A Returnee's Drink

Transatlantic Trade and Consumption of Yerba Mate between Argentina & Lebanon (1920s–1950s)

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Introduction

Yerba mate, originally an indigenous drink from South America, has recently become a popular soft drink in Switzerland's supermarkets. However, already in the 1930s returning migrants, who emigrated from the Ottoman provinces of Mount Lebanon and Syria, brought yerba mate in large quantities from South America to the Levant.

The project highlights the migrants' agency as they returned from Argentina, actively shaping Lebanon's economy and consumption culture, while decentering the colonial metropole France. By using yerba mate in Lebanon as a case study, the project demonstrates how global trade relations in the early 20th century were still mainly shaped by personal networks, and contributes to better understand (return) migration practices and the 'glocalisation' of commodities.

Research Questions

How and by **whom** was Argentinian yerba mate introduced to Lebanon?

- Interplay of economic, social and cultural capital

Practices of yerba mate consumption

- Marker of distinction along class, sectarian, and gender lines

Conceptual Approach

- History of Capitalism
- Consumption History
- Global History of Middle Classes
- Migration History

- Social life of commodities
- Different forms of capital
- Translocality

Sources

Private & public archives in France, Argentina, and Lebanon

- Periodicals
- Diplomatic reports
- Business sources
- Non-written sources

Swiss National Science Foundation

Fig. 1: Advertisement of the Lebanese Yerba Mate Brand Castiello. [Alyārbā māty, Kāstylū – Kāmbyūn – Nāndūj | Mohamad Abou Khuzam & Sons. Kfar Him, Lebanon: ca. 1980s.
Fig. 2: Atlantic Ocean. Prevailing Winds and Tracks. In: Navigation of the Atlantic Ocean, With an Account of the Winds, Weather and Currents Found Therein. – Fourth and Enlarged Edition, Etc. London 1892. British Library: <https://picryl.com/media/map-from-navigation-of-the-atlantic-ocean-with-an-account-of-the-winds-weather-1dd502>, last accessed 18.11.23
Fig 3: Salim Azzam: Endless rounds of Mate, June 2022, <https://salimazzam.com/blogs/the-journal/endless-rounds-of-mate>, last accessed on 13.06.23