signified so as to represent different factions.

The politicization of *mate* in Syria is slightly different since the country did not go through the same “culture of sectarianism”. As many Syrians, S.G. first associates *mate* with soldiers or government employees: ⁵⁶⁰

“What does *mate* mean? The first word that comes is massassa which means straw in English, also mountains because the majority of people who

⁵⁵⁵ Cammett M. 2019

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁵⁷ Makdisi, U. 2000. *The culture of Sectarianism...* p. 52

⁵⁵⁸ At the end of the French Mandate in 1943, a national pact was sealed between leaders of the dominant Maronite Christian and Sunni Muslim communities. It established that the position of president was reserved for Maronite Christian, the position of Prime Minister for a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of parliament was granted to a Shia Muslim.

⁵⁵⁹ Cammett, M. 2019.

⁵⁶⁰ S. G. is an artist based in London (he asks me note to quote his full name), who I met in September 2020. His relatives are based in Damascus, Daraa, Hama and Latakia.

drink *mate* in Syria are in mountainous regions. Law forces agency is the last thing that comes to my mind, because it's common to see people, like soldiers, sat in plastic chairs drinking *mate*".⁵⁶¹

Why does *mate* now tend to be associated with Syrian soldiers? How are *mate*, the Alawi and the army linked? Often described as having a "minority regime", Syria is currently ruled by the Alawite community which represents ten percent of the Syrian population. According to Aslam Farouk-Alli, in the mid twentieth century, the nascent Ba'ath party was instrumental in the Alawi community's rise to power. Like many Syrian religious minorities, Alawites found the party appealing because it advocated a secular, socialist political system "that promised them freedom from socio-economic discrimination and minority status".⁵⁶² And in the Alawi ascent to power, the Syrian army was even more important than the Ba'ath party:

"Like the Ba'ath party the army served as a means of upward social mobility for marginalized religious minorities and impoverished Syrians from the rural peripheries, who flocked to its number far greater than their percentage of population. several factors contributed to the over representation of Alawis in the army. First, the French had encouraged minority recruitment to counter the nationalist tendencies of the Arab-Sunni majority⁵⁶³, second, minorities came from poor backgrounds and were attracted by the economic opportunities and social advancement offered by a career in the army, and third, Sunni urban elites avoided military service and considered the army a place for the socially undistinguished⁵⁶⁴".⁵⁶⁵

Military and security institutions represented desirable career opportunities that were especially attractive to marginalized segments of society, and Assad regimes have aimed at reinforcing Alawi solidarity "by ensuring that the public sector employment was concentrated in their hands".⁵⁶⁶ At least equally important was the urge to secure the regime by "stacking the security agencies and the officer corps with family relations of the ruling clan and its Alawite tribal allies".⁵⁶⁷ Thus, Alawites were at significant advantage for upward social mobility and came to dominate the upper ranks of Assad regimes. Therefore, according to Aslam Farouk-Alli, the Alawi community as a whole, "has been hamstrung in association with the ruling Assad clan, which has exploited religious identity to entrench autocratic rules".⁵⁶⁸ Thus, throughout the decades preceding the 2011 uprising, sects had become a common frame of interpretation for social relation, with one particular sect-Alawites- credited with "unpredictable near magical

⁵⁶¹ Author's Interview with S. G. conducted in London on the 14 of September 2020

⁵⁶² Larkin C and Michel E. Kerr, (dir.) 2015 *The Alawis of Syria*.... p. 41

⁵⁶³ See Bou-Nacklie, N.E. 1993. "Les troupes spéciales : Religious and Ethnic Recruitment, 1916-46"

⁵⁶⁴ See also Faksh, *The Alawi Community of Syria*, p. 143.

⁵⁶⁵ Larkin C and Michel E. Kerr, (dir.) 2015 *The Alawis of Syria*.... p. 41

⁵⁶⁶ Wimmen, H. 2016, *Syria's path from civic uprising to civil war*, p. 6

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid

⁵⁶⁸ Larkin C and Michel E. Kerr, (dir.) 2015 *The Alawis of Syria*.... p. 41p. 47

powers”.⁵⁶⁹ In a context in which Alawi dominate the upper ranks of Assad regime, it is not surprising to find *mate* in hands of soldiers or government officials.

At a time in which sectarian identities are exacerbated, I consider important to question to what extent *mate* functions as a status marker. Having particularly well adhered to Druze and Alawite social organization and mysticisms, *mate* might constitute a *mark of sameness* among those minorities. People recognize in and with their group through the sharing of common practices and *mate* works fostering a sense of belonging. But while *mate* functions as a *mark of sameness* within the communities, it also constitutes a *mark of difference* from the outside. Indeed, identification is constituted by ambivalence⁵⁷⁰, by the “doubleness of similarity and difference”⁵⁷¹, and I argue that the exclusive association of *mate* with Druze and Alawites might be primarily due to the increasing *representation* of sectarian difference. In a 2018 episode of the famous Lebanese Mafi Mtlo Show, for instance, each person plays a character based on their sect and *mate* literally becomes a *mark of difference*, an identifier attached to the Druze woman who keeps sipping it (Figure 8). Although the TV show makes fun of the various cliché commonly associated to one or another sect, it also translates the way difference is staged in Lebanon. And I consider that it would be worth investigating the various *representations* of *mate* in Lebanese and Syrian visual culture, so as to analyze how media and TV shows might work essentializing *mate* as an exclusive Druze or Alawite beverage, while *mate* consumption is far from remaining confined to those communities.

⁵⁶⁹ Wimmen, H. 2016, *Syria's path from civic uprising to civil war* p. 10

⁵⁷⁰ Hall Stuart. 1991. “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities.” *Culture, Globalisation and the World System*. P: 47

⁵⁷¹ Hall Stuart. 1990. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. P. 227



Figure 8: Mafi Mtlo Show picturing *mate* in the hand of the Druze character ⁵⁷²

Indeed, according to Anna Poujeau, whose research focus on Syrian Christians the reductive association of *mate* with Druze and Alawite is a cliché that must be deconstructed.⁵⁷³ In an email-interview she told me that, far from remaining affiliated to any specific community, *mate* was in reality drunk by everybody in Syria:

“In Syria, people who like to drink *mate* drink it without fear of being mistaken for a Druze or something else. This drink is widespread throughout Syria but it is more widely found on the coast, in the Homs region and in Jabal al-Arab, a Druze and Christian region. Everyone drinks it : Christian or Druze. Given the internal migration, you can imagine how widespread this drink is, after that it is a matter of taste and habit. In Syria, there is no such a community identification as in Lebanon, however the drink is traditionally associated with the Druze and the Alawites. But in reality, those who like *mate* drink it without paying attention to this community issue. Besides, everyone has a *mate* set at home even if they don't usually drink much of it”.⁵⁷⁴

In addition to Anna Poujeau's testimony, I think that a single calculation can demonstrate that Druzes and Alawites cannot be the only ones to consume *mate* in Syria. Indeed when

⁵⁷² Pictures extracted from the 2018 video of the Lebanese comedy group “Mafi Metlo Show”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZWBibGsSXE> Accessed May 3rd, 2023.

⁵⁷³ See Poujeau Anna, 2014. *Des monastères en partage. Sainteté et pouvoir chez les chrétiens de Syrie*.

⁵⁷⁴ Email interview with Anna Poujeau, on the 23 of November 2020

confronting the amount of *yerba mate* imported per year by Syria with the number of Alawites and Syrians living there, one can quickly become aware that they cannot consume such an amount of *mate* alone. It is established that Syria accounts between 350.000 and 400.000 Druzes and approximately two million Alawite, while Lebanon hosts 350 000 Druzes. The total sum of Druze and Alawites therefore equate to more or less 2,8 million people. If we divide the 32 000 000 kilos of *yerba mate* imported by Syria and Lebanon in 2019 by 2,800 000 we obtain an amount of 11,4 kilos of *yerba* per person per year. This represents almost twice the consumption of Argentinians who consume a bit more than 6 kg of *yerba* per habitant each year. This figure indicates that *mate* consumption is therefore far from being only part of the Druze and Alawite customs.

Following return migrants who had grown accustomed to *mate* when living in Argentina, *mate* penetrated the Middle East by keeping a ritualized collective consumption. Although the drink successfully spread among the whole Syrian and Lebanese societies, it has recently been essentially associated with the Druze and Alawite communities at a time in which sectarian identities are politicized. However, *mate* has kept the agency to both escape restaurant menus and reductive representations. Indeed, *mate* neither stick to the giant fingerprint designed by the INYM in Argentina, nor to the pictures of Alawite soldiers. Here and there, the drink is less a marker of identity than a vector of identification. *Mate* does not exacerbate sectarianism, but on the contrary exhibit the material trace of a transnational past. When consuming *mate*, Syrian and Lebanese whether Druze, Alawites, Muslims or Christians both revive the memory of a link to Argentina and rearticulate multiple layers of belonging, being a connection to a family, a group or any other “imagined community”.

PART III

MATE IN THE WESTERN WORLD

“What’s going on guys, I have just discovered a very special plant in the South of Patagonia called *yerba mate*. It leads to increased focus, energy, concentration, health benefits, creativity, this stuff is just the best and I want to tell you exactly what this can do for you, right here, right now! It is all about improving yourself, on a daily basis, taking action and really striving towards your goals to get where you wanna be. I’m gonna help you become the best version of yourself so that you could do that. Ok! So *yerba mate* is an ancient plant from South America, it’s consumed in Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina and in Chili, people carry around these flasks. I am not gonna go through how they actually prepare the drink, you can check up some youtube videos or listen to links in the description below. I just want to tell you about what *yerba mate* is and this fascinating new discovery that I have stumbled across. It provides a lot of energy, I just had some *yerba mate* and you can tell that I am on point at the moment, I am feeling good, energized, focused, creative. I am feeling on the board at the moment and this is exactly what the herb does. It really boosts your energy, you are energized but your mind remains in a calm state. It’s really really cool stuff. It has got less caffeine than coffee so it’s great if you want a substitute for coffee (...), it’s got a whole host of health benefits, it’s full of antioxidant, it’s got more antioxidant than green tea, it’s been proven through scientific studies. It turns your body into a more alkaline state. It’s really good for weight loss, cholesterol levels, it is also good as lowering your blood sugar, it’s got minerals like potassium, magnesium. (...) So this stuff is really good for you. Try this stuff out, I mean what’s the worse thing that can happen? It really does help you generating new ideas and think in a really, I don’t know, really more of an active and focused way while still remaining calm. I had to share that with you guys. Please give it a crack!”⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁵Extract from the video by the youtuber « Today Dreamer » published on the 27 of February 2019
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6R76XdhvKMc>

CHAPTER 9

THE RE-PRESENTATION OF *YERBA MATE* AS A HEALTHY PRODUCT

I. *MATE'S* RECENT ENCOUNTER WITH WESTERN MARKETS

1) *YERBA MATE* AND THE WESTERN WORLD: A LONG-LASTING NON-ENCOUNTER

Soon after their arrival in the Paraguay region, in 1537, Spaniards quickly assimilated the habit of drinking *mate* from the Guaraní Indigenous people⁵⁷⁶. By the turn of the seventeenth century, *yerba* use had spread throughout the whole empire, from Potosi to Buenos Aires, and *mate* became a well-established a social drink in both the lower and upper classes of colonial society⁵⁷⁷. At that time, two other stimulating infusion, coffee and tea, were, like *mate*, still unknown in Europe. All three products contained caffeine “which was to change the social, physiological, financial and imperial face of Europe”, but although they reached the Old Continent at about the same time, they followed different trajectories.⁵⁷⁸ Chocolate was introduced to Europe in 1544 by Spain, coffee came to Venice in the 1640s, and tea arrived in Amsterdam in 1610, but “to the bitter disappointment of South American *yerba* producers, multiple efforts to introduce *yerba* to a broader public generally foundered until the late twentieth century.”⁵⁷⁹ The introduction of tea and coffee in Europe did not result in an immediate penetration of European mores. Indeed, it was only in the eighteenth and nineteenth century that drinking tea and coffee became a common practice. But why did *yerba*, which reached Europe at the same time as other similar stimulants, not follow the same route as tea, coffee or chocolate?

According to Christina Folch, *yerba's* trajectory must be understood in the context of the introduction of caffeine drinks to Europe, and more broadly in the context of empire:

“Tea came under the control of monopolistic companies such as the British East India Company, whose internal structures and external orientation were constructed according to a profit-maximizing capitalist logic—hence the move of production from China to India, and the infamous opium trade. Coffee, though it entered Europe through the structure of the coffeehouse, also restructured coffee-producing regions according to a similar logic, as they were incorporated into the world market, this time under a free trade ideology. (...) Within the Spanish empire, *yerba* was developed first for royal

⁵⁷⁶ See Chapter 2 of this thesis

⁵⁷⁷ Garavaglia, J. C. 1983, *Mercado interno* p. 40

⁵⁷⁸ Folch, C. 2010. “Stimulating consumption...” p. 7

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid

tribute and secondly for local trade, rather than according to the economic directives of investors and shareholders.”⁵⁸⁰

Unlike the development in the production of tea and coffee which followed a “profit-maximizing capitalist logic”, *yerba mate* was not incorporated into the world market but rather represented a key pillar of the Spanish empire’s internal economy. This is partially due to the fact that, unlike tea, coffee and cacao which could be cultivated in many different regions, *yerba mate* only grew in a restricted area- covering North Argentina, Paraguay and Southern Brazil- and could not be transplanted easily. Moreover, with the exception of the seventeenth-century Jesuit Missions’ experience, *yerba mate*’s production was not rationally mastered until the early 20th century. Although multiple attempts were made to try to develop plantations, the Spaniards failed to make them flourish and therefore used to harvest the plant by extracting it from wild *yerbales*. The complexity of both cultivating and transplanting *yerba* to regions more accessible to European and North American markets is one of the reasons why *yerba*’s route differed from those of other stimulant products. It is worth mentioning that propaganda against *mate* in Europe also contributed to hampering the market success of *yerba*.

Both *material* artefacts and written documents provide evidence that Europe had early contact with *yerba mate*. The collection of the museum Casa de la Independancia in Asuncion, for instance, contains a silver *mate* cup and a gold and silver bombilla made in Europe in the eighteenth century. Regarding written records, Father Sanchez Labrador’s 1774 account, mentions the European encounter with *mate*: “In Spain and in Portugal, many drink *yerba*... in Italy, with the arrival of the Jesuits, many persons of distinction have [also] drunk it”.⁵⁸¹ And in 1856, Thomas Ewbank even claimed that in Europe the habit of tea-drinking came from South America fully half a century before the “Chinese infusion” appeared.⁵⁸² In 1878, a silver *mate* was displayed in the Paraguayan section of the Universal exhibition hold in Paris. This extract from the illustrated catalogue of the exhibition shows how *mate* was at that time presented positively:

“The cassowary is a kind of ostrich that lives in the pampas. Its feathers are exploited, but they are not as impressive as those of the African, Arabian or Syrian ostrich. The Republics of Argentina and Paraguay have exhibited these feathers and the bird they come from. Paraguay also presented *mate*, which is a silver cup where *yerba mate*, the South American tea, is infused and sipped from a straw with a golden mouthpiece. During night parties in Buenos Aires, it is common to see beautiful women sipping the beverage before passing it to their gentlemen friend.”⁵⁸³

⁵⁸⁰ Folch, C. 2010. “Stimulating consumption...” p. 18-20

⁵⁸¹ Furlong, G. 1991. *Jose Sanchez Labrador, S. J., y su « Yerba mate »* , p. 118

⁵⁸² Ewbank, T. 1856. *Life in Brazil ; Or, A Journal of a Visit to the Land of the Cocoas and the Palm*. P. 199

⁵⁸³ Brunfaut, J. (dir.) 1878. *L'exposition universelle de 1878 illustrée*, p. 836

Not only was *mate* exhibited in fairs but also reported on newspapers which often introduced it as an original and healthy beverage. In *La femme de France* in 1930, *mate* was for instance mentioned in a serial part of the “Gastronomic consultation” section:

“Of course I know *mate*, dear Abeille ! A lot of people praise it as being good for the stomach and digestion, far healthier than tea and less of a stimulant. One can drink large quantities of *mate* without suffering from insomnia. It is also commonly said that *mate* has coca’s restorative properties and rhubarb’s refreshing virtues.”⁵⁸⁴

In the first decades of the twentieth century, *mate* was often compared to other stimulant beverages, as in the above extract. To persuade Europeans to adopt *mate*, promoters suggested that it could be used as a low-cost replacement for coffee and tea for military troops, notably in Great Britain.⁵⁸⁵ In 1905, the U.S. vice-consul in Argentina, Mr. Aben M. Flagg had written that *mate*:

“would be of inestimable value to our army and navy, for the entire outfit of a soldier or sailor would not take up so much room as a cup and spoon, and the beverage could be prepared at any moment of the day or night without a cook. It would cost about one-fifth the price of tea, and would not make the consumer bilious, as coffee is inclined to do.”⁵⁸⁶

Depicted as a virtuous beverage and as a cheaper substitute for other stimulant drinks, *mate* seemed to be destined to successfully penetrate western markets. So why did it actually fail to catch on Europe and North America?

Presented as a substitute for tea and coffee, *mate* was perceived as a threat for these products. And coffee and tea lobbies worked to fight against nascent competition from *yerba*. In his writings, Father Sanchez Labrador recalled that in the eighteenth century, *yerba mate* was the target of negative marketing from competitors. He reported that Europeans said that:

“The use of *yerba* causes a loss of color in the face and tinges them with pallor. Those who hoped to establish the use of Oriental Tea have invented this so that the use of *yerba* might fall, as it had begun to take flight. And so, the majority of Peru, Chile, Tucumán, all these provinces, as well as many people from Spain and Portugal are accustomed to this drink [i.e., *yerba*] and they all retain rosy faces and such beauty that the defect of which *yerba* is accused is purely false. Oriental Tea, Coffee from Turkey, and American Chocolate also have defects. Nevertheless these beverages triumphed over

⁵⁸⁴ Revue La Femme de France, n°801 September 1930. Paris : <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb44222136j>, p. 24

⁵⁸⁵ Blay Pigrau A. 1918. *La Yerba-Mate*, p. 22

⁵⁸⁶ Geare, R. I. 1905. “About Yerba Maté”. *Tea and coffee Trade Journal* 9, 4 p.188

their critics, their praise resting on the continued experience of their good qualities.⁵⁸⁷

Dobrizhoffer also noted this phenomenon, saying that although the British had successfully introduced *yerba mate* to their country in the eighteenth century, the product soon vanished from the market because of pamphlets circulated by its detractors who had links with the oriental tea trade. These opponents of *yerba* claimed it was a pernicious venom which could deprive women from their beauty and fecundity.⁵⁸⁸ Pejorative accounts of *mate*'s collective consumption also served to strengthen the drink's unpopularity. In 1865 for instance, Alfred Demersay drew attention to the "disgusting" necessity to sip the drink from "a straw that successively passes from a mouth to another, starting by the lips of the slave in charge of its preparation, without being ever washed. A *mate* drinker never washes a bombilla ». ⁵⁸⁹ *Mate*'s ceremony clashed with European notions of cleanness and hygiene and the collective nature of its ritual consumption heightened prejudices against it. So the success of propaganda campaigns against *mate*, and the fact that *yerba mate* could not be easily grown on plantations hampered its arrival on the market. Having failed in taking hold on European and North American drink sectors, *yerba mate* ended up only used as a curative in those regions.⁵⁹⁰

Like other psychoactive substances, *yerba mate* first penetrated Europe in the form of medicine.⁵⁹¹ At the turn of the twentieth century, scientists began to conduct pharmacological experiments in laboratories in order to isolate *yerba mate*'s chemical compounds. The plant was found to have various medicinal properties, and *yerba mate* was prescribed for a wide range of problems. Recognized as a hunger suppressant, an antifebrotic, a stimulant and a sedative, *yerba* was also used to treat the nervous, muscular and cardiac systems.⁵⁹² *Yerba*'s early usages even included intravenous injection for heart and urinary problems⁵⁹³. Yet despite the fact that *yerba mate* has been extensively marketed by the pharmaceutical industry since the turn of the twentieth century, it is only in the last two decades that it has been the object of

⁵⁸⁷ Quoted in Furlong 1991, p. 119-20

⁵⁸⁸ Dobrizhoffer, M. [1783]. *Historia de los Abipones*, Tomo I, pp. 203-204

⁵⁸⁹ Demersay, A. « Le maté, ses caractères botaniques, sa culture, sa récolte, sa préparation, son usage, son action physiologique sur l'homme », *Histoire du Paraguay*, quoted in Eyriès J. B and Malte-Brun (dir.) 1865. *Nouvelles annales des voyages, de la géographie et de l'histoire*. Paris. P. 347.

⁵⁹⁰ Daumas, E. 1930. *El problema de la yerba mate*. P. 31

⁵⁹¹ Courtwright D. 2001. *Forces of habit: drugs and the making of the modern world.*; Goodman, J. 1993. *Tobacco in history: The cultures of Dependence.*; Jankowiak, W. and Bradburd, D. (eds.) 2003. *Drugs, Labor and Colonial Expansion*.

⁵⁹² Blay Pigrau A. 1918. *La Yerba Mate*, p. 18 ; Girola, C. D. 1915. *Cultivo de la Yerba Mate (Ilex Paraguariensis)*. P.4; Levy, G. C. 1890. *Handy Guide to the River Plate*, p. 184; Muello, A. C. 1946. *Yerba Mate, su cultivo y explotación. Enciclopedia Agropecuaria Argentina* 31. P.41

⁵⁹³ *Le maté ou thé du Paraguay*, 1914, p.14

serious scientific research.⁵⁹⁴ Indeed, the recent world-wide interest for *yerba mate* is currently accompanied by a growing number of articles in scientific papers which both investigate and publicize the plant's beneficial properties and effects. The scientific literature notably reports that this herbal tea is an antioxidant, hypocholesterolemic, a central nervous stimulant and that it benefits the cardiovascular system⁵⁹⁵ (Figure 1). Moreover, "numerous active phytochemicals have been identified in *mate* tea that may be responsible for its health benefits".⁵⁹⁶ Indeed, rich in xanthines, theobromine and theophylline, *mate* tea is said to increase energy levels while providing "high amounts of caffeoylquinic acid derivatives, with biological effects beneficial for human health".⁵⁹⁷ It is worth noting that now that *yerba mate*'s compounds have been identified and documented, research on this plant continues so as to explore its "extraordinary possibilities not only as a consumer beverage but also in the nutraceutical industry".⁵⁹⁸ Many products to help at weight loss, for instance, now contain some derivatives of *yerba mate*. At a time in which consumers in the Global North are increasingly concerned with their diet and wellbeing, *yerba mate* is not only scientifically recognized as a healthy plant but also re-signified as a healthy product by marketing. Having long been rejected by western markets, *mate* now seems to be now poised to take hold in the European and North American health drink sectors.

⁵⁹⁴ Heck C.I and E.G. De Mejia. 2007. "Yerba Mate Tea (*Ilex paraguariensis*): A Comprehensive Review on Chemistry, Health Implications, and Technological Considerations", *Journal of Food Science*, vol. 72, nr.9, p. 149

⁵⁹⁵ See : Filip R. and others. 2000. "Antioxidant activity of *Ilex Paraguariensis* and related species". *Nutr Res* 20:1437-46. VanderJagt T.J. and others. 2002. "Comparison of the total antioxidant content of 30 widely used medicinal plants of New Mexico". *Life Sci* 70:1035-40 ; Filip R. and G.E. Ferraro. 2003. "Researching on new species of "Mate": *Ilex breviscupis*: phytochemical and pharmacology study". *Phytotherapy Res.* 12:129-31; Gonzalez and others. 1993. "Biological screening of Uruguayan medicinal plants". *Journal Ethnopharmacol* 39:217-20 ; Schinella and others. 2005. "Cardioprotective effects of *Ilex paraguariensis* extract: evidence for a nitric oxide-dependent mechanism". *Clin Nutr* 24:360-6.

⁵⁹⁶ Heck C.I and E.G. De Mejia. 2007. "Yerba Mate Tea (*Ilex paraguariensis*): A Comprehensive Review on Chemistry, Health Implications, and Technological Considerations", p. 138

⁵⁹⁷ Bravo and others. 2007. "LC/MS characterization of phenolic constituents of *Mate* (*Ilex Paraguariensis*, St. Hil.) and its antioxidant activity compared to commonly consumed beverages". *Food Res Int* 40:393-405.

⁵⁹⁸ Heck C.I and E.G. De Mejia. 2007. Yerba Mate Tea (*Ilex paraguariensis*): A Comprehensive Review on Chemistry, Health Implications, and Technological Considerations", p.149

Table 4 – Compounds identified in Yerba Mate leaves and some of their biological activities.

Compound	Biological activities
Caffeine	Anticarcinogenic, antiobesity, antioxidant, antitumor, diuretic, energizer 20 to 200 mg, stimulant, topoisomerase-I-inhibitor 0.1 M, topoisomerase-II-inhibitor 99 mM, vasodilator
Chlorogenic-acid	Antioxidant $IC_{50} = 54.2 \mu M$, analgesic, antiatherosclerotic, antibacterial, antidiabetic, antitumor, choleric
Chlorophyll	Antibacterial, anticancer
Choline	Antidiabetic, cholinergic, lipotropic
Nicotinic acid	Choleric, hypocholesterolemic 1 to 6 g/day
Pantothenic acid	Antiallergic 100 to 500 mg/day, antiarthritic 500 to 2000 mg/day, antifatigue
Rutin	Antioxidant $IC_{28} = 30 \text{ ppm}$ $IC_{50} = 120 \mu M$, antitumor, antitumor-promoter, antiulcer, cAMP-phosphodiesterase-inhibitor, topoisomerase-II-inhibitor $IC_{50} = 1 \mu g/mL$, vasodilator
Tannin	Antioxidant 1/3 quercetin $IC_{50} = 1.44 \mu g/mL$, antitumor, antitumor-promoter, lipoxygenase-inhibitor, MAO-inhibitor ^e
Theobromine	cAMP-inhibitor $IC_{50} = 0.06 \text{ mg/mL}$, cAMP-phosphodiesterase-inhibitor, diuretic 300 to 600 mg/day, stimulant, myorelaxant
Theophylline	cAMP-inhibitor $IC_{50} = 0.06 \text{ mg/mL}$, cAMP-phosphodiesterase-inhibitor, diuretic, choleric, stimulant, vasodilator, myorelaxant 100 μM
Ursolic acid	Analgesic, antioxidant $IC_{50} = 10 \mu M$, antiperoxidant $IC_{35} = 200 \mu g/mL$, protease-inhibitor $IC_{85} = 18 \mu g/mL$, topoisomerase-II-inhibitor, antiarrhythmic, anticancer, antialzheimer

Adapted from Duke (1992).

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Figure 1: *Yerba Mate*'s compounds and effects

⁵⁹⁹ Table extracted from Heck C.I and E.G. De Mejia. 2007. "Yerba Mate Tea (*Ilex paraguariensis*): A Comprehensive Review on Chemistry, Health Implications, and Technological Considerations", p.143

2) THE RE-SIGNIFICATION OF *MATE* AS A HEALTHY PRODUCT

In order to introduce western consumers to *yerba mate*, its marketing stresses the beneficial properties of the drink by incorporating scientific data into their discourse. For example, on the website of Guayaki - most important company selling *yerba mate* in the USA, created in 1996-*mate* is described as follows:

“Brewed from the naturally caffeinated and nourishing leaves of the species of holly native to the South American Atlantic rainforest (*Ilex paraguariensis*), it contains 24 vitamins and minerals, 15 amino acids, and abundant polyphenols. Remarkably, the Pasteur Institute and the Paris Scientific society concluded in 1964 that “it is difficult to find a plant in any area of the world equal to *mate* in nutritional value” and that *yerba mate* contains “practically all of the vitamins necessary to sustain life.”⁶⁰⁰

Scientific research and the stamp of approval of the Pasteur Institute therefore support the representation and re-signification of a plant that has long been unknown to western consumers, and marketing adapts its narrative to satisfy the demands of a market increasingly concerned with health. Moreover, advertisements also position *mate* as a superfood by renaming its invigorating qualities. Indeed, though it has been established for more than a century that one of *yerba mate*'s main ingredient is caffeine, marketing has recently sought to establish *mate*'s uniqueness by asserting that the drink's stimulant effect was due to his high content in “*mateine*”. Advertising therefore currently works to distinguish *yerba*'s stimulant effects from those of coffee by renaming a molecule that is in fact chemically identical to caffeine. This shows that, in the global North, *yerba* is undergoing a metamorphosis and that the new increasing interest in the plant is based on its re-signification. In teashops the promotion of *yerba*'s unicity stress the benefits of *mateine*, depicted as a harmless, exotic and non-addictive stimulant. The re-naming of *yerba mate*'s properties and the re-signification of its meaning “well illustrates the flexibility and complexity of the capitalist market as it operates within different socio-cultural contexts”⁶⁰¹. Indeed, *mate* consumption has been described differently over time, due to the changing identities of its users, the evolving discourse of its critics, as well as to shifts of economic context. In other words, *yerba*'s meaning ceaselessly evolves and is by no means static. Thus, the re-signification of *yerba* which - having long been despised- is now worshipped as a marvelous magic potion, reveals the interwoven nature of commodities which are both *material* and symbolic. Indeed, the constant *material* qualities of commodities are intrinsically linked to fluctuating symbolic interpretation. *Yerba*'s chemical composition was exactly the same a century ago, and if *mate* is now poised to take on European and North

⁶⁰⁰ Guayaki company website: <https://guayaki.com/yerba-mate/> accessed on 10/03/ 2022)

⁶⁰¹ Folch, C. 2010. “Stimulating Consumption” p. 32

American, it is only because the changing gaze on its compounds has also remodeled its image.

Yerba mate is spreading into the North American and European markets under new forms. With remarkable prescience, Barbier had already predicted in 1879 that *yerba mate* would enter Europe only if separated from the calabash it was inextricably linked to in South America, and that *yerba mate*, once detached from its collective consumption, would undoubtedly penetrate western mores:

“By replacing the infusion of the powder by the decoction of the leaf, one can prepare and drink *mate* like a tea and add milk or more water to it, like we are used to do with coffee or tea. With the diffusion of a strong taste for well-being and novelties, as well as the increasing need for stimulant products, *mate* is poised to penetrate in ten years the market that its predecessors gained in two centuries.”⁶⁰²

Barbier’s intuition proved correct although *mate* took not ten years, but a century to reach the western world, and it arrived there under new forms. Tea bags, as suggested by Barbier are one of the many alternative ways offered by the market to consume *yerba mate* (Figure 2). In addition to “*mate*-bags”, one can find a wide range of refreshing beverages in cans and bottles stressing *yerba*’s health-enhancing properties. Without being exhaustive big brands like Perrier (Figure 3) and Charitea have recently enlarged their product range by creating specific *yerba* blends.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰² Barbier, C. *Le maté*. quoted in Société académique du Bas-rhin. 1879. Bulletin/ société académique du Bas-Rhin pour le progrès des sciences, des lettres, des arts et de la vie économique p. 509

⁶⁰³ See <https://charitea.com/en/product/charitea-mate/> accessed on June 5, 2023



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Figure 2: Yerba mate tea bags

604 <https://us.kissmeorganics.com/shop/yerba-mate-variety-pack/>

605 <https://www.sol-a-sol.fr/mate/infusettes/>

606 <https://www.amazon.com/ECOTEAS-Organic-Yerba-Mate-Unsmoked/dp/B00822Z36O>



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Figure 3: Perrier 2021 Advertising campaign for a new energizing drink made with *yerba mate*

Smaller companies, exclusively devoted to the creation of beverages made with *yerba mate*, have also flourished. In France for instance, the company Gallimaté, created in 2017, invented a fizzy drink blending *yerba mate* and elderflower and in 2021 another company Pop Mate launched a similar healthy stimulant soft drink⁶⁰⁸. I will focus on Guayaki and Club Mate, the two leading firms selling *yerba mate* in the United-States of America and Europe. Both companies work publicizing *mate* as a healthy beverage and I consider important to pay attention to the discourse of their websites. Identifying *yerba* with “holiness”, Guayaki website’s discourse functions fantasizing the purity of the plant to enabling the consumers to fill themselves with “good energy”. The website invites you to experience a “magic” regeneration thanks to *mate*’s propensity to provide “strength”, “health” and “euphoria” (Figure 4). Furthermore people are promised the opportunity to connect with their inner self when consuming such a powerful beverage. Drinking *mate*, they say, is to “come to life” (Figure 5).

⁶⁰⁷ <https://www.nestle-waters.fr/newsroom/perrier-energize-recette-bio-unique>

Accessed on July 31, 2023

⁶⁰⁸ See <http://www.cyrilrouquet.com/recettes/2020/6/25/gallimat-les-boisson-aux-extraits-naturels-de-mat> Accessed on July 31, 2023 and <https://www.popmate.fr> Accessed on June 12, 2023.

MEET THE MIGHTY MATE LEAF

Legend has it that a magical tree grows in the South American rainforest with the powers to unite and energize.

We believe thousands of years of legend can't be wrong: Yerba mate has the strength of coffee, the health benefits of tea, and the euphoria of chocolate, all in a single drink.

If that's not magic, we don't know what is.

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Figure 4: The “magic” of *yerba mate* presented by the Guayaki website.

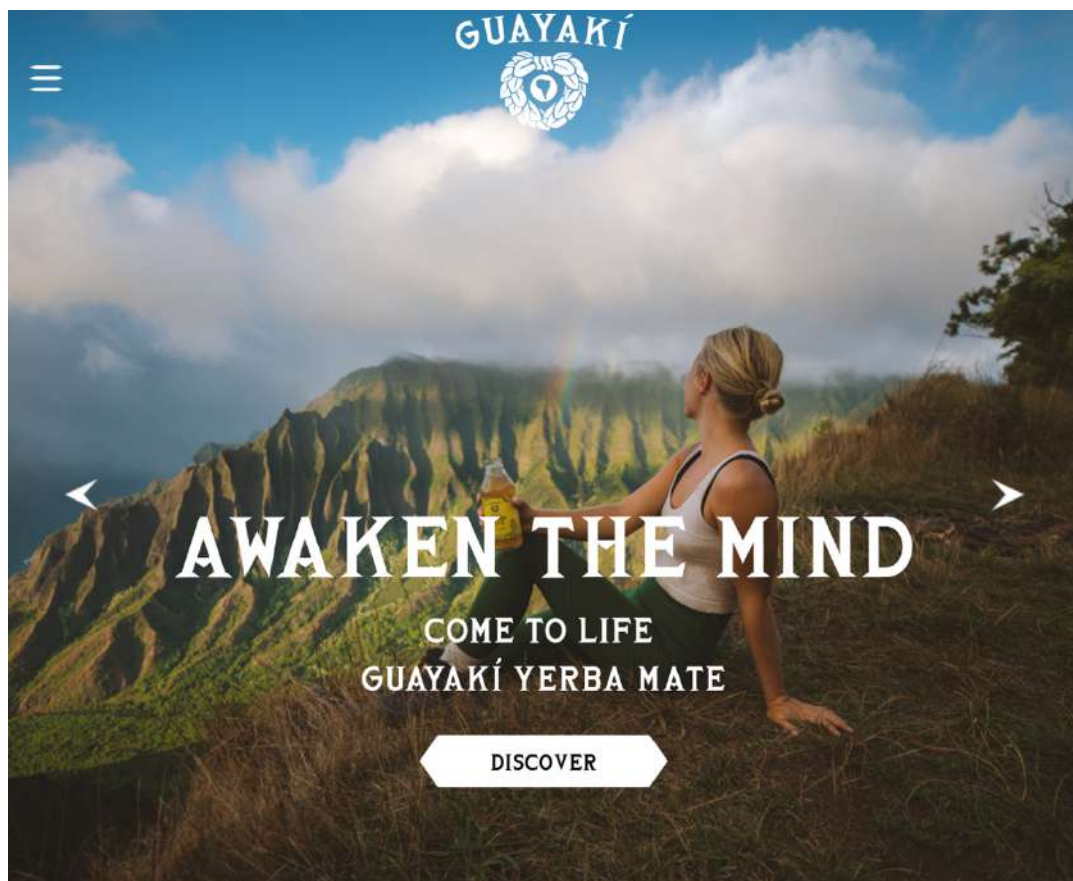


Figure 5: *Mate*, a “regenerative” drink according to Guayaki website.

⁶⁰⁹ Guayaki website: <https://guayaki.com> Accessed on July 31, 2023.

To have the “magic” of *yerba* operating on their targeted consumers, Guayaki has developed a large range of products. Since North Americans are not that familiar with *yerba mate* the company transformed it into forms that fit American food consumption patterns. Describing themselves as “changemakers fueling the regenerative movement”, they provide their clients with healthy *Mate* tea bags flavored with mint, lemon or chai, *mate* latte concentrates, as well as canned *mate* and *mate* energy shots.⁶¹⁰ (Figure 6).



HIGH ENERGY CANS +

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Figure 6: *Yerba mate* cans: Guayaki’s most successful product

Contrary to Guayaki, Club *Mate* has limited its offer to a single bottle, but its website, like the Guayaki website, insists on *yerba mate*’s fantastic invigorating qualities: while Guayaki speaks of a “magic” beverage, Club *Mate* mentions a “super-natural” energy (Figure 7). Providing people with a healthy boost, Club *mate*’s website asserts that the drink is “not only convincing with its low calorie content but also with the fact that it is vegan, vegetarian, lactose-free, gluten-free and alcohol-free”⁶¹². One is encouraged to try the beverage and to fall “sip by sip” into a good addiction: “you will quickly acquire a taste for it and you will want more and more”.⁶¹³ Originally called Sekt-Bronte, Club *Mate* was created long before Guayaki in 1924 by Mr. G. Latteier in Germany. In 1994, the company was sold to the brewery Losher who marketed the beverage under the name of Club *Mate*. The energizing drink made of *yerba mate* soon

⁶¹⁰ <https://guayaki.com> Accessed on June 2, 2023.

⁶¹¹ <https://guayaki.com/our-product-family/> Accessed on June 2, 2023.

⁶¹² <https://www.club-mate.de/en/> Accessed on June 6, 2023.

⁶¹³ <https://www.club-mate.de/en/> Accessed on June 6, 2023.

became popular with the hackers of the Chaos computer club who consumed it to remain awake. Later, the drink gained popularity in Berlin nightclubs where its popularity essentially spread by word of mouth. Although Club *Mate*'s website provides a short video retracing the first steps of the beverage in Germany, -which somehow recalls traditional *mate*'s trajectory since its early diffusion relied on physical transmission: the company refused to publicize the drink, and Club *Mate* contingently expanded around-, it essentially stresses the benefits of a "super-natural plant".⁶¹⁴ Club *Mate*'s discourse connects *mate* to well-being rather than to nightlife, and the company stresses their concern for environment, for example by using engaging returnable bottles. They claim that Club *Mate* is the symbol of a generation respectful of their environment and of their body's health:

" Club *mate* is the incredible history of a natural sparkling beverage made of *yerba mate*, which was invented by a family of German brewers in 1924 and has later become the symbol of a generation respectful of their environment, concerned with their consumption choices and eager to pleasurably take care of their body." ⁶¹⁵

With the emergence of numerous competitors, Club *Mate* have widened their product range by adding various flavors to Club *Mate*'s initial recipe that had until recently remained their only product. Pomegranate, and Coca Cola among other flavours, enabled the company to target a wider demand.



Figure 7: Club-Mate: the "Sur-Natural Energy"

⁶¹⁴: <https://club-mate.fr> Accessed on June 5, 2023

⁶¹⁵ <https://club-mate.fr> Accessed on June 5, 2023

Club *mate* and Guayaki's websites similarly promote *yerba mate*'s health properties by creating a whole narrative on the "regenerative" or "super-natural" energy that people should sip to become the best version of themselves. This re-presentation and re-signification of *yerba mate* provides a good case study of how certain foods are transformed to fit "the well-worn grooves of prominent health food marketing",⁶¹⁶ and points to the "powerful effects of new affects- new ways of conceiving and feeling about the body".⁶¹⁷ Since the mid-1990s, popular nutrition discourse has shifted from advising people to avoid certain "bad" foods to emphasizing the consumption of "good" foods which guarantee well-being and healthfulness.⁶¹⁸ I consider it necessary to question what lies beyond the current marketisation of *yerba mate*, among other products, as a "good" and healthy food, by analyzing the politics of wellness industries in light of the notion of biopower.

II. MATE, BIOPOWER AND PRODUCTIVITY

1) HEALTH, BIOPOWER AND WELL-BEING INDUSTRIES

The re-presentation of *yerba mate* as a healthy product must be linked to the current apogee of well-being industries which are a direct emanation of biopower. The notion of biopower emerged as a theme in Foucault's 1975-1976 lectures at the Collège de France and was also briefly mentioned in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*⁶¹⁹. It is in his 1978-1979 Collège de France lectures that Foucault more fully developed "The Birth of Biopolitics" and coined the concept of biopower to designate an instance of power that directly affects life. Describing a shift from a "sovereign society" to a "disciplinary society" at the end of the XVIIIth century, Foucault analyzes the practice of modern nation states and the way they regulate their subjects. He traces the mutation of a power based on monarchical absolutism and organized around the control and ritualization of death- "take life or let live"- to a new form of power centered on the calculation of life.⁶²⁰ Biopower is the name of this new form or power. A tentacular and diffuse form of power that invades the very body of the modern subject. Biopower does not function as a coercive law but rather as a general politics that people inhabit and are inhabited by. The establishment of a "disciplinary society" is orchestrated by the "explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies",

⁶¹⁶ Fochesatto, A. 2019. "Yerba *mate*: national project to emerging Superfood." p. 59

⁶¹⁷ Folch, C. 2010. "Stimulating Consumption", p. 32

⁶¹⁸ Loyer, J. 2016. "The social life of superfoods" p.16

⁶¹⁹ Foucault, M. [1976]. 1998. *The history of Sexuality*, vol 1.

⁶²⁰ Ibid, p. 136

ranging from architecture (schools, jails, hospitals), to demographic surveys and public health programs. In short, biopower could be defined as an “art of government” that “brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations”⁶²¹. Understood as a form of power that is exercised on life, that regulates and conforms life, and that now even shapes and invents the body, biopower is actually what invigorates the wellness industries. I consider it important to comment on the long relationship between biopower and health to better understand what is actually at work in the current injunction for wellbeing.

Power over life-and therefore over health- presupposed both a control over the milieu subjects lived in and over the milieu subjects contain. Disciplinary architecture and public hygiene projects for the *milieu extérieur* ; immunology and vaccination for the *milieu intérieur*. In the eighteenth century, “health appears as a political good precisely by enhancing the citizen’s productive potential for the state and hence *against* all its looming adversaries”.⁶²² In *Staatswirtschaft*, published in 1758, for instance, Von Justi explicitly advised the prince to prepare for war by guaranteeing his subjects’ collective health⁶²³. Since within the European equilibrium, all neighbors constituted potential adversaries, the population’s health -understood as a military deterrent- represented “a political good not intrinsically but conditionally”.⁶²⁴ Representing a mode of military preparation, health also manifested the state’s action on its population, and in the second half of the eighteenth century, a new domain appeared : “medical police”. According to Ed Cohen “the explicit emphasis on medicine as an official means, or as a governing agent, refocuse[d] the policing project” since Medical police started aligning with “medical experts rather than with the cameralist administrators” who were in control of it until then: ⁶²⁵

“If cameralists ground their political claims in their extensive knowledge about population, the region, its resources, their utility for industry and export, et cetera, medical police focus more explicitly on population’s *vital* dimensions (public health, occupational safety, food, sanitation, dwellings, disposal of corpses, regulation of health practitioners, elimination of quacks, building of hospitals, and marriage and procreation, including all the vicissitudes thereof: fertility, sterility, prostitution, unwed mothers, masturbation, etc). “Medical police” thus designates a new political conjunction between physician and the state which increasingly legitimates physicians’ authority as experts

⁶²¹ Ibid p. 143.

⁶²² Cohen E. 2009. *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body*. p. 97

⁶²³ Justi, Johann Heinrich von. 1756. *Eléments généraux de police, démontrés par des raisonnements fondés sur l’objet et la fin qu’elle se propose* p. 20

⁶²⁴ Cohen E. 2009. *A body worth defending*. p. 97

⁶²⁵ Ibid. p. 97

about the population's general well-being, or "happiness", as living organisms."⁶²⁶

It is worth noting that this "health care" did not concern individual subjects, but rather the well-being of the state's people as a whole. This led to the emergence of new political and economic visions in which a population started to be treated as an "entangled problem of biology and economy", and consequently to the first "biopolitical incarnation" of the modern body.⁶²⁷ In "La naissance de la médecine sociale", Foucault insists on the role medicine played in structuring the body as a "bio-political reality". According to him, at the turn of the nineteenth century, capitalism "had first socialized a primary object, the body, in its capacity as a productive force" and society not only controlled individuals by ideology but also in and with the body⁶²⁸:

"For capitalist society, bio-politics mattered before everything, the biological, the somatic, the corporeal. The body is a bio-political reality; medicine is a bio-political strategy".⁶²⁹

Medicine and public hygiene – which Foucault designates as "a medicine of the milieu of existence" - served both as a knowledge and as a practice regulating the modern body and the vital domain they inhabited.⁶³⁰ And while at the beginning of the nineteenth century, hygiene first referred to a control of the external milieu to ensure the healthiness of population as a whole, it began, by the end of the century, to focus on the individual's internal milieu. By coining the concept of *milieu intérieur* in 1865, Claude Bernard "scientifically recasts the organism's most salient environment as existing within it" and therefore paves the way for the development and culmination of biomedical immunity.⁶³¹ Research on vaccination and immunology increased and resulted in the inoculation of biopolitics into organisms. At the turn of the twentieth century biopower came to not only control but also permeate the body. During the twentieth century "the conceptual and practical scope of the notion of health" expanded to the point of encompassing everything from "epidemics and sanitation to diet, leisure pursuits and sexual conduct."⁶³² The action of biocapitalism on bodies went even further in that it even started to regulate the individual's affects. According to Paul B. Preciado we have now entered a "pharmacopornographic biocapitalism" where the body is no longer *the object* of the disciplinary power but rather *a subject* invented by it. At a time in which biopower engenders "mobile ideas, living organs, symbols, desires, chemical reaction and affects" so as to "invent

⁶²⁶ Ibid p. 97-98

⁶²⁷ Ibid p. 116

⁶²⁸ Foucault, M. « La naissance de la médecine sociale » p. 210

⁶²⁹ Foucault, M. « La naissance de la médecine sociale p. 210

⁶³⁰ Ibid, p. 222

⁶³¹ Cohen, E. 2009. *A body worth defending*, p. 132

⁶³² Wright C. 2013. "Against Flourishing: Wellbeing as biopolitics, and the psychoanalytic alternative", *Health, Culture and Society*, vol.5, no. 1. p. 26

a subject and to globally produce it” the body has come to ingest the very surveillance devices.⁶³³ In *Testo Junkie*, Paul B. Preciado asserts that:

« We will gradually witness the miniaturisation, internalisation and introversion (a twisting movement inwards, towards the space considered *intimate*, private) of the surveillance and control devices specific to the disciplinary sex-political regime. The specificity of these soft pharmacopornographic technologies is that they take the form of the bodies they control. They transform themselves into bodies until they become inseparable and indistinguishable from the bodies they control, and mutate into subjectivities. The body no longer inhabits the disciplinary sites, but is inhabited by them; its biomolecular and organic structure is their ultimate springboard. Horror and exaltation of the body’s political power. »⁶³⁴

The “soft technologies” that Preciado mentions designate a wide range of molecules that are ingested and incorporated by the body to the point of becoming indissociable from it. By adhering to the organism they occupy, those molecules control, influence and transform the body from inside. Silicone, for instance, can “take the form of the breast” hormones can regulate one’s sleep or hunger, and superfoods their energy.⁶³⁵ And at a time in which wellbeing has become the new norm and health an imperative, biopower relies on the “biomolecular and organic structure of the body” to mold its healthiest and best version. I consider that it is worth questioning the politics of wellness industries in general and the consumption of *yerba mate* in particular in light of Preciado’s thought. Indeed, power does circulate in superfoods which, like hormones, exert a hold over the body. By being encouraged to consume healthy products, people are not merely invited to take care of themselves but also globally “invented” as high performing bodies.

Biopower has always been intrinsically linked to the notion of health, and health has long been attached to evolving meanings and purposes. Health was and still is a means rather than an end. And while “health of the population serve[d] as a form of war preparedness”⁶³⁶ in the eighteenth century, I argue that health of the individual serves as a way of optimizing performance and healthiness in the twenty-first century. Indeed, at a time in which happiness has become the new norm, health carries the promise of self-fulfillment, while also increasing productivity. The tremendous expansion of the wellness industry which is estimated “at more than \$1.5 trillion, with annual growth from 5 to 10 percent” testifies to the establishment of a

⁶³³ Preciado, Paul B. 2008. *Testo Junkie, sexe, drogue et biopolitique*, p. 54

⁶³⁴ Ibid p. 79.

⁶³⁵ Preciado, 2008 p. 79

⁶³⁶ Cohen, 2009, p. 97

new norm globally defining what the “good” and happy body should be.⁶³⁷ Although wellness industries tend to be described as a response to the increasing amount of anxiety and sadness generated by lifestyles in the Global North, I consider that they should rather be regarded as the real cause of the problems that they are said to solve. Indeed, the requirement to improve one’s wellbeing is a source of stress in itself, and many people feel depressed precisely because they do not fit the new “happiness” norm. According to this idea, wellness industries do not solve anxiety, but rather nourish it: by inventing the good and healthy body, they also shape the bad and unhealthy body, while also seeking to remedy it. In other words, “prevailing ideologies of happiness and personal fulfilment can be hard to live up to”⁶³⁸ and as Williams suggests, we are witnessing “creeping forms of mental disorder” precisely because discourses on the good life contribute to breeding sadness because of unrealistic expectations⁶³⁹. Horvitz and Wakefield argue along similar lines that the growing prevalence of depression is not due to a rise in mental disorders but rather a consequence of the current pathologizing of normal sadness, and the implications of this are far-reaching⁶⁴⁰:

“ranging from the overselling of antidepressants as treatments for ordinary sadness by exploitative pharmaceutical industries, to intrusive and expensive screening programs, where well-meaning but misguided initiatives over-simplify psychiatric research in order to detect depressive pathologies at work in society.”⁶⁴¹

The greater the pressure to be happy, the more being sad is pathologized. Therefore superfoods, such as *yerba mate*, and antidepressants should be observed as the two sides of the same coin. To feel good, one is either prescribed pills to fit the norm promoted by wellbeing industries, or doped with superfood to feel even better, and stronger and healthier. I consider that the action of wellbeing industries on bodies provides a good illustration of Preciado’s argument that biopower has come to permeate the body to the point that “the body does not inhabit disciplinary spaces anymore” but is rather “inhabited by them”. At a time in which the prevailing ideology of healthiness both relies on the prescription of pills and on the promotion of superfoods- which could be nicknamed the “good” drugs- power is digested and bodies are subjected to their own mutation, to a targeted metamorphosis towards a pre-shaped “good” and consequently high-performing body.

⁶³⁷ Callaghan Shaun and others.. 2021. “Feeling good: The future of the \$1,5 trillion wellness market”, McKinsey and Company.

⁶³⁸ Carlisle S. and others, 2009. “Wellbeing: a collateral casualty of modernity?”, *Social Science and Medicine* 69. P.1558

⁶³⁹ Williams, S. J. 2000. “Reason, emotion and embodiment: is “mental” health a contradiction in terms?” *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 22.

⁶⁴⁰ Horvitz, A. V. and Wakefield, J. C. 2007. *The loss of sadness: How psychiatry transformed normal sorrow into depressive disorder*.

⁶⁴¹ Carlisle S. and others, 2009. “Wellbeing: a collateral casualty of modernity?” p. 1558.

2) MATE, AN INDIVIDUAL BOOST ENHANCER OF PRODUCTIVITY

The healthy body now conditioned by the wellness ideology is an active, high-performing and productive body. Paying attention to the way healthy foods in general, and *yerba mate* in particular, are marketized one can indeed notice that people are generally first invited to *improve* themselves. Health is not just about feeling good. It is about seeking to feel even better. It is about achieving the best version of yourself, in everlasting improvement. Health is now synonymous with productivity and through the ingestion of healthy products, bodies are both guaranteed and expected to maximize their mental and physical performances. In the case of *yerba mate* for instance, it is worth noting that Guayaki and Club *Mate*'s marketing directly associate the healthy properties of the plant with the notions of "regeneration"⁶⁴² and "super-natural energy"⁶⁴³. By drinking *mate*, one can "awaken [his] mind"⁶⁴⁴, and experience the "magic"⁶⁴⁵ of a plant that gives them access to an until then unknown potential. The word "regenerate" is not anodyne. To regenerate is to bring new and more vigorous life to an organism. *Mate*, as a healthy product, brings you vigor and an accurate mind, it fills you with positive and productive energy. Drinking *mate* makes you "feel restored faster and ready for everyday life"⁶⁴⁶. Just try it, see how it "increases the power of concentration" and helps "energizing your muscles"⁶⁴⁷. Discover yourself sip by sip. You deserve it. *Mate* will make you think better, train better, work better, it is the healthy boost that will change your life. Guayaki and Club *mate*'s websites skillfully enshrine the notions of health, personal fulfillment and physical performance. Suggesting that *mate* is a source of improvement, and that improvement nourishes happiness, both companies' discourses well illustrate the politics of wellbeing industries in general. The health market works maximizing the bodies' productive potential by having individuals who, while working out to achieve their so-called own fulfillment, are actually collectively "invented" to adhere to the capitalist impetus for productivity. *Yerba mate* as a healthy product is an energy enhancer that basically makes you fit, in every senses of the term.

Tim Ferris, an American entrepreneur author and lifestyle guru provides an example of the promotion of *yerba mate* as a "good drug" which can be used to enhance one's productivity.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴² <https://guayaki.com> Accessed on August 2, 2023.

⁶⁴³ <https://club-mate.fr> Accessed on August 2, 2023.

⁶⁴⁴ <https://guayaki.com>

⁶⁴⁵ <https://guayaki.com>

⁶⁴⁶ <https://www.club-mate.de/en/club-mate-en/>

⁶⁴⁷ <https://www.club-mate.de/en/club-mate-en/>

⁶⁴⁸ Tim Ferris became widely known after the publication of his 4-Hour self-help books devoted to lifestyle optimization.

In *The 4-Hour Workweek* he provides people with alternative ways of designing their life-plans, and urges them to optimize their schedule so as to spend as much time as possible far from work.⁶⁴⁹ This guidebook, which has sold over 2 million copies and been translated into 40 languages, contains “lifestyle design” and “practical tips” to allow readers to reinvent and free themselves by becoming more productive. The Ferris approach advocates the adoption of a particular diet which includes the consumption of superfoods, including *yerba mate*.

In August 2016, Tim Ferris published a 9 min video on Youtube to share his tips on “smart drugs”.⁶⁵⁰ “Hey guys! Tim Ferris here, author of the 4-Hour workweek, 4-Hour body, (...) I always get asked about smart drugs, what smart drugs are you using. (...) If you want to improve cognitive function, there are a few things that I use that I found very sustainable and consistently reliable, so I’ll show you what those are”, he says as a start. He then presents his “collection” of good drugs and points out what he considers most important about each. Number one is creatine and ubiquinol, “a good combo to take on a daily basis”, then comes Lion’s mane that “*extremely* impacts your cognitive and mental state” and “lights you up like a Christmas tree”. Next is *yerba mate*, which Tim Ferris describes as the perfect drink to consume to remain focused for hours. He introduces people to various brand of *yerba mate* and really stresses the importance of consuming it in the traditional calabash. “What you consume is one thing, how you consume it is the second” he says, before explaining that although there are many ways to consume *yerba mate*, now that it has become very popular, the best way to benefit from the plant’s effects is to infuse it in the calabash. Ferris then speaks about exogenous ketone (EXO) and of butanediol and sodium BHB salts. After listing and showing his favorite “smart drugs”, Tim Ferris ends his video with a tutorial on how to self-evaluate one’s own BHB concentration. Using a “precision x-tra device”, he shows how to use the ketone and glucose strips by testing himself on camera. One can clearly see how he pricks his finger to collect a few blood drops which he places on the strip inserted in the device. When he gets the result of his ketone test, he says “0.2, I am not in ketosis. I am incredibly glucose dependent at the moment but within two days with proper dietary planning fasting, consistent walking and exogenous ketones, I could be at 1.2-1.5. I would feel ten times better cognitively.” The video ends with a big smile and the injunction “Be safe, be responsible, enjoy!”.

I consider that Tim Ferris could be regarded as a physical incarnation of the wellbeing ideology, as the paroxysmal version of the body invented by what Preciado calls “pharmacopornographic capitalism”, as the embodiment of the healthiest and hence most productive body. By ingesting

⁶⁴⁹ Ferris T. 2011. *The 4-Hour workweek*.

⁶⁵⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fHm30-66Do>

Accessed on August 2, 2023

smart drugs, Ferris as well as all his followers, actively and intensively work to transform their bodies. They seek to maximize their mental and physical performances by monitoring their bodies on a daily basis. Biopower has permeated the body to the point that people “inhabited by disciplinary power” exert self-control for personal improvement, and therefore work actualizing the subject that biopower globally projects. Biocapitalism does not produce things. It produces « chemical reactions and affects». ⁶⁵¹ By willingly ingesting smart drugs, Ferris performs his own subjectivation since superfoods, like hormones, show a mode of action on the body that Preciado calls “microprosthetic”: “power penetrates the body through a molecule that integrates our immune system” and hence transform our body. ⁶⁵² Thus, by conscientiously regulating his doses of Lion’s mane, EXO or *yerba mate*, as well as by controlling his body through self-examination such as glucose or ketone tests, Tim Ferris actually first works maximizing the *power effect* of smart drugs. He is a body that has been invented as self-disciplinary and which “enjoys” partaking to its own conformation. And since, as a well-known guru, Tim Ferris constitutes an example that many people follow, it can be said that he is not only a *product* but also a *conveyer* of biopower.

Regarding his description of *yerba mate*, it is worth noting that, although mentioning that he lived “for a very long time” in Argentina, Tim Ferris does not mention at all the collective consumption that is well-established there. He spends time detailing how to fill the calabash with *yerba mate*, how to place the bombilla in it and how to pour hot water in the “traditional way”, but then says that one should sip the beverage several times, alone, while writing for instance. Thus, it seems that *mate*, as a smart drug, has been diverted from its social function to become a mere energy enhancer. And willing to dig more into the re-presentations of *mate* accompanying its re-signification as a healthy product, I decided to conduct youtube search for “*mate*” and “*yerba mate*” (Figures 8 and 9) in order to see to what extent its age-old social function had or had not been silenced.

⁶⁵¹ Preciado, 2008. p. 54

⁶⁵² Preciado, 2008 p. 79

YouTube FR

Search: yerba mate

Se connecter

8 BIENFAITS MATÉ
+ 4 DANGERS

9:59

MATÉ : TOUT SAVOIR SUR LA YERBA MATÉ (BIENFAITS ET DANGERS...
45 k vues · il y a 1 an

Les Bienfaits ✓

Les compléments alimentaires que nous vous recommandons vivement : ✓ Gélules de Moringa Bio : <https://bit.ly/3dmhjZh...>

Sous-titres

COMMENT PRÉPARER UN MATÉ ?

1:31

Préparation du maté : Comment préparer un maté facilement ?
194 k vues · il y a 3 ans

La Bombilla

Avant toute chose, le matériel qu'il te faut : - Unealebasse à maté - Une bombilla - De la yerba maté Ensuite, la préparation...

5 erreurs à ne pas commettre avec le MATÉ

1:15

Maté : 5 erreurs à éviter avec le maté !
39 k vues · il y a 1 an

Frate Mate Club

Le maté : Comment infuser le maté ? Quelle température pour l'eau ? Combien de temps faut-il infuser le maté ? Comment ...

Sous-titres

Tuto : Comment préparer un maté ?

Bonne dégustation.

3:15

Tuto : Comment préparer un maté ?
78 k vues · il y a 2 ans

Palais des Thés

Découvrez toutes les techniques pour préparer votre maté. Déc...

0:08 ... mater le matin est une boisson originaire d'amérique ...

How To Prepare Yerba Mate

1:00

How To Prepare Yerba Mate
71 k vues · il y a 3 ans

Guayakí Yerba Mate

Ever wondered how to prepare Yerba Mate with that funny looking cup and straw? Well, first- never call it a cup and straw...

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Figure 8: Youtube search first five results for “yerba mate”

⁶⁵³Links to the videos (from top to bottom) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDywSkrimjA>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_fn8B4PaEQ
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-QwrX5IW8>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2L2ik0WLzY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vA6HIKYkxaE>

The image shows a YouTube search interface for the term "mate". The search bar at the top contains the word "mate". Below the search bar, five video results are displayed in a list format. Each result includes a video thumbnail, a title, view count, upload date, channel name, and a brief description. The thumbnails show a woman holding a mate cup, a hand holding a mate cup with a bombilla, a man with a hand raised, hands pouring mate into a cup, and a mate cup with a bombilla.

À propos de ces résultats **Filtres**

Tuto : Comment préparer un maté ?
78 k vues · il y a 2 ans
Palais des Thés
Découvrez toutes les techniques pour préparer votre maté.
Découvrez nos accessoires ...

8 BIENFAITS MATÉ + 4 DANGERS
9:59
Les Bienfaits
Les compléments alimentaires que nous vous recommandons vivement : ✓ Gélules de Moringa Bio : <https://bit.ly/3dmhjZh...>
Sous-titres

5 erreurs à ne pas commettre avec le MATÉ
1:15
Frate Mate Club
Le maté : Comment infuser le maté ? Quelle température pour l'eau ? Combien de temps faut-il infuser le maté ? Comment ...
Sous-titres

Préparation du maté : Comment préparer un maté facilement ?
194 k vues · il y a 3 ans
La Bombilla
Comment préparer un maté ? La préparation du maté semble toujours un peu compliquée pour les non-initiés, alors voici une ...

C'est quoi le maté ?
308 k vues · il y a 5 ans
Brut.
Le point commun entre le pape, Antoine Griezmann et Barack Obama ? Le maté.

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Figure 9: Youtube search first five results for “mate”

Focusing on the first five results of *mate* and *yerba mate* searches, I quickly became aware that none of the videos even mentioned the collective consumption that *mate* has been

⁶⁵⁴Links to the videos (from top to bottom) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2L2ik0WLzY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDywSkrimjA>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-QwrX5IW8>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_fN8B4PaEQ
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KS_pmjPkgM

enshrined in for centuries in South America⁶⁵⁵. Published by Health channel, by firms such as Guayaki or Le Palais des thés, or by online selling platforms such as La Bombilla or Frate *mate*, the videos either provide tutorials on how to prepare a *mate* or explanations of the drink's beneficial properties and their effects. Like Tim Ferris, Le Palais des thés, Guayaki, La Bombilla and Frate *mate* all promote *mate*'s « traditional » calabash without mentioning the social ritual that is part of *mate*'s consumption in other regions. Moreover, the re-presentation of *mate* as a drink to be drunk alone is further exacerbated by its association with productivity. In the video “Les bienfaits du *mate*” (first result of *yerba mate* search and second of *mate* search) for instance, the list of *mate*'s beneficial effects⁶⁵⁶ is accompanied by pictures depicting individuals working out or studying alone (Figure 10 and 11).

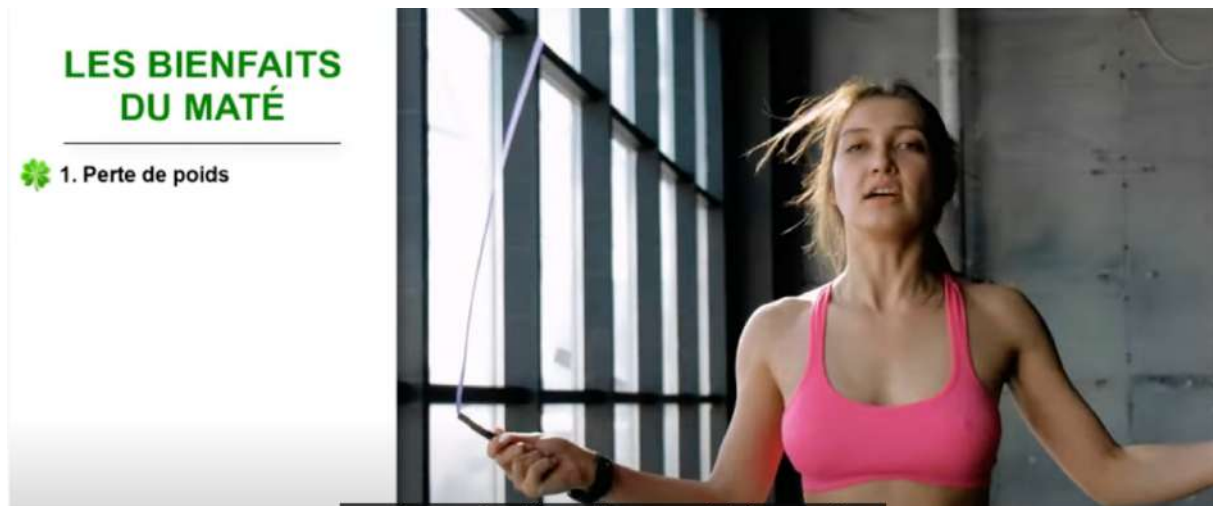


Figure 10: Screenshot from the video *Les bienfaits du maté*: “*Mate* helps weight loss”

⁶⁵⁵ Yerba *mate* and *mate* first five results have four videos in common

⁶⁵⁶ *Mate*'s beneficial effects are listed as follows :

- 1: *mate* helps losing weight
- 2: is an excellent stimulant
- 3: is a source of antioxidant
- 4: helps digesting
- 5: purifies the body
- 6: is rich in vitamins and minerals
- 7: reinforces the immunity
- 8: is an energizing drink

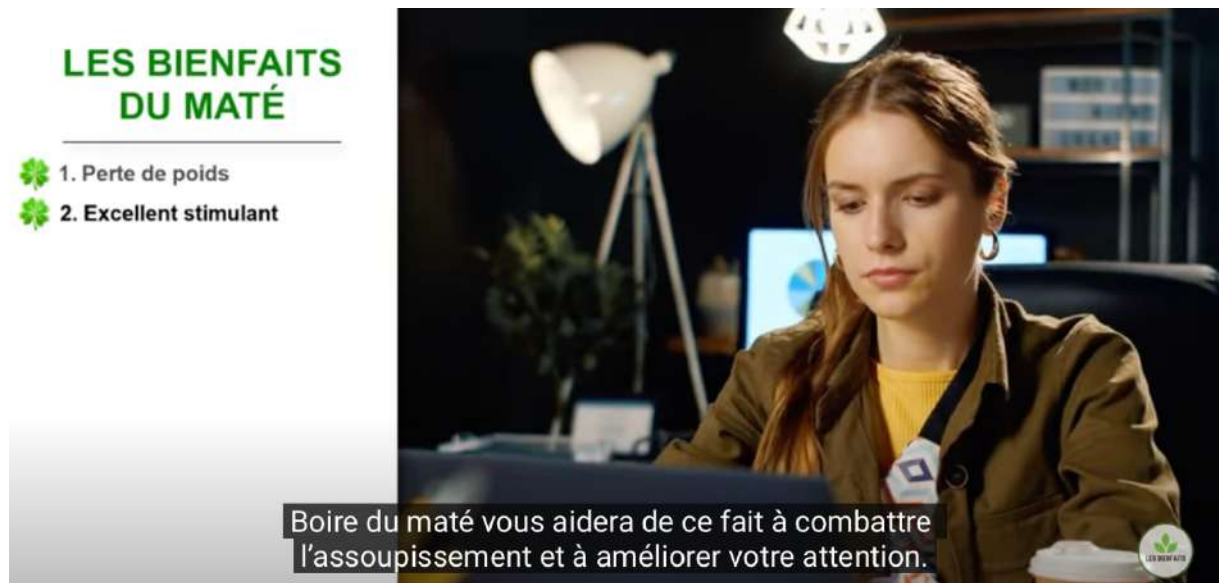


Figure 11 : Screenshot from the video Les bienfaits du *mate*: “*Mate* is an excellent stimulant”

Defined as a healthy product that increases mental and physical performances and pictured in the hands of individuals, *mate* has been given a new image that totally excludes its function as a social drink. Whilst *mate* has long shown the agency to bring people together in South America and in the Middle-East, it has been converted into an individual boost in western markets. *Mate* which has long been known as the drink that “mide las horas”⁶⁵⁷ in South America, is now thought to optimize them in the Global North. Moreover, the drink’s association with productivity is even more reinforced by the unpredictable arrival of *mate* in the world of professional football. Now that Griezmann and Messi have turned to become *mate*’s most famous “ambassadors” many people want *mate* to give them a kick too!⁶⁵⁸

In the course of the 2016 Football Eurocup, *mate* started to be publicized as the new “indispensable drink” of international football players such as Lionel Messi or Antoine Griezmann who carry their gourds when they walk out on the football pitch before the match starts.

⁶⁵⁷ “Fills the hours” Borges, quoted in Luzán del Campo, *El Cancionero del mate*, p. 26

⁶⁵⁸ https://www.eurosport.fr/football/le-mate-l-indispensable-boisson-pour-les-footballeurs_sto7446325/story.shtml

It is worth noting that before being caught by journalists' cameras, *mate* had discretely made his way into the cloakrooms. Far from being adopted by football players for its energizing properties, as one could have guessed, *mate* has on the contrary been adopted as a custom transmitted by Argentinian or Uruguayan players who were recruited by European teams. Thus, in the same way as it reached the Middle East by following in the footsteps of returning migrants, *mate* has started to conquer the football world by following South American players recruited by European clubs. When confronted with this unknown drink which had entered their cloakrooms almost by chance, French, English or Russian football players were first intrigued by *mate*, then eager to try it. Once having grown accustomed to *mate* thanks to their South American teammates, they themselves spread the trend around. In France for instance, Antoine Griezmann who has become the most high profile convert to *mate*, was initiated to it by the Uruguayan Carlos Bueno.

Antoine Griezmann was fourteen when he joined the Real Sociedad, a Spanish Club that had many South American players on its books. And it was there that, four years later, he became a very close friend of Carlos Bueno who was ten years older than him and became his mentor. Antoine Griezmann first encountered *mate* with Carlos Bueno who recalled in a 2018 Eurosport interview how “Grizou” wanted to sip the drink like him:

“ He saw me with my *mate* all the time. We are in the habit of bringing our *mate* everywhere with us. It is almost like a religion for us. Any time he saw me with my *mate*, he asked me if he could try it, and I always refused to give it to him telling him that I was sure that he would spit it out all over my car and that I would then have to ask him to get out of the car. I want to try, I want to try the Uruguayan. he used to call me that: “the Uruguayan”. And then I finally let him. “Come on, try it”. He tried and looked at me with a face... His gaze literally meant « Son of a... what is that ? ». But he immediately tried again and said “it is awful. It’s too bitter, too strong, too hot”. I answered him “I told you that you wouldn’t like it.” But the taste remained in his mouth. And a few days later, he asked for *mate* again. This is how his love story with *mate* started. Little by little, he got used to it and finally asked me to bring him a gourd and a pack of *yerba* to make his own *mate*”.⁶⁵⁹

Having initially found the beverage very bitter and not to his taste, Antoine Griezmann persevered and kept drinking to emulate Carlos Bueno, whom he admired. Although Griezmann has been drinking *mate* for many years, he was first widely seen with his calabash during the 2016 European Championships when the French federation of football released a

⁶⁵⁹ https://www.eurosport.fr/football/coupe-du-monde/2018/avant-france-uruguay-carlos-bueno-jai-fait-de-griezmann-un-uruguayen-pur-jus_sto6832702/story.shtml

video in which he explains how and why he consumes *mate*.⁶⁶⁰ The 7 min video aims to portray Griezmann's routine. We first see him having breakfast then going to the physiotherapist, having lunch and resting in his room. The last part of the video is shot in the changing room before Griezmann starts training outside. There, the focus is on *mate*. Griezmann is sitting at his place in the cloakroom with a big calabash full of *yerba* and a thermos in his hand. The cameraman asks him about the beverage and after spending some time showing how to prepare a good *mate* - showing how to fill the gourd with *yerba* and to place the bombilla in it before pouring hot water - Griezmann says "I always drink it before training, it really wakes me up". Directly after those words, the sequence changes and we can see Griezmann training outside on the pitch. The video directly juxtaposes clips of Griezmann sipping *mate* with him running fast, making the link between *mate* consumption and physical performance becoming very well established in France. Indeed, when collecting interviews in various Parisian Tea shops⁶⁶¹, I came to realise that this video had a huge impact on the sales of *mate*. I was told that whereas before 2016 *yerba mate* was principally sold for its exoticism or for its stimulant properties, after Griezmann's video, it immediately became closely associated with the world of sport. In Le Temple des thés, for instance, I was explained that:

"Griezmann ! It is because of him. I hardly sold *mate* before, except to people who had lived in South America. But from the time he made that video... In the following months, I saw a lot of young people coming to buy *mate*. I didn't understand why. So at some point, I asked one of them "What's going on?". He answered "didn't you see the video by Griezmann?". I must admit that I don't watch football. So I said "well, no, I haven't". Fortunately I knew that he was a football player, I would have really sound stupid if had not. After that I did some research on the internet, and I saw all these people doing sport, and also people who drunk *mate* to stay awake."⁶⁶²

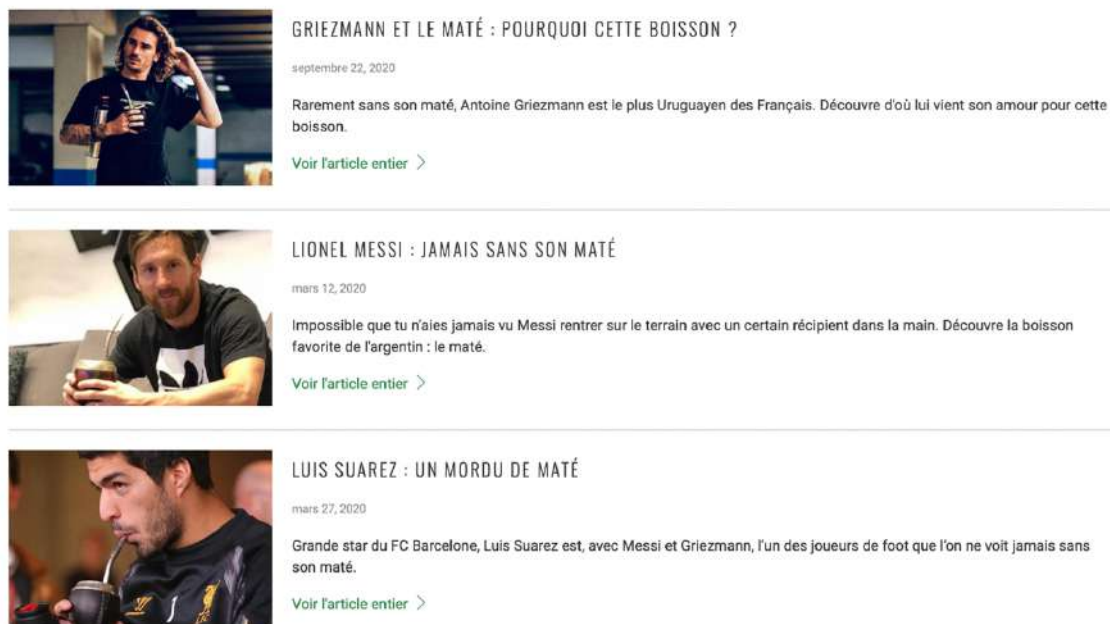
By publicizing Griezmann's use of *mate*, the video published by Eurosport in 2016 really impacted *mate*'s sales in France and young football fans became interested in consuming *mate* to emulate their idol. In March 2020, in Bonthés, I was told that " *Mate* sales have dramatically increased over the last three years" because "a lot of young people want to follow his [Griezmann] example" and just ask "Do you have what Griezmann drinks?" without even

⁶⁶⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skNORO3MVk4&t=2s>

⁶⁶¹ In order to better apprehend the impact of *mate*'s adoption by football players on French consumers, I conducted interviews in various Parisian teashops. I used to enter places that displayed a *mate* cup in their windows and asked the owners to tell me about their *mate*'s sale over the past ten years. I recorded people in Bonthés (157 rue Marcadet 75018 Paris), Temple des thés (33 rue de la cour des noues, 75020 Paris), Artefacts (23 rue des Blancs manteaux 75004 Paris), Café EL Sur (Boulevard Saint Germain 75006 Paris). The persons I interviewed asked me to remain anonymous and to only quote the name of their shop.

⁶⁶² Temple des thés, 33 rue de la cour des noues, Paris 75020, 22/07/2020

knowing the name of the beverage.⁶⁶³ Some platforms, such as La Bombilla- *yerba mate*'s most important online selling platform in France- exploited this trend by reinforcing the association of *mate* with football in their advertising campaigns. On their website, there are three articles about the adoption of *mate* by footballers. By presenting both the history of the players' encounter with the beverage and the benefits they take from its consumption, *La Bombilla* stresses the healthy properties of the plant and encourages people to adopt the drink to look like an athlete (Figure 12).



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Figure 12 : Three articles available on *La Bombilla* website linking *mate* to football and physical performance

It is worth noting that, after Griezmann's 2016 video had exerted a huge influence on French fans, the 2018 World Cup made this phenomenon more international. *Mate*'s relationship to the football world was indeed commented on by many newspapers. The British newspaper *The Guardian* for instance, published an article entitled "Fancy a Brew? Why are England's footballers hooked on *mate*?"⁶⁶⁵ which paid tribute to *mate* by presenting it as a drink widely adopted by many stars and which promised to spread around as a healthy addiction:

⁶⁶³ Bonthés, 157 rue Marcadet, Paris 75018, 13/03/2020

⁶⁶⁴ https://labombilla.fr/search?type=product,page,article&q=griezmann* Titles of the articles: "Griezmann and *mate*: why choosing this beverage?", "Lionel Messi: never without his gourd" and "Luis Suarez: a *mate* fan".

⁶⁶⁵ Plunkett-Hogge, K. 2018 "Fancy a Brew? Why England's footballers are hooked on *mate*?" *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2018/jun/12/england-footballers-hooked-on-mate-tea>

“The national drink of Argentina, beloved by the pope and thanks to coach Mauricio Pochettino, half of the Tottenham Hotspur dressing room. And now the England dressing room, too. Not least Spurs and England defender Eric Dier, who said this week that he is a little bit addicted to it. (...) If the England team does well in this World Cup, and Dier keeps singing *mate*’s praises, it surely can’t be long before the rest of us stick a brew on”.⁶⁶⁶

Re-signified as a healthy product which enhances physical and mental performance, *mate*’s adoption by international footballers has also led it to be associated with productivity. By entering the world of football, *mate* has gained a new visibility and is said to set to conquer “the rest of us”, accepted as an ideal beverage that contains “the energy boost of coffee, the health benefits of tea and the endorphin buzz of chocolate.”⁶⁶⁷ Having long followed a drastically different route from other stimulant beverages, *mate* has now reached the Global North as a product more than as a practice. Initiation has been replaced by advertising and western consumers, introduced to *mate* through dematerialized flux rather than physical encounters, absorb the drink’s publicized version by consuming both the beverage and the discourse that accompanies it. Detached from its collective practice and defined in terms of its effects, *mate* is individually sipped for the energy it contains, not for the synergy it could create and sustain. I consider important to question, in a final chapter, *mate*’s new relationships to identity and identification at a time in which it is not only individualized in its consumption, but also, for the first time, commercialized as a beverage.

⁶⁶⁶ Plunkett-Hogge, K. 2018

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid

CHAPTER 10

MATE, CONSUMERISM AND IDENTITY

I. SEEKING SALVATION THROUGH THE CONSUMPTION OF MATE'S AUTHENTICITY

1) YERBA MATE AND "NUTRITIONAL PRIMITIVISM"⁶⁶⁸

Superfoods like *yerba mate*, are introduced to western markets as not only beneficial for the health of individual consumers, but also as foods that support "the physical and social health of humanity and the planet".⁶⁶⁹ Thus, in order to appeal to consumers from the Global North, marketers not only praise *yerba mate*'s properties but also stress the legendary past of the plant. By doing so, they place the product in a story that targets consumers' affects. At a time of emotional capitalism, commodities are as much desired for what they say than for what they are, and people are directed to buy both the merchandise and the narratives they are packaged in. In the case of *yerba mate*, one can observe a recurrent connection of the plant with its indigenous origins, and marketing invites alienated Westerners to partake of the beverage to feel the good energy. By cultivating *yerba*'s past, advertisements suggest that this magic plant, although already known for its stimulant effects, should rather be embraced in order to experience spiritual improvement, and rediscover one's lost authenticity. *Yerba mate* thus well illustrates how organic food consumption reflects not only a concern for well-being, but also includes a discourse about the product's environment and origins. *Yerba*'s image has been modified to incorporate fantasies about its indigenous past so that western consumers can buy the promise of a "regeneration".⁶⁷⁰ This present-day instance of salvation through consuming the primitive "is predicated on a homogenizing and othering discourse that reaffirms the superiority of Western modernity".⁶⁷¹ According to Loyer, superfoods in general should be understood as "a marketing category and discursive device rather than self-evident group of foods" and their representation as "natural, traditional and exotic draws upon a discourse of nutritional primitivism".⁶⁷² Publicized both for their natural nutrient densities and for their authentic qualities, superfoods are a construction that tell us about "the anxieties and desires

⁶⁶⁸ The notion of "nutritional primitivism" was coined by C. Knight in 2008 in "'The Food nature intended you to eat': Nutritional Primitivism in Low-carbohydrate diet discourse"

⁶⁶⁹ Loyer J. and C. Knight. 2018. "Selling the "Inca Superfood": nutritional primitivism in superfoods books and maca packaging". *Food, Culture and Society*, 21:4. p. 462

⁶⁷⁰ <https://guayaki.com>

⁶⁷¹ Di Leonardo, M. 1998. *Exotics at home: Anthropologies, Others and American Modernity*. p. 34

⁶⁷² Loyer, J. and C. Knight. 2018. "Selling the "Inca superfood", p. 450

beneath the surface of our food culture”⁶⁷³. I consider it important to question the commodification of *mate* in light of the concept of “nutritional primitivism”.

The notion of “primitivism” has long been explored in many areas of cultural production, such as literature or art history but it is only recently that it has entered the field of food studies.⁶⁷⁴ Indeed, the concept of “nutritional primitivism” was first coined by Knight in 2008 in the context of her study on the low-carbohydrate diet movement.⁶⁷⁵ In the tradition of a primitivism which expresses a state of nostalgia for a pre-civilized world, nutritional primitivism is characterized by the promotion of indigenous foodways as a path to wellbeing.⁶⁷⁶ According to Knight, nutritional primitivism could be defined as “the pursuit of supposedly simpler, more natural and more authentic ways of eating as part of a quest for health”, in a context of growing discontent with modern Western life.⁶⁷⁷ Echoing other primitivisms which “denote, or arise from, a sense of crisis in civilization”⁶⁷⁸, nutritional primitivism is a reaction to the perceived current crisis in Western health, but also to a broader sense of “crisis relating to globalized and industrialized food production and ensuing consumer alienation”.⁶⁷⁹ Seeking salvation through the consumption of superfoods that are marketized as non-modern and non-western, consumers from the global north are attracted by both the food’s nutritive properties and the ethical discourse which accompanies it. By observing the way superfoods are packaged, one can quickly notice that products tend to be presented with information on their origins and production process. And by stressing the legends and historical use of superfoods, marketing actually works to strengthen modern consumers’ identification with an idealized past. Focusing on the packaging of Maca⁶⁸⁰ for instance, Loyer observes that it favours “stylized imagery emphasizing “traditional” production practices“ that resonates with “longstanding Western tropes for the representation of South American people”.⁶⁸¹ Moreover, Maca packaging not only locates Andean producers in an idealized and romanticized past but also :

⁶⁷³ Ibid p. 449

⁶⁷⁴See Fairchild, H. 1928. *The Noble Savage*. ; Goldwater, R. 1938. *Primitivism in Modern Painting*. ; Levin, H. 1969. *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* ; Runge, E. 1946. *Primitivism and Related ideas in Sturm and Drang literature*.

⁶⁷⁵ Knight C. 2008. “The Food Nature Intended you to eat’: Nutritional primitivism in Low-carbohydrate Diet Discourse”. Knight C. 2012 “An alliance with Mother Nature: Natural Food, Health and morality in low-Carbohydrate Diet Books”, *Food and foodways* 20 (2) ; Knight, C. 2015. “We can’t go back a hundred million years’: Low-Carbohydrate dieters’ responses to nutritional primitivism”, *Food, Culture and Society* 18 (3).

⁶⁷⁶ Bell, M. 1972. *Primitivism*, p. 1

⁶⁷⁷ Knight, C. 2012. “An alliance with Mother Nature...” p. 289

⁶⁷⁸ Bell, M. 1972. *Primitivism*, p.80

⁶⁷⁹ Loyer, J and C. Knight. 2018. “Selling the “Inca superfood” p. 449

⁶⁸⁰ Maca is a relative of radish that grows in Peru. Dried and powdered maca root is consumed for its health benefits in the Global North.

⁶⁸¹ Loyer J. and C. Knight. 2018. “Selling the “Inca Superfood” p 459-460

“carries labels certifying it as “organic” and “fair trade,” the assumption being that organic production is environmentally benign and fair trade is socially equitable. This logic portrays superfood production as an ethical alternative to mainstream food production, with its associated social and environmental problems, ignoring the varied practices across different production networks.”

The representation of Maca as a superfood goes hand in hand with the creation of a discourse that, under the labels of “organic” and “fair trade”, omit many aspects of the “production networks”. And in the same way as Maca packaging distances western consumers from South American producers, *yerba mate* packaging glosses over the working conditions of the *tareferos*.

Known as the “drink of friendship”, *yerba mate*, like Maca, is embedded in a discourse that insists on the product’s authenticity and mythical past. Praised for its unique model of “Market-Driven Restoration”, Guayaki-number one supplier of *yerba mate* in the United-States, created in 1996- addresses many of the concerns over nutrition, environment and unfair labor practices. Their link with the indigenous Guayaki in Paraguay - people who the firm is named after- is central to their marketing and business model. Indeed, Guayaki highly publicized the fact that it has trained 40 Guayaki family to grow and harvest *yerba mate* in the Mbará-cayú Biosphere Preserve.⁶⁸² Working with producers to obtain fair-trade and organic certifications, Guayaki invites consumers to understand *yerba mate* culture as an opportunity to “COME TO LIFE”⁶⁸³. This mantra, they say :

“is an invitation to personal, social, ecological and cultural regeneration. The regeneration of the planet is at the heart of our business model. Every time you purchase Guayaki *Yerba Mate*, you’re creating a positive global impact. We call it Market driven Regeneration and it’s the driving force behind everything we do”.⁶⁸⁴

Stressing on their social and ecological engagement, Guayaki show that *yerba mate*, as a superfood, can support “the physical and social health of humanity and the planet”.⁶⁸⁵ Moreover, the history attached to *yerba mate* in their website perfectly illustrates the way nutritional primitivism operates. Guayaki praises the “mighty *mate* leaf” by asserting that “legend has it that a magical tree grows in the South American rainforest with the power to unite and energize. We believe thousands of years of legend can’t be wrong”. Embedded in a

⁶⁸²Ballvé, T. 2007. “*Mate* on the Market: Fair Trade and the *Gaucha*’s ‘liquid vegetable’ Part Two in a series.” NACLA Report on the Americas. 40 (5). P. 10-13

⁶⁸³ The company explicitly claims that « COME TO LIFE” is their mantra.

⁶⁸⁴ <https://guayaki.com/join-our-community/> Accessed on May 28, 2023.

⁶⁸⁵ Loyer J. and C. Knight. 2018.p. 462

narrative that stresses its legendary past, *yerba mate* is turned into a magic product that western consumers should consume to connect with a non-western revitalizing energy. Regarding Guayaki packaging, it pictures, like the Maca one “local person” working in the traditional way, while also directly connecting the realm of *yerba mate* production to the one of *mate* consumption. Stating that Guayaki’s “mission” is to “regenerate ecosystems and create vibrant communities”, the pack of *yerba mate* explicitly bring together South American producers with western consumers as if they were all part of the same “growing team serving up *yerba* culture”. Indeed, on the bottom of the pack (Figure 1), three pictures are affixed together: a branch of *yerba mate* (picture 1), a “local” carrying a bag full of *yerba mate* at the time of the harvest (picture 2) and a woman sipping *mate* form the traditional calabash (picture 3).



Figure 1: Guayaki yerba mate pack

The texts below the pictures work to strengthen the idea of an inter-connection: “*mate* drinkers create demand for a sustainable yerba mate harvest” (text below picture 3) directly refers to what is seen on picture 2, and “local people earn a living wage to steward biodiverse *mate* forests (text below picture 2) echoes picture 1, as if pictures could be read from left to right and from right to left in a circular way. This corroborates the way Guayaki perceives and publicizes

their “revolutionary business model” that empowers “customers to drive tangible change”. Although Guayaki do work to ensure ethical working conditions on their plantations, it is important to note that they constitute an exception and that the “drink of friendship” remains in many ways rooted in indigenous exploitation. Being the most important company selling *yerba mate* in the United States, Guayaki’s discourse is powerful and the vision they spread on “*yerba* culture” conflict with actual production practices in South America. As Hugues and Reimer say:

“Claims about the healthfulness and production practices of superfoods are, at best, questionable, and at worst reinforce neocolonial social and economic relations. By examining superfoods discourse, we can understand how primitivism challenges food production norms and hegemonic constructions of scientized nutrition, but also maintains notions of cultural difference and “peripheral” production for “core” consumption.”⁶⁸⁶

The essentialization of *mate* as a traditional, authentic and natural drink that provides alienated westerners with the possibility to “COME TO LIFE”, goes hand in hand with the reinforcement of “neocolonial social and economic relations” and the silencing of varied production practices. Although “culture and traditional knowledge have replaced the scientist as the source of authority”, it did not revert the “logic of dietary colonialism”, nor benefited the indigenous workers in *yerba mate* plantations. In his book *Cosechando Yerba Mate*, published in 2012, Rau provides key information on *yerba* production in Misiones, Argentina.⁶⁸⁷ He asserts that a correlation can be easily made between the region’s social structure and people’s ethnicity. The lower class - farm workers- are either indigenous or creole and the rural middle-class is made up of producer and landowner descendants of Europeans and who are still called “colonos”⁶⁸⁸ due to the history of the region and the upper-class designates the governing elite. According to Rau, while the 1988 Agricultural census counted 9.300 permanent salaried workers on *yerba* plantations, this figure had dropped to 4.800 by 2002. In such a context the figure of the “contractor” who mediates between the owner of the plantation and the *tarefero*⁶⁸⁹, became predominant and this system resulted in “informality, labour precariousness, low wages and family and child labor.”⁶⁹⁰ Today, in Misiones, although there is an estimated population of 25.000 *tareferos*, actually some 115.000 people, including adults, young people and children are involved in this work.⁶⁹¹ Women and children are not accounted as workers since they are hired indirectly as part of a “family group” without being paid for their work. *Yerba*

⁶⁸⁶ Hughes A. and S. Reimer, eds. 2004. *Geographies of Commodity Chains*.

⁶⁸⁷ Misiones is the first global producer of *yerba mate* (see chapter 5 of this thesis).

⁶⁸⁸ “Colonos” is the Spanish word for “settlers”.

⁶⁸⁹ *Tarefero* is a word coming from the Portuguese word “tarefa” which means “task”. A *tarefero* works for a company that pays him for a task that should be completed within a certain period of time. See García Lerena, R. 2006. *Peones: Los Primeros Trabajadores Argentinos*.

⁶⁹⁰ Gortari et al, coord. 2017. *Vida y trabajo en los yerbales*. Editorial Universitaria, Universidad Nacional de Misiones. p. 94.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid* p. 376

mate harvest is usually synonymous with family work, since it is the only way for *tareferos* to harvest more in less time and to earn enough money to live. According to Aparicio, the widespread use of child labor in *yerba mate* plantations is not only caused by the poverty of the *tarefero* but due to the lack of schools and the complicity of producers who allow children to join in with the work and stay for long periods.⁶⁹² I consider that this very system in which producers- descendants of Europeans- tolerate and encourage the exploitation of mostly indigenous children demonstrates the “logic of dietary colonialism”. Once entering the *yerbal*, children remain in it: “by the age of 19, there is no turning back” and “those who opted to become *tareferos*, look back to their past with a mixture of regret, self-deprecation and resignation”.⁶⁹³ To “be *tarefero*” is not just about knowing how to harvest *yerba mate*. To “be *tarefero*” is rather “the constitution of a type of subjectivity”⁶⁹⁴. It has come to be a hereditary state. To “be *tarefero*” is a way of being that has been created and perpetuated by neocolonialism and *yerba mate*, as a superfood, is a discursive device that claims authenticity while failing to shed light on the exploitation of indigenous producers.⁶⁹⁵

2) MATE, AUTHENTICITY AND SELF-IDENTITY IN CONSUMPTION

The re-signification of *yerba mate* as a superfood is currently accompanied by a revalorization of the traditional *mate* calabash. *Mate*, as an object, becomes an authenticity enhancer, it is a confirmation of the drink’s indigenous origins. As Tim Ferris asserts in his video the question is not only “What you consume” but also “how you consume it”.⁶⁹⁶ By drinking *mate* in an organic calabash, Global North consumers are guaranteed to experience a deeper connection to the good energy. Having long been considered as incompatible with western mores, the *mate* calabash is now praised for its “natural” origins and many firms have started to publicize the benefits of a “traditional” form of consumption. Thus, although *yerba mate* first penetrated western markets by being detached from the container it had been inextricably linked to for centuries, it seems that the increasing demand for authenticity requires

⁶⁹² Aparicio, S. 2009. *Niños trabajadores en el agro argentino. Familias campesinas y de asalariados rurales. Mitos y creencias en torno al trabajo infantil rural*. p. 40

⁶⁹³ Gortari and others. 2017. *Vida y trabajo en los yerbales*, p. 420

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 420

⁶⁹⁵ See the work made by the organization “Un sueño para Misiones” which aims to sensitize people to the working conditions of the *tareferos* and to eradicate child labor in the *yerbales*.

<https://unsueñoparamisiones.org>

⁶⁹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fHm30-66Do>

the plant to be reunited with the eponymous cup. The Guayaki website for instance, invites people to “connect with [them]” by picturing a man inviting a potential consumer to have a sip from the calabash he holds in hand.⁶⁹⁷ The website also includes a video which shows how to prepare a *mate* traditionally, in order to “come to life”⁶⁹⁸. In the same way, the video posted on Youtube by Le Palais des Thés devotes a lot of time to the presentation of the calabash.⁶⁹⁹ After briefly explaining that *yerba mate* is a stimulant originating from South America, the woman says that “the best way to consume it is to drink it from a calabash” and then praises the natural and organic character of the traditional *mate* (Figure 2). The appearance as well as the “natural” origin of the dried calabash, corroborate the idea of an object that carries the trace of an Indigenous heritage. Moreover, the *bombilla* makes its method of consumption unique and therefore more valuable. People are seduced by the “naturally authentic” calabashes which are all unique: “some are bigger, some are smaller, nature does not repeat-it creates” (Figure 3). Confirming the discourses sold with *yerba mate*, *mate*, as an object, constitutes the *material* embodiment of the drink’s authenticity.



Figure 2: Screenshot from the youtube video by Le Palais des thés: “The traditional calabash is a natural product”

⁶⁹⁷ <https://guayaki.com/connect-with-us/> Accessed on August 6, 2023.

⁶⁹⁸ <https://guayaki.com/how-to-prepare-yerba-mate/> Accessed on August 6, 2023.

⁶⁹⁹ The video by Le Palais des thés was part of the first five results of the youtube search for *yerba mate* and *mate*. Le Palais des thés is a tea company founded in Paris in 1987 and that has now specialty tea shops in France as well as in Japan, Ireland, Norway, Belgium and Germany.

NATURALLY AUTHENTIC

Each Calabash Gourd grows uniquely, at his time and form. No two are the same. Some are bigger, Some are smaller, nature does not repeat - it creates.

Years pass by and every sip brings sweet memories and special feelings with a unique taste that only a Natural Gourd can provide.



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Figure 3: *Mate*, an object enhancer of authenticity

Having analyzed how the commodification of *mate* as an authentic object-beverage “arises from a sense of crisis”⁷⁰¹ in western civilization, I consider that it is now worth questioning what lays beyond this current craving for authenticity. Why people search for natural “non-western” products is one question, how they were convinced that they could find salvation in the consumption of authenticity is another one worth considering. The following development will explore how emotional capitalism has long worked on consumers affects and how identity-making is at work in the consumption of authentic products such as *mate*.

According to Eva Illouz, we cannot approach the history of consumer society by pretending that markets only adapted to consumer’s preexisting needs and desires. She argues that, on the contrary, the market itself molded the consumer in the image of the goods it was producing:

⁷⁰⁰ <https://littlebaires.com/collections/yerbas/products/balibetov-yerba-mate-gourd-set-original-natural-handmade-yerba-mate-cup-argentina-includes-mate-tea-cup-bombilla-yerba-mate-straw-and-clean-brush-classic-mate-cup-and-bombilla-set-brown-1>

⁷⁰¹ Bell, M. 1972. *Primitivism*, p. 80

“Marketers and advertisers deliberately managed to increase the emotional and symbolic value of consumer goods.⁷⁰² This strategy, called branding, consists in associating products, names and brands with ideas, concepts and feelings by consciously resorting to cultural images and myths. The main objective is to create identities and emotional meanings that should be activated by collective symbols.⁷⁰³ “⁷⁰⁴

Not only has branding increased the emotional value of commodities, but it has also worked to shape consumer’s emotions themselves so as to make them adhered to the produced commodities. Jean Baudrillard, Mary Douglas, Arjun Appadurai or Pierre Bourdieu all agreed on the idea that consumer society is characterized by the fact that we buy commodities not only for what they do but also for what they signify and for what they say about us.⁷⁰⁵ And the language of advertisement through which products are re-signified, is “the only language in which the object speaks to us” as well as of us.⁷⁰⁶ The language of consumption is all the more powerful as it is a ‘language of signals’ whose function is to mobilize connotations or affects. As signification is detached from meaning in the large repertoire formed by the objects of mass consumption, advertising is a “brainwashing activity which deepens our enslavement to consumerism and capitalist exploitation”⁷⁰⁷ and the “loyalty to a brand name is nothing more than the conditioned reflex of a controlled affect”.⁷⁰⁸ In other words, the language of advertisement operates at a psychological level which implies that it works modeling our affects.

Having become the paradigm of the entire economy, advertisement predefines consumer’s needs and it is worth recontextualizing how Global north consumers’ current craving for authenticity has been created by emotional capitalism. Taylor considers that the triumph of

⁷⁰² Bennett, D. 2005, « Getting the Id to go shopping. Psychoanalysis, advertising, Barbie Dolls and the invention of the consumer unconscious”, *Public Culture*, vol. 17, n°1. P 1-26 ; Caru A. and B. Cova, 2007, “Consuming experiences. An introduction” in A. Caru and B. Cova (dir.) *Consuming experience* p 3-16 ; Holbrook M. B. and E. C. Hirshman, 1982. “The experiential aspects of consumption. Consumer fantasies, feelings and fun”, *Journal of Consumer research*, vol. 9, n°2, p. 132-140 ; Lury C. 2004, *Brand; the logos of the Global Economy* ; Vargo S. and R. F. Lush, 2004. “Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing”, *Journal of marketing*, vol 68, n°1, p. 1-17

⁷⁰³ Holt D. B. 2004, *How brands become icons. The principles of cultural branding*.

⁷⁰⁴ Illouz, E. 2017. *Emotions as commodities, capitalism, consumption and authenticity*. p. 35

⁷⁰⁵ Baudrillard J. 1996 [1970], *La société de consommation.*; Douglas M. and B. C Isherwood, 2008, *Pour une anthropologie de la consommation. Le monde des biens* [1979] ; Appadurai A. 1986, *The social life of things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective.* ; Bourdieu P. 1979, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*.

⁷⁰⁶ Baudrillard J., 1968. *The system of objects*, p. 17

⁷⁰⁷ Stravakakis Y., 2006. ‘Objects of consumption, causes of Desire: Consumerism and Advertising in Societies of Commanded Enjoyment’, p. 86

⁷⁰⁸ Baudrillard Jean, 1968. *The system of objects*. p. 17

industrial capitalism was intrinsically linked to the rise of new ideas about authenticity, sincerity, intimacy or emotional expressivity.⁷⁰⁹ The emerging model of an identity essentially rooted in one's internal self, led European and North American people to primarily experience their self as fundamentally emotional. And since this "self" needed to be expressed and realized, the market started providing people with products promising to satisfy cultural ideals, such as emotional authenticity, and successfully accompanied the consumer's search for an "authentic self"⁷¹⁰. This is how the ethic of the "Be yourself" gained Europe and North America where people look for their authenticity by consuming products associated with that very notion. The production and consumption of authenticity have therefore become a structuring vector of consumer society and people now seek to find their authentic self by absorbing the authenticity of the products they consume. Viewed as "important and valuable in their own right"⁷¹¹, consumer items are products around which the lives of many people revolve and "consumer culture has become an integral facet of everyday life in Western countries"⁷¹². Consumption has become a means to express citizenship or national pride⁷¹³, as well as way to self-identify:

"while the consumption of food, water, clothing and shelter are necessary for human survival, many of the consumer items purchased in the West are non-necessary. Nevertheless, these items have come to represent important symbols in modern society that confer elements of self-identity. As well as being a driver of international trade and economic growth, consumer culture plays an important role in meaningful psychological experiences such as the formation of self-identity, impression management and creating links and associations with others in the social milieu"⁷¹⁴

Buying a Mercedes or drinking *mate* is not *necessary* but in a context in which consumption confers an "element of self-identity", products have become *constitutive* of one's personality. Neoliberalism has generated new forms of subjectivity⁷¹⁵ and the "commodification of self-

⁷⁰⁹ Taylor, C. 2018. *Les sources du moi. La formation de l'identité moderne* [1989].

⁷¹⁰ Lears T. J. 1994, *No place of grace. Antimodernism and the transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*; Illouz, E. 2019. *Les Marchandises Emotionnelles*. p. 43

⁷¹¹ Ritzer, G. 2007. *The globalization of nothing*. p. 164

⁷¹² McDonald Matthew and others. 2017 "Social psychology, consumer culture and neoliberal political economy", *J Theory Soc Behav.* 47, p. 365. See also: Lury, C. 1996. *Consumer Culture*. ; Mackay, H. 1997. Introduction. In H. Mackay (ed.), *Consumption and everyday life*. London:Sage; Miles, S. 1998. *Consumerism: As a way of life* ; and Miles, S. 1996. "The cultural capital of consumption: 'Postmodern' identities in cultural context. *Culture and psychology*, 2.

⁷¹³See Cohen, L. 2003. *A consumers' republic: The politics of mass consumption in postwar America* ; Trentmann, F. 2001. "Bread, milk and democracy: Consumption and citizenship in twentieth-century Britain". In M. Daunton and M. Hilton (eds.), *The politics of consumption: Material culture and citizenship in Europe and America*.

⁷¹⁴ McDonald Matthew and others. 2017. "Social psychology, consumer culture and neoliberal political economy", p. 365

⁷¹⁵ Smith, C. 2012. "Neoliberalism and individualism: Ego leads to interpersonal violence." *Sociology Lens*.

identity”⁷¹⁶ resulted in a new conception of personality now understood as one’s ability to be distinctive, unique, visible and noticed by others.⁷¹⁷ Thus, if people seek to consume authentic products for instance, it is not mainly to individually “regenerate” but also to exist socially. When consuming authenticity, people perform their belonging to a group they identify with. Drinking specialty coffee or *mate* therefore constitutes a marker of one’s status. By becoming a “home barista” or by sipping *mate* from a natural calabash, individuals self-identify as “unique” by standing out of the crowd while socially engaging with people sharing the same connoisseurship.

Manzo’s article on specialty coffee consumption illustrates how taste confers “cultural capital by acting as a marker of one’s position within a social hierarchy”.⁷¹⁸ Indeed, among other stories collected by the author, Calpro’s testimony explicitly reflects the effort entailed in obtaining the “coffee geek status”, for instance. Explaining the monetary investment and connoisseurship that specialty coffee consumption involves, Calpro says that when his grinder arrived at his place, he could “qualified [himself] a home barista” and that he worked hard to improve the “education” he had received from Coffeegeek, “the world’s most read coffee and espresso resource”. Identifying himself as a barista, Calpro constructs his interests for coffee connoisseurship as shared ones and therefore makes “evident that “social” aspect of taste”.⁷¹⁹ A similar phenomenon is observable regarding the “traditional” consumption of *mate*. The calabash constitutes a status marker that signals one’s engagement with other persons who consume *mate* in the same way. The website Circle of Drink – the equivalent of Coffee geek for *mate*- illustrates how *mate* consumption confers an element of self-identity. Circle of Drink is a company located in East Patchogue NY, United States, especially devoted to the promotion and online sales of *yerba mate* and of traditional *mate* calabashes. Their “philosophy”, they say, is to think of *mate* along the lines of a fine wine or complex craft beer and to present it as “a gourmet tea” with regional varieties and a growing repertoire of “exquisite blends”.⁷²⁰ The Circle of Drink sources “only the highest-quality *yerba mate* grown in the best regions of the world for producing this holy shrub”.⁷²¹ When entering Circle of Drink one is basically told that “a relationship with *Mate* is a lifestyle” and customers are provided with a “Beginner’s guide” designed “for seasoned *materos* and those freshly embarking upon their

⁷¹⁶ Bauman, Z. 2007. *Consuming life* ; Williams, C. C. 2005. *A commodified world? Mapping the limits of capitalism*.

⁷¹⁷ Schroer, M. 2014. “Visual culture and the fight for visibility”. *Journal for the theory of social behaviour*, 44.

⁷¹⁸ Manzo, J. 2010. « Coffee, connoisseurship and an ethnomethodologically informed sociology of taste”, *Human studies*, vol. 33, no 2/3

⁷¹⁹ Ibid, p. 152

⁷²⁰ <https://circleofdrink.com/about-us>

⁷²¹ Ibid

mate journey alike”.⁷²² Being a compilation of videos ranging from tutorials on how to prepare *mate*, to descriptions of the plant and initiation to “*mateology*”-the philosophy of *mate* drinkers theorized by David Askaripour, founder of the Circle- the beginner’s guide extensively documents *mate*, suggesting that drinking *mate* is not merely a practice but a knowledge, a way of living, and therefore of *being*. By reading and learning about *mate*, consumers educate themselves so as to gain membership to the Circle. Since the “ability to manipulate the signs and symbols of a consumer product” signal one’s status, knowledge of *mate* enables one to identify with the consumers sharing the same connoisseurship. The “social identity” resulting from such an identification provides a “definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category- a self-definition that is part of the self-concept”.⁷²³ I consider that Ahmo Mehmedovic’s words, on the comments section of Circle of Drink website well illustrates this idea of self-definition through consumption. “I can already tell that I *will be* a *mate* drinker for life”, he says. Ahmo could have said that he would continue drinking *mate* for the rest of his life, but he rather put that he “*will be* a *mate* drinker”, and therefore directly defines and embeds his identity with his consumption habits. It is worth noting that the making of self-identity at work in *mate* consumption in the western world represents a shift in the relationship *mate* has long had with belonging. Indeed, whereas in South America and in the Middle East, the collective practice of drinking *mate* usually promotes a common feeling of belonging among the *participants* who physically share the calabash, western consumers now identify with a dematerialized group of similar *mate consumers*. *Mate* is, a vector of togetherness as a quasi-object, and a status marker as a product and I consider important to question how *mate*’s inclusiveness and community have been reframed according of this new conception of belonging.

II. THE COMMODIFICATION AND DEMATERIALIZING OF *MATE*’S TOGETHERNESS

1) THE OPENING OF THE FIRST *MATE* BARS

Though inextricably linked, *yerba mate* and *mate* have until recently followed distinct routes. Indeed, while *yerba mate*, which had constituted the “green gold” of the Spanish empire, has long been inscribed in the capitalist economy, *mate*, as a beverage, has, on the contrary escaped commercialization. In South America as well as in the Middle East, the drink has traveled through contingent migrations without being detached from its ritualized collective

⁷²² <https://circleofdrink.com/beginners-guide-to-yerba-mate-tea>

⁷²³ Hogg, Terry and White. 1995. “A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58. p. 259

consumption. The primacy of the drink's social function kept the drink away from restaurant menus, since the sharing of a single beverage between various persons would not have been profitable for restaurateurs. Thus, *yerba*, as a product, followed the route of economic forces, while *mate*, as a beverage embedded in a practice, followed the route of human encounters. But now that the drink has been publicized under the form of an individual "magic potion", its consumption can easily be restricted to a café-like place. *Mate* and *yerba*'s two parallel routes are about to become one since the beverage is introduced to western consumers as a product and not as a practice. Detached from its social function, *mate*, in the Global North, is being replaced. While in South America and in the Middle East *mate* has shown the agency to re-define space through the establishment of performative happenings which impact on and ephemerally reconfigure the public space, *mate*'s consumption, in the western world is poised to be confined to a pre-defined place.

I consider that the opening of *Porteñas*, the first "*mate* bar" in Brooklyn, New York city, in February 2019, can be perceived as the bootstrap of *mate*'s ongoing conversion from a sensorial to an affordable experience in western markets. Aiming to introduce people to the "Argentinian ritual", Fernanda Tabares, Carmen Ferreyra and Gretel Pellegrini, the bar's owners, present *yerba mate* as an "intelligent alternative to coffee" that "stimulates the brain" and increase "lucidity" while stressing the authentic and exotic character of the beverage by publicizing its Guaraní origins and making its calabash a fashion item. "Everyone should have access to a healthy and nutritious diet" and "we source our organic *yerba mate* and merchandise from small cooperatives from Argentina because we believe that by empowering small producers we can share the tools to grow together", they say.⁷²⁴ Organic, fair trade, authentic, healthy, indigenous, superfood, empowering, stimulating: *Porteñas*' discourse on *yerba mate* ticks all the boxes of nutritional primitivism. And in order to please North American palates, *Porteñas* also works to temper the beverage's bitterness by incorporating mix-ins like rose petals and cinnamon, and hopes to have its customers consider their bar as "the Starbucks of *yerba mate*".⁷²⁵ Their menu also features mash-ups of Argentinian and American cultures "such as "South Williamsburg" empanadas stuffed with pastrami, "*mateccinos*", juices infused with *yerba mate* concentrate in flavors like lemon and passion fruit, and an assortment of *yerba mate*-laced pastries and baked goods."⁷²⁶ Customers in a hurry can grab a "*mate* latte" to go but traditional *mate* however requires you to stay inside as it can't be taken out. Customers are given a liter of hot water and a *mate* blend that they can either sip from a gourd imported from Argentina, or from a trendy modern version of the calabash: a special glass with

⁷²⁴ <https://www.portenas.nyc> Accessed on August 6, 2023.

⁷²⁵ Yar, S. February 2019. "A *yerba mate* bar will open in Williamsburg this week-end", *Grub Street*: <https://www.grubstreet.com/2019/02/portenas-brooklyn-yerba-mate.html>

⁷²⁶ Ibid

a built-in-straw and strainer. It seems that the experience that is sold in the name of authenticity is actually the exact opposite of what originally characterized *mate*. People are “offered” the newly called “drink of friendship” for 12 dollars, while its original consumption was free. The more is *mate* branded as “a true experience” the more it is diverted from the agency it has carried as a quasi-object. And as a consequence of its entrance into a concept store, the space of the ritual of drinking *mate* has been confined to the place of an “inclusive” sociability salon.

When entering the “Our story” section of Porteñas’ website, one can quickly become aware that Porteñas “actively” engages in fostering an “inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome”, and therefore skillfully links *yerba mate* with queer identity. Indeed, the website juxtaposes the assumption “We are Women, Immigrant, Hispanic and Queer” with a series of portraits picturing eight women who hold one or another version of *mate* (Figure 4). Some of them are sipping it from wooden gourds, some others carry boxes containing *yerba mate* tea bags. All are smiling. “Rainbow *mate*” is given a “diversity” of faces and colors, and provides a good illustration of the way pink capitalism participates in the subjectivation of queer identity.

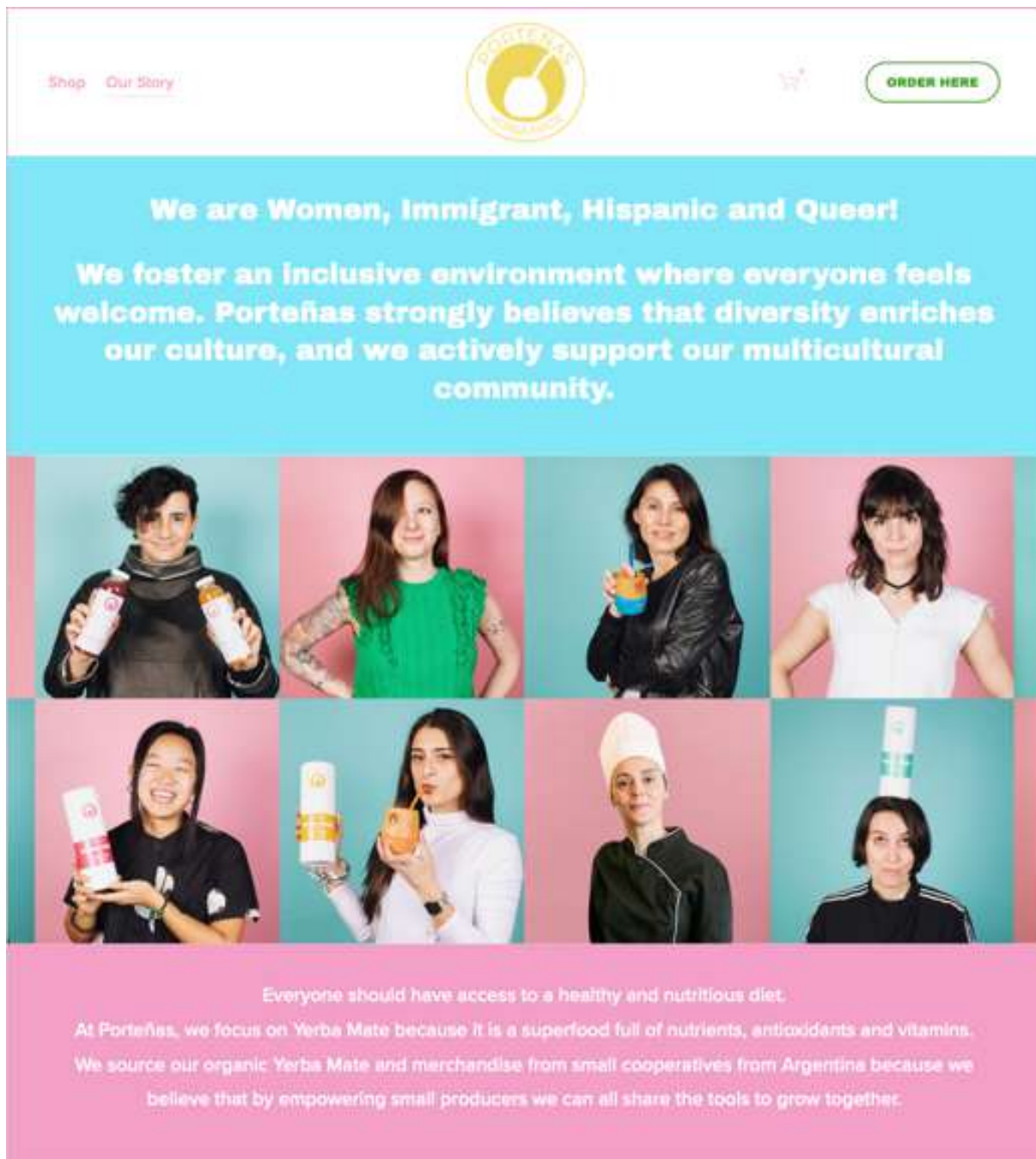


Figure 4: The “story” of Porteñas on the shop’s website: *Mate*, inclusivity and the cooption of queer identity

Pink capitalism essentially “refers to the incorporation or the co-opting of progressive movements, usually LGBTQ+ civil rights, by the media and corporations which thereby mainstream these ideas in a capitalist economy”.⁷²⁷ Many companies now dedicate June to celebrating Pride Month for instance, and manifest their support to the LGBTQ+ community by selling rainbow-patterned merchandise and “advertising using same-sex couples and queer-

⁷²⁷ Siddhaant, Verma. 2021. “The progressive disillusion of Pink capitalism”, *International journal of Law management and Humanities*, vol. 4, issue 2.

coded individuals as means to drive their sales”.⁷²⁸ The subjectivation of queer identity, or rainbow washing, often results in the mere branding of the LGBTQ+ community, with no investment in the community itself.⁷²⁹ The marketisation of queerness has now come to be a profitable selling argument. In the case of Porteñas, the direct inscription of *mate* in an advertised “inclusive environment”, is all the more interesting as it also attests of the way *mate*’s commodification changes the meaning of its inclusive character. While *mate*, as a practice, is an *inclusive happening* that gathers people together regardless of their age, gender or status, it is, as a commodity, associated to an *inclusive place*. It could be said that the commercialization of *mate* expresses a shift from spontaneous performance to sold experience and from inclusiveness to inclusivity. Indeed, while *mate*’s *inclusiveness* refers to its *agency* to physically gather people together, Porteña’s *inclusivity* refers to the *branding* of an environment supportive of a “multicultural community”.

The commercialization of *mate* in western restaurants is a phenomenon that is also expanding in regions where *mate* first established itself as a social practice. Indeed, with the increasing popularity for South America for instance, tourists abound in Argentina and sustain the commodification of what they consider as the country’s quintessential folklore. In the same way as they are offered the opportunity to touch Argentina’s soul by attending a tango class, I think that foreigners will soon be able to enjoy a taste of the nation in numerous *mate* bar. This argument is already legitimated by the opening of the first (and still only) *mate* bar of South America in 2018 in the city of La Plata, which is an hour’s train from Buenos Aires. Uriel, owner of *Matea*⁷³⁰, who I was able to contact, told me that, although they manage to introduce foreigners to the meaning of *mate*’s collective gathering in Argentina, they however sell the drink individually, since each customer is given a proper gourd for 400 pesos, which is the same price as a coffee:

« we emphasize *mate*’s collective consumption, as well on its role as a social practice and on its symbolism, especially before covid. We want strangers to know what *mate* is, its origins, we want them to know that we inherited it from the Guaraní people. But then each one drinks his *mate* alone. People don’t

⁷²⁸ Johns, A. N. and others. 2022. “Rainbow-washing away customers: Does the consumer’s perception of Rainbow-washing affect purchasing behavior?” *Association of Marketing theory and practice proceedings*, p. 1.

⁷²⁹ See Champlin, S. and Li, M. 2020. “Communicating Support in pride Collection Advertising: the impact of Gender expression and contribution amount”. *International journal of Strategic Communication*, 14 (3).

⁷³⁰ See <https://www.somosmatea.com.ar/quienes-somos/>

share *mate*. Except couples who sometimes share it. Couples do share *mate* but in general it is drunk individually”.⁷³¹

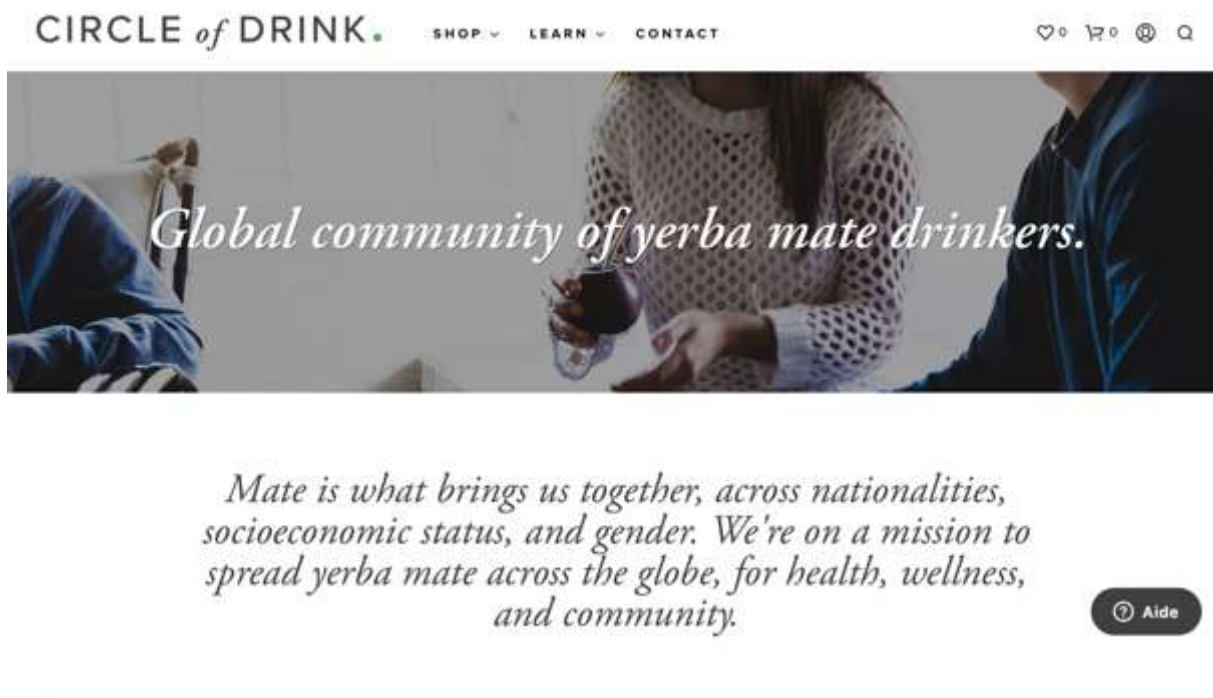
Uriel also told me that they were about to open a second bar in Buenos Aires aiming to target almost exclusively foreigners, and that they would design “*mate* classes” in order to introduce tourists to the the “culture of *yerba mate*” while allowing them to try different types of blends. Being South America’s first *mate* bar, *Matea* clearly illustrates the impact of globalization and tourism on *mate*’s centuries-old tradition. Having become both a superfood and a trend in Europe and North America, *mate*, as a beverage, is now also perceived as a profitable product in the eyes of South American entrepreneurs themselves who start thinking of a new definition of *mate* combining self-orientalism and occidentalism. Self-orientalism is the sense that *mate* is clearly inscribed in a narrative that stresses its exotic collective consumption: “we want strangers to know what *mate* is”, and occidentalism in the sense the consumption is individualized so as to fit western mores: “Each one drinks his *mate* alone. People don’t share *mate*.” It could be said that tourists are provided with a *sanitized exoticism* that relegates *mate*’s social function to a disincarnated narrative and replaces the sharing of a gourd by the sharing of an experience. In South America as well as in the United States, *mate* has made his first steps into coffee-shop like places as an individual drink and it is worth observing how globalization has not only sustained the creation of delimited places for *mate* consumption but has also started to re-configure its community.

2) GLOBALIZATION AND THE *DEMATERIALIZING* OF *MATE*’S COMMUNITY

Although *mate* is being detached from its social function by marketers who work to individualize *mate*’s consumption, the circle inherent to *mate*’s collective consumption has not entirely disappeared from its marketing. Indeed, marketing strengthens the link between *mate* and belonging by claiming that, when adopting the beverage, one can connect with the *global community* of *mate* drinkers. Therefore, on the one hand, marketers have rendered invisible the physical gatherings that *mate* has facilitated for centuries, and on the other end they have coopted the very principles of *mate*’s age-old collectiveness to publicize *mate*’s new global community. While *mate* has long participated in sustaining multiple layers of identifications, its various corporeal communities have been replaced by the concept of a single virtual

⁷³¹ WhatsApp interview with Uriel Charne, owner of *Matea* 04/03/2022

community. *Mate*'s circle is becoming abstract and belonging itself is being dematerialized. At a time in which relationships are increasingly mediated by screens, *mate*'s *non-physical encounters* have multiplied, and many companies such as Circle of Drink have coopted and reformulated *mate*'s agency to physically bring people together, to instead promote a contactless community. When entering the Circle's website for instance, a message appears, telling you: "Welcome to the Circle" and the invitation to enter "*mate*'s global community" is accompanied by the following description (Figure 5):



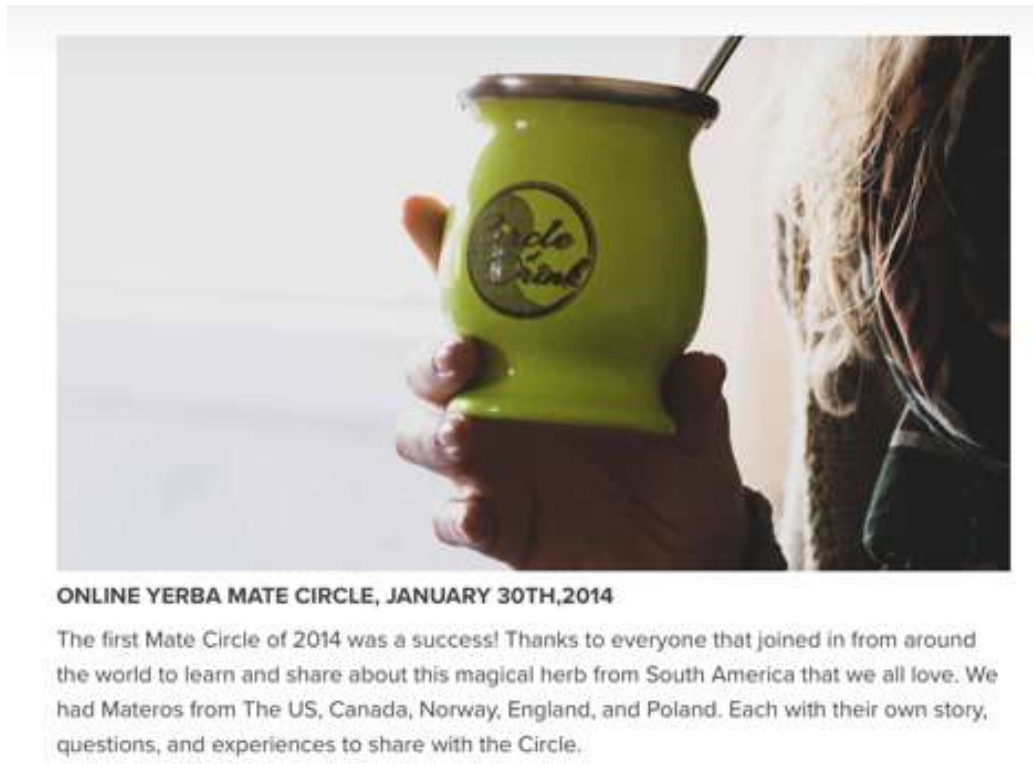
732

Figure 5: The "philosophy" of Circle of Drink: Bringing together a global community of *mate* drinkers (screenshot from Circle of Drink website)

Having given themselves the "mission" of spreading *yerba mate* all over the world while also consolidating its "global community", the Circle skillfully remodeled the link between *mate* and friendship. Since drinking *mate* in South America concretely constitutes a pretext for friends to gather, the Circle manages to keep this connection while transferring the friendship onto *mate* itself. In other words, *mate* is now less a beverage thanks to which you can make friends than the very friend you need to build a relationship with. Depicting *mate* as a friend, the Circle managed to make its consumers identify with and feel part of a global community of "*mate* lovers". Dis-connected from vivid encounters, individuals are re-connected to a virtual

⁷³² <https://circleofdrink.com/about-us>

togetherness through an inclusive abstract Circle. This shows that the company has substituted a sprawling dematerialized Circle for *mate*'s traditional physical rounds, and also succeeded in offering new forms of gatherings, by creating online encounters (Figure 6).



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Figure 6: Online *Mate* circle: feeling part of a “global community” of *yerba mate* drinkers

Along with the emergence of a dematerialized community, *mate* itself entered the virtual world with a non-material substitute for the physical calabash (Figure 7). Having long been an enhancer of conversation as a physical object, *mate* has now also become, as an emoji, a sign that communicates. In May 2018, *mate* was accepted as a draft emoji candidate by the group that approves new emojis, a subcommittee of the Unicode consortium.⁷³⁴ *Mate*'s emoji campaign was led by a team of Argentinian and other South American journalists, designers, and “internet enthusiasts” who sent a 40 pages proposal that broke down the world's *mate* drinkers and insisted on the drink's centrality by picturing some of its famous fans like Lionel Messi, Diego Maradona, Pope Francis and Barack Obama, as well as Che Guevara, and a character on the US TV show *Parks and Recreation*.⁷³⁵

⁷³³ <https://circleofdrink.com/online-mate-circle-yerba-mate-basics>

⁷³⁴ The Unicode Consortium is a corporation devoted to developing, maintaining and promoting software internationalization standards and data, particularly the Unicode Standard, which specifies the representation of text in all modern software products and standards.

⁷³⁵ <https://www.unicode.org/L2/L2018/18122-mate-emoji.pdf>

Google	
Microsoft	
Samsung	
Twitter	
JoyPixels	
Emojipedia	

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Figure 7: *Mate* emojis in 2018

The proposal emphasized both on the cultural significance of *mate* by presenting it as a drink that “unites, even during times of segregation”, and its market, showing that the whole world was catching onto this South American beverage. Moreover, it made a case for the linguistic potential of *mate*’s emoji, asserting that “no beverage means as much”. In March 2019, interestingly just a month after the opening of the first *mate* bar in the United-States, the *mate*

⁷³⁶Emojis designed in 2018: <https://medium.com/beereal/how-the-mate-emoji-came-to-be-90db92f60a12>

emoji entered the grammar of our smartphones. I think that it is worth questioning the transformation of *mate* into a linguistic emoji in light of the long relationship *mate* has had with language, so as to appreciate how the dematerialization of the *mate* calabash impacts on the drink's communicative function. While *mate*, as an emoji has recently entered the grammar of online language as a mere sign, it has long constituted, as a beverage and as a material object, a whole language. Yet in 1867, Mantegazza commented on the capacity *mate* had to speak by listing the various meanings that the drink conveyed depending on which ingredients were added to it.⁷³⁷ Later, Amaro Villanueva devoted a whole book on the language of *mate*, where he analyzed the drink as a cultural sediment whose lexicon travelled through time.⁷³⁸ And in addition to have its own language, *mate* has also long functioned as an enhancer of conversations. In South America as well as in the Middle East people have until now primarily observed *mate*'s consumption as a good opportunity to gather and speak. *Mate*, as a material object that circulates around co-present participants, articulates, sustains and orchestrates the conversations it instigates. Indeed, as a popular Argentinian poem by Lalo Mir puts it: "*Mate* foments and orchestrates conversations : when one drinks, the other speaks and vice versa".⁷³⁹ While *mate*, as an emoji, is reduced to a sign inserted into an established virtual grammar, it was and still is, as a material object, a powerful pre-text entirely structuring and articulating communication. But how will the language of *mate* evolve now that along with neoliberalism, Covid 19 had the effect of normalizing social distancing?

3) "CADA UNO CON SU MATE": MATE, COVID 19 AND THE GLOBAL INJUNCTION FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING

On December 31, 2019, Chinese authorities alerted the World Health Organization of pneumonia cases in Wuhan city, Hubei province, China, the cause of the outbreak was unknown. What started as a mystery disease was first referred to as 2019-ncov and then re-named Covid-19. Four months after first Chinese case of Covid-19, almost the whole world was in lockdown. Indeed, in April 2020, 4,5 billion people in 110 different countries were constrained to remain at home and apply drastic new social distancing measures. Global

⁷³⁷ In 1867, P. Mantegazza listed the codes of *mate*'s language in the course of his journey in the Rio de la Plata. He notably observed that *mate* functioned as a means of communication, especially in couples: a *mate* served really hot meant: I love you very much; if instead served quite cold: I don't really care of you. *Mate* with honey: marriage proposal; *mate* with coffee: I forgive you: ; *Mate* with cinnamon: I think of you a lot ; *Mate* with lemon balm: disgust... Mantegazza, 1867. *Rio de la Plata y Tenerife*, in Barretto M. 2006. *El mate, su historia y cultura*, p. 83-84.

⁷³⁸ Villanueva, A. 2018 [1967] *El arte de cebar! El lenguaje del mate..*

⁷³⁹ Mir Lalo, "El *mate* no es una bebida". https://www.elliberal.com.ar/noticia/pais/224002/recordamos-poema-lalo-mir-homenaje-al-mate?utm_campaign=ScrollInfinitoDesktop&utm_medium=scroll&utm_source=nota

measures, such as the requirement to keep at a distance of at least one meter from other individuals, were accompanied by local ones, as each country faced different challenges. In France for instance, people were strongly recommended to stop kissing on the cheeks (the French “bise” is a common way to greet people). In the same way, *mate* countries like Argentina, Uruguay or Paraguay, encouraged people to stop sharing their *mate* gourd. What had until then been considered as a welcoming gesture became perceived as a dangerous threat, since the sharing of a same *bombilla* between a group of people turned *mate* into a vector of transmission of the virus. In March 2020, the Uruguayan infectious disease specialist Eduardo Savio, coordinator of the Panamerican Association of infectiology’s Immunization comity asserted that:

“There has never been any study in our countries regarding the risk to transmit a virus when sharing a *mate*. It is now necessary to warn people of that risk, since we know that the virus is transmitted through saliva. When drinking *mate* one could be infected by sipping the saliva of the person he shares the cup with.”⁷⁴⁰

Treating *mate* as a propagator of covid, Uruguayan, Argentinian and Paraguayan authorities worked to have its consumption sanitized and numerous campaigns were conducted to make people aware of the risk involved in sharing *mate*. Uruguay’s Health Ministry explicitly formulated : “Do not share a *bombilla*”, and the same happened in Argentina where authorities claimed that it was urgent for citizens to stop sharing “*mate*, plates and utensils”. Paraguay too warned people of the danger of sharing a *tereré*. Announcements were usually made on the countries’ Health Ministry websites and recommendations regarding *mate*’s individual use also appeared in speeches by politicians, such as one made by the Paraguayan minister Julio Mazzoleni, who asserted that: “it is urgent to get used to no longer share *mate*”.⁷⁴¹ Argentina remains the country that did the most to convince people to reconsider their consumption of *mate*, by explicitly providing them with advice on how to drink it in a new way. Yet in April 2020, Argentina’s Health Ministry made *mate* figured on the list of the most important barrier gesture. Along with the injunction to remain home, people were urged to stop sharing *mate* (Figure 8). Although Paraguayan and Uruguayan authorities managed to have their people internalise the idea that *mate* should be drunk individually, neither of these countries had an equivalent body to the Argentinian INYM which was seriously committed in creating and spreading an image of a sanitized *mate*.

⁷⁴⁰ « El *mate* en época de coronavirus : de gesto de bienvenida a arma peligrosa » 2020. France 24. <https://amp.rfi.fr/es/20200318-el-mate-en-epoca-de-coronavirus-de-gesto-de-bienvenida-arma-peligrosa>

⁷⁴¹Speech delivered to the AFP (France Media Agency) in March 2020 quoted in <https://amp.rfi.fr/es/20200318-el-mate-en-epoca-de-coronavirus-de-gesto-de-bienvenida-arma-peligrosa>



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Figure 8: Argentina’s health ministry injunction to wash hands, sneeze in one’s elbow, avoid touching one’s nose and mouth with dirty hands, frequently ventilate, clean domestic objects, remain home, avoid direct contact with people and stop sharing *mate* as well as any other utensil.

In order to have people reconsider their *mate* habits, the INYM designed a guide “*Matear en tiempo de cuarentena*” (drinking *mate* under lockdown) which aimed to teach people how to drink *mate* at a time of Covid 19, by providing examples on how to enjoy a *mate* alone (Figure 9). They explain how to keep *mate* safe both from the point of view of its consumption (asking people to drink it individually) and of care of *mate* paraphernalia (how to disinfect the gourd and bombilla). The INYM also reiterated the importance of the social infusion, and promised people that *mate* would better unite people if drunk in a safe and sanitized way. They argue that when having your *mate* individually you are actually taking care of your loved one. “*Cada uno con su mate*”: don’t share your gourd in order to keep your relatives safe.

⁷⁴² Argentina Health ministry website : <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/salud>



Figure 9: INYM guide aiming to teach people how to drink *mate* safely at a time of Covid-19

In the aftermaths of the first lockdown “*Yerba Mate Argentina*” Instagram posts played their part in the country’s effort to individualize *mate* consumption on. The visuals depicted various situations in which people, at work or chilling in a park, have their own *mate* cup, establishing *mate*’s new representation while offering reassurance that “*Cada uno con su mate*” did not mean that people were alone, but rather together separately (Figure 10).

⁷⁴³ <https://inym.org.ar/noticias/yerba-mate-argentina/78846-cada-uno-con-su-mate-nos-cuidamos-entre-todos.html>

Cada uno con su mate, nos cuidamos entre todos.



#CadaUnoConSuMate 🍵

yerba_mate_argent · Abonné(e) ...

yerba_mate_argentina De a poquito, empezamos a reencontrarnos con nuestros amigos y el aire libre. ¡Qué lindo! 🥰 Cuánto lo esperamos... 🥰 Compartamos nuevamente un hermoso momento acompañado con un buen mate o tereré. 🍵💖 Y como venimos haciendo #encasa también, cada uno con el suyo.

#CadaUnoConSuMate, nos cuidamos entre todos.

¡Y recordá que hoy termina la promo! 😊 Estás a tiempo de comprar una bombilla de la marca que elijas, y llevarte gratis una del @INYM. ¡No te cuelgues! 📱 Más info en nuestras historias. Link



829 J'aime

20 SEPTEMBRE 2020

Ajouter un commentaire... Publier

Cada uno con su mate, nos cuidamos entre todos.



#CadaUnoConSuMate 🍵

yerba_mate_argent · Abonné(e) ...

yerba_mate_argentina En estos tiempos en los que las reuniones virtuales 📺 son parte de nuestra nueva realidad, no olvides llevar tu compañero de siempre... el mate 🍵. Eso sí, compartí solamente tus ideas 🗣️, tus reportes 📊, tus presentaciones 📄 o tu pantalla. 🖥️ #CadaUnoConSuMate, pensando en todos.

#Mate #MateArgentino
#CostumbresArgentinas
#ComunidadMatera #AguanteElMate
#Cuarentena

Gracias @mlvvirtual por tus ilustraciones hermosas. 🥰



Aimé par comunidadpipore et 326 autres personnes

28 SEPTEMBRE 2020

Ajouter un commentaire... Publier

Figure 10: Instagram posts by Yerba Mate Argentina, published in September 2020, which aim to represent a new way of drinking mate. People do not share the cup anymore: they each have their own mate cup and share the moment rather than the straw.

Eager to evaluate the success of the INYM and *Yerba Mate* Argentina campaigns, I had WhatsApp conversations with Argentinian persons during lockdown. I simply asked them to tell me how they were dealing with the new injunction to drink *mate* individually, aiming to discover whether *mate* had truly stopped circulating from one person to another or if the age-old deep rooted tradition had continued. All the people I was able to exchange with asserted that *mate* went through a transformation and that the disruption of its collective consumption had had a great impact on them.⁷⁴⁴ In May 2020 Rodrigo Mirto for instance, asserted that “We now have *mate* by ourselves, each person has his own cup. We are leaving behind the tradition to share *mate* and saliva”.⁷⁴⁵ Describing the same phenomenon, Sergio Aisenstein also stressed the emotional consequences of such a “transformation”:

“Hello ! How are you doing ? Such a long time. What a shame that it all happens exactly at the time when you were supposed to come and visit us. We couldn’t plan it. We are under lockdown too in Buenos Aires. I am with my eleven year old son. And we are fine. It gives us plenty of time to do things. I do my radio program from home. I am really busy actually, doing my radio program and reading and relaxing. My house has a sort of veranda where I am currently sat. Sun comes in. I feel good. I saw some friends. Of course it is not the same, but I try to remain positive. Regarding *mate*, we don’t share it anymore. We don’t notice it that much for now, because people are all locked down, we don’t see each other. But when two of my friends visited me, we did not share *mate*. It is so weird for us. It is like refusing to let a friend enter your home. Opening the door but not letting him enter, something like that. Not sharing a *mate* is like not sharing intimacy with your close friends. It is a weird thing. I am having *mate* right now, with the autumn sun. It is a really nice autumn.”⁷⁴⁶

Although all the people I interviewed told me that they did change their way of drinking *mate* during the first months of the lockdown, they however did not all agree about how the consumption of *mate* would evolve in the future. While some persons considered that the shift towards individual consumption would not be temporary and that people would permanently adopt the habit of having *mate* on their own, others argued that, on the contrary, *mate* would, sooner or later, return in its traditional form. Going in that sense, I was for instance told that, after a few weeks of not sharing *mate* at all, people had started to manage to find another way to pass the gourd around. Some of them, for instance, started to put several straws in a single

⁷⁴⁴ During the first lockdown, I exchanged on WhatsApp with the Lombardo family as well as with relatives who I met when living in Argentina.

⁷⁴⁵ Rodrigo Mirto (50 years old) La Plata, Argentina. WhatsApp interview 15/05/2020. I met Rodrigo at Residencia Corazón, an artistic residency where I spent a month in 2018. He was, at that time, in charge of the programming and organization of the residence’s exhibitions. We spoke almost every day during the first lockdown.

⁷⁴⁶ Sergio Aisenstein is an Argentinian writer in his 60’s, living in Buenos Aires, Argentina. We met in January 2019 in Valparaiso, Chile, at a writing workshop and we remained friends. WhatsApp interview 12/05/2020

cup to keep the gourd turning around without sipping the beverage from the same *bombilla*. Moreover, after a month of lockdown, individuals started to share *mate* again with family members who were confined in the same house. This made Joaquin confident that *mate* would surely represent a symbol of trust in the future, and that in the same way as its collective consumption was re-instated in private houses after a few weeks of interruption, it will go back to being shared with outsiders too.⁷⁴⁷ Although Covid-19 has momentarily disrupted the collective consumption of *mate*, the tradition is too deeply rooted in the conscious and unconscious memories of *materos'* bodies and minds, for it to disappear for good. And at a time in which individuals have grown accustomed to fear closeness, I agree with Joaquin when he says that:

“*Mate* can play a fundamental role in re-connecting people together. It can help reestablish links and trust, and make people forget about their fear of the other and of physical contact. I consider that being together is one of the most important things in life and that *mate* will help re-shaping spaces where people can feel safe together.”⁷⁴⁸

If one cannot deny the impact of neoliberalism and Covid19, which have been working hand in hand to individualize the consumption of *mate*, it is important to remember that *mate* has long had an agency of its own. Even if *mate* has been transformed into and commercialized as, an authentic product which consumers can identify with, it is still, and will hopefully long remain, an intercorporeal social ritual ceaselessly creating various instances of co-identification.

⁷⁴⁷ Joaquin Wall (32 years old) Bariloche, Argentina. Email interview. 25/07/2020. Joaquin is a visual artist and plastician who I met in residencia Corazón, La Plata in 2018.

⁷⁴⁸ Joaquin Wall, Bariloche, Argentina. Email interview, July 2020

CONCLUSION

Mate, which has brought people from widely different socio-cultural contexts together for centuries, was drunk alone by isolated individuals for the first time in 2020. Indeed, not only has the practice of drinking *mate* been commodified but it has also been sanitized, as a result of Covid 19, and the worldwide imposition of social distancing regulations. At the same time as *mate*, as a beverage, was for the first time commercialized as an individual drink, its collective consumption was suspended in the very regions where the drink had long had a social function. Neoliberalism and Covid 19 seem to have worked together to have people drink their *mate* alone, and this resulted in *mate*'s recent individual consumption unexpectedly becoming the norm. So will *mate*'s age-old passage from mouth to mouth then end here? Or will the collective ritual of drinking *mate* survive, and reverse the new trend of generalized social distancing?

Before the conquest of Latin America, *mate* was a drink that the Guarani people used to share in the course of religious ceremonies. Originally venerated as a sacred plant, *yerba mate* quickly became a key product of the relationship of the Indigenous with the Spaniards and the drink, through the *mestizaje* in the domestic sphere and the transcultural relations resulting from mixed-marriage, spread widely as a social practice among all classes of the colonial society. Contingently adhering to migrations between South America and the Middle-East, *mate* also established itself as a collective practice in Syria and Lebanon. Later, after facing effective barriers in the western world - reluctant to adopt *mate* while other stimulant drinks, such as tea and coffee, were penetrating the market- it is now poised to compete in the European and North American health drink sectors. As Folch states, *mate* consumption is "the embodied interface of political economy and symbolic significance and it both reveals and complicates the interplay between economic forces and the choices of individual and groups".⁷⁴⁹ Tracing back the route that *mate* followed from colonial to consumer society, my thesis analyzes how and why *mate* traveled to certain places and not to other ones. It demonstrates that, unlike other stimulant drinks which were turned into commodity to satisfy the western demand, *mate* somehow avoided commercialization as a beverage and first travelled as a social practice. Thus, the route of *mate* differed from those of tea and coffee in that the drink spread only after it had been experienced and transmitted. In colonial Latin America as well as in the Middle East *mate* circulated as a practice that individuals had charged with their own meanings. Introducing Spanish colonists into indigenous ways of life or giving Middle-Eastern immigrants a sense of home by reminding them of their traditional nargileh ceremony *mate*, as a beverage drunk collectively, has followed its own itineraries, and

⁷⁴⁹ Folch, C. 2010. "Stimulating Consumption". p. 8

remained partly autonomous from economic forces. And this trajectory is all the more interesting as *yerba mate* was, on the contrary, totally subjected to the capitalist order from the point of view of its production. A key pillar of the colonial economy, *yerba mate* also played a fundamental role in the economic development of Argentina, Paraguay, and Southern Brazil. While it is clear that the plant's difficult domestication and impossible transplantation did impact and influence *mate's* global distribution, I consider that the spread of *mate* was principally determined by its evolving meanings, and that its recent resignification into a superfood is just the latest step in that evolution. Having traveled to the Middle East as a transmitted practice, *mate* now enters the western world with a pre-defined image that consumers ingest with the drink. Consumers in the Global north are not initiated to *mate* the way settlers were by Guaranis, and Middle-Eastern immigrants by Argentine people, they are rather exposed to a dematerialized image of *mate*; advertising, not physical encounters, is now what gives *mate* a meaning.

Being the first research mapping the various spaces of *mate* consumption and production, my thesis constitutes primarily a broad introduction to the topic which will be useful to future researchers in a variety of fields including sociology, anthropology, food studies, politics, and plant humanities. More fieldwork would have helped strengthen my arguments on numerous occasions so, although I was myself prevented from conducting many interviews because of the Covid19 pandemic, I hope that further investigations would be carried out to gather more quantitative and qualitative data, notably regarding the campaign by the Argentinian state to integrate *mate* into a key component of the country's national identity. I also want to note that even though I made the choice to focus on the collective consumption of *mate* in South America, it is important to acknowledge the existence of more plural narratives regarding *mate* and its consumption in this part of the world. It would, for instance, be of interest to include testimonies of individuals who do not themselves drink *mate*. Regarding the distribution of *mate* in Syria and Lebanon, anthropological fieldwork could help shed light on why *mate* consumption took hold in some communities, and not in others. By collecting data in the Chouf region in Lebanon or in the mountains of Latakia in Syria, possible relations between Druze and Alawi mysticism could be further investigated. Moreover, the link between *mate* and geopolitics, which my thesis explored when investigating the role that the site of the *yerbales* played in shaping the national borders of what are now Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, could be a useful analytic framework to transpose onto the Middle East. *Mate* influenced the tracing of the national border in South America; how does it blur frontiers at a time of war and displacement in the Middle East? Do Syrian refugees travel with *mate*? How will the distribution of *mate* evolve in the region?

Research in visual culture could analyse the representations of *mate*, through close reading of visual arts, *mate* advertising and material culture. I have myself dug into the publicization of *mate* and commented on its recent re-branding in the western world, but my research did not cover images of *mate* in Argentina's advertisement throughout the 20th century, nor its representation in Syrian or Lebanese popular culture. Such analyses could highlight *mate*'s ambivalent role in Argentinian politics, or investigate the potential for politicization of the drink in the Middle East.

Finally, I believe that further research in the field of Plant Humanities could be conducted. Indeed, while my research drew from flat ontologies and new materialistic approaches to question the agency *mate* has as a quasi-object, it did not sufficiently explore *mate* from the perspective of organic non-human life. In other words, I could have looked at *mate* from the plant's perspective rather than from the point of view of material "objectness" per se. A simple, yet necessary, question would then be: What agency did *yerba mate* have historically?

The cultural, social, economic, religious, and botanical particularities of *mate* as both a plant and a beverage are still barely known. I wrote this thesis in order to broach a number of questions related to *mate*, and hope that this work will provide starting points for research in various disciplines. Having tried to map out the itinerary *mate* has followed up until the present day, I would like to conclude by speculating on what *mate*'s future might be. Will *mate* evolve as an exclusive individual drink in the long term? Or will the collective practice of drinking *mate* persist? Under what form might *mate* put down roots in the Global North? And will its western version travel back to the regions where it is an established social practice?

I think that the current craze for "authentic" *mate* in Europe and North America will not last long. Indeed, although *mate*'s calabash has made front pages during the last two Football World Cups, it may well be replaced by the next novelty to come along. Trends are ephemeral, and *mate* already had its moment as the must-have accessory of Antoine Griezmann and Lionel Messi. Its fame as a superfood has, I believe, not yet peaked, and I consider that *yerba mate* will be a vital ingredient of numerous healthy beverages and infusions. The recent partnership between *Club Mate* and mass distributors in France (since 2022, *Club Mate* is available at Monoprix, Carrefour and Franprix) testifies to the increasing demand for healthy stimulant soft drinks. It would not be surprising if such beverages go on to penetrate regions where *mate* is an established social drink. As noted in the thesis, South American entrepreneurs have already started to think about selling *mate* as an individual drink to provide tourists with an exotic experience, while rebranding the meaning of the beverage to align with European and North American mores. Thus, if on the one hand Argentinian bars such as *Matea* in La Plata, Argentina, indulge in self-orientalism to sell their national drink to foreigners, contemporary commercial narratives which resignify *mate* as a superfood can, on the other

hand, also attract South American consumers. *Mate*'s new meaning might indeed appeal Argentinians, Paraguayans and Brazilians, in the same way as it is winning over Western consumers. However, I do not consider that this means that the promotion of *yerba mate* energizing properties will be in direct competition with the drink's social function. In South America, people might start drinking healthy beverages made with *yerba mate*, without necessarily stopping sharing the calabash on other occasions: there is no reason that several meanings of *mate* cannot cohabit. One could either decide to drink a *Club mate*, or participate in a collective *mate* session, depending on the context. Similarly, in Syria *mate* is consumed as a dietary supplement, although the drink is still primarily considered as a communal beverage. *Mate*'s uses, like its meanings, have always evolved and are continuing to do so. One cannot deny the impact of neoliberalism and Covid19 on the habit of sharing the gourd, but I think that the social ritual is still, in several places and culture, too deeply internalized to simply vanish. There is an unconscious memory that operates in the transmission and perpetuation of *mate*'s endless circles, and although the collective practice has been subject to various ideological attacks, disrupted by various pandemics, and challenged by profit-seeking commercial narratives, I consider that *mate* is and will long remain a rhizomic ritual which, when "broken or crushed in one place", will always resurge "following one of its original trajectories or finding a new one"⁷⁵⁰, with its agency intact to re-shape past, present and future belongings.

⁷⁵⁰ G. Deleuze and P. Guattari. 1980. *Rhizome*, quoted in Deleuze, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 16.

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