



# **Yerba Mate: Earth as a Companion**

**Clara Albacete**  
**2023**

**Environmental Studies Honors Thesis**  
Environmental Humanities

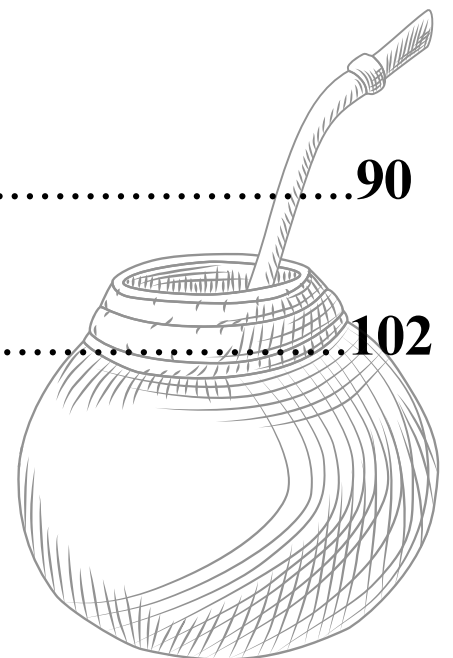
*Para mi Abuela Emma*



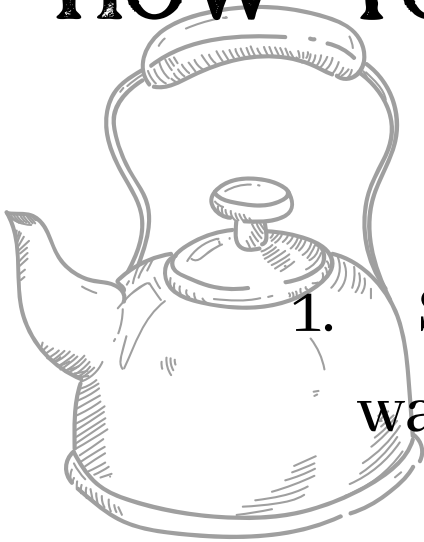
# YERBA MATE: EARTH AS A COMPANION

## How to Prepare Yerba Mate

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. The Iron in Our Veins .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>Ecology of Ilex Paraguariensis</i>	
<i>Processing of Yerba</i>	
<b>2. They Who Shaped Mate.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>The Roots of Yerba Mate</i>	
<i>The Modern Mate Industry</i>	
<i>Laboring Hands</i>	
<b>3. Reciprocity in the Rounds.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<i>Mate in the Middle East</i>	
<i>Modern Marketing</i>	
<i>Mate Globalized</i>	
<b>4. Mate an as Argentine.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<i>The Companionship of Mate</i>	
<i>Mate as a National Symbol</i>	
<i>Amargo y Dulce</i>	
<i>COVID-19 and Mate</i>	
<b>5. Compañero de por Vida.....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Afterword.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	
<b>Works Cited</b>	
<b>Appendix A</b>	
<b>Appendix B</b>	



# HOW TO DRINK YERBA MATE



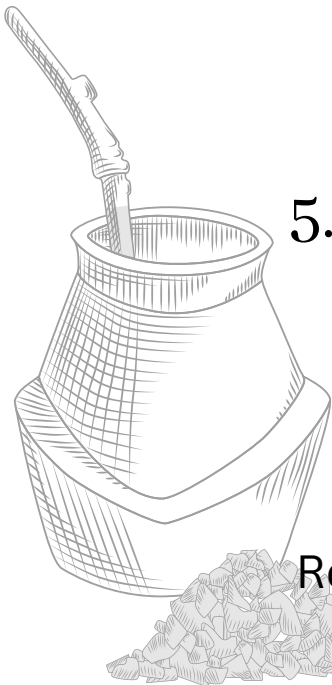
1. Set water to boil. (note: take water off the heat right before it hits boiling point)

2. Fill the mate with  $\frac{3}{4}$  of yerba

3. Insert bombilla so the bottom filter is fully covered



4. Pour water into mate until all the leaves are wet (note: water level should not go beyond the yerba. ie: no floating leaves)



5. Drink and Enjoy!

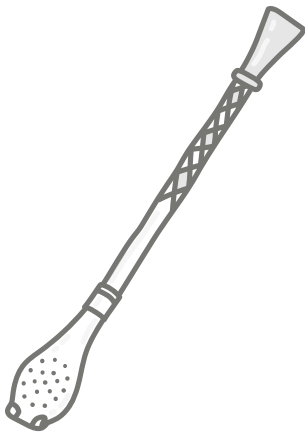
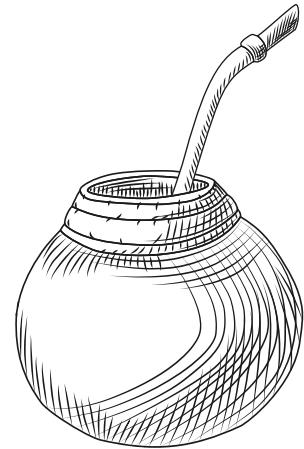
Repeat step 4 every time the water runs out :)

# TERM KEY



yerba: tea leaves

mate: cup for tea



bombilla: straw with  
filter on bottom

## INTRODUCTION

The water has been taken off the heat, the mate filled with yerba, and the bombilla situated. Come, take a seat, and let's start our rounds of mate. I drink the first one to spare you the bitterness at its peak and a burnt tongue, should the water be a little too hot. Your turn—and while you drink, let me tell you a little bit about the gift you hold in your hands.

Yerba mate is an infusion that can be drunk hot or cold, native to Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, and southern Brazil. While often called a tea, mate does not come from the tea plant *Camellia sinensis*—therefore, if we're getting technical, it's not actually a tea. But as a beverage infused by the leaves of a particular plant, we can call mate a cousin to tea. Why make the distinction? Because mate doesn't have the same ecology, history, worldwide recognition, or cultural placement as tea. In fact, aside from their shared trait of steeped leaves, the beverages are hardly similar at all.

As the mate makes its rounds, let's dive into all that “yerba mate” means. First, we must situate ourselves within the field of study through which we hope to come to an understanding of mate. The environmental humanities encompasses precisely what's in its name: humanities disciplines investigated through an environmental lens (UCLA, n.d.). This field of study gives weight and credence to stories and experiences, without claiming to speak for entire peoples or lands. A specific emphasis is placed on indigenous knowledge, particularly as it pertains to human-planet relationships. Understanding how the environmental humanities is defined, we now turn to what it aims to do.

In the words of anthropologist Donna Haraway, the environmental humanities “want[s] to nurture...the attachment sites and contact zones so that all...players learn each other's idioms” (Mitman, 2019). Haraway was criticizing the “anthropocene,” a term referring to what

anthropologists have deemed a new epoch with humans as the central geomorphic force. Haraway's words echo a sentiment often overlooked in the discussion of environmental change. The "attachment sites" and "contact zones" she speaks of are the spaces where there's opportunity for people to better understand and extend hands to each other. Haraway discusses the miscommunication between people from different fields of study, cultural backgrounds, and even simply different cities; we, as individuals—particularly those in positions of privilege—assume that the way in which we talk about topics like climate change is universally understood, regardless of the diversity of experiences that exist in the world. Much of what we lack is proper connection, to each other and to nature. Robin Wall Kimmerer, a botanist and environmental writer that marries indigenous wisdom with scientific knowledge, echoes this sentiment: "...there is a barrier of language and meaning between science and traditional knowledge, different ways of knowing, different ways of communicating" (Kimmerer, 2013, p.154). It takes the will to be open to new perspectives and the recognition of one's own biases and privileges to form cross-cultural connections that can allow our languages and understandings to be in conversation with each other.

The barrier that Kimmerer speaks of is largely what the environmental humanities tries to tear down. A key piece in all of this is understanding that communication doesn't always mean words. Communication can be art, it can be meditation, it can be ritual, it can be yerba mate. This is why, as we travel through this thesis, I invite you to take moments between chapters to pause and consider the words you just consumed. What does mate presented in each context mean to you? How does it illuminate or change your perspective of your environment? Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk and advocate for peace and the environment, places a great emphasis on the importance of mindfulness in facilitating not only peace in our lives but also connection

with each other and the world. He describes mindfulness “like morning sunlight shining on a lotus flower. The bud has not opened yet, but as the sunlight pours down, the photons penetrate into the bud, and after one or two hours of being penetrated by the light, the flower opens itself” (Hanh, 2021, p.55). Like the flower, with moments of reflection we can learn to open our minds and hearts. Drinking mate is a slow process that requires you to continue pausing to serve yourself another. Consider the moments between chapters as that time you are pouring, and pour mindfully. When you’re done you’ll have a fresh mate waiting, all the richer because you’ll have a deeper understanding of the flavors and sensations it produces from pausing to fully appreciate the previous serving.

To create the space to reflect, I have included poems and images between each chapter.

I have studied creative nonfiction writing and taken classes in eco writing and memoir that have informed my approach to writing this thesis. While I don’t claim to be an expert, there is an academic basis and inherent value in the use of this genre. Throughout history and across cultures, the use of stories has been central to preserving traditions and explaining natural phenomena. The use of creative nonfiction writing in this thesis aims to not only emulate the time-old practice of informing through storytelling, but also to weave a narrative that leaves an impression on the reader. Furthermore, the framework of environmental humanities applied to this thesis places an emphasis on storytelling and accessibility. Following the styles of environmental writers Robin Wall Kimmerer, Thich Nhat Hanh, Anna Tsing, and Sarah Besky, the language and tone I employ throughout this thesis is personable and intentionally speaks directly to the reader. The academic rigor of this style of writing has been questioned and will likely continue to be questioned, but as a reader I ask you to be open to a different definition of “academic” than what has institutionally been ingrained in most scholars. Academia has a long



history of being closed to marginalized communities and while this does not discredit the merit of academia as it exists, it does ask us to examine our own biases in how we define the academic. In addition, one of my main focuses in studying the environmental humanities concerns accessibility. Climate change is an issue that affects us all and that we all play a crucial role in mitigating. For those that haven't had access to the education that prepares them to read scientific and traditionally academic literature, this conversation becomes one that they are excluded from even though it pertains to them just as much as those with higher levels of education.

Mate is a beverage drunk by people of all social classes and levels of education. In using a more accessible tone throughout my thesis, I aim to invoke that spirit of welcoming everyone to participate, regardless of their background.

Throughout the following chapters I will refer to specific research I conducted for this thesis in the summer of 2022. To help you better follow and understand the nature of these interactions and experiences, I would like to provide a bit of context for the research as well as my background. My parents immigrated to the United States in 1989, meaning that myself as well as my sisters were born and raised in the US. We were fortunate to be able to go to Argentina to visit family nearly every year, predominantly staying in Buenos Aires and Córdoba. My abuela was a big mate drinker and as a result the rest of us were as well.

When I traveled to Argentina in June of 2022, I was there for the entire month staying with both family and on my own. Starting in Buenos Aires, I traveled (in order) to: San Juan, Córdoba, Corrientes, and Misiones, spending a day in Chaco as well. I was able to stay in each location for approximately five days. In Córdoba and Corrientes I got a close-up view of student life through the lens of my cousins who were attending university in those locations. While not

necessarily a limitation, it is important to note that a teacher strike was happening in San Juan while I visited, which prevented me from being able to get that university perspective there as well.

To help visualize the geographic scope of my travels, I include here a map of Argentina from the World Atlas:



Before we begin our journey, I'd like to address something that I received some pushback about while writing this thesis and that you the reader may also question as you move forward. Does this thesis romanticize yerba mate and by extension its role in generating mindfulness and

environmental connection? The framework I provide in this introduction is here to give an understanding of my approach to thinking about, writing about, and engaging with the tradition of mate. My intention is not to romanticize but to explore the ways mate can aid us in practices of mindfulness and help us understand the way we and our cultures are individually and collectively shaped by our environments. I frame mate as a vehicle, a gift from the earth, through which we can learn to walk alongside our planet and truly discover the companionship she gives us every day. Robin Wall Kimmerer responded in an interview to a question regarding romanticization of nature: “It is a mistake to romanticize the living world, but it is also mistake to think of the living world as adversarial” (2023). I will address some of the struggles and ugly sides of yerba mate throughout history, but even in these sections I would ask the reader to consider how these parts of the story contribute to your own understanding of mate and how they have and continue to complicate relationships between people and planet.

And so, without further ado, may I offer you a mate?

Red soil in  
Misiones  
Province



Mate statue,  
Governador  
Valentín-Virasoro,  
Corrientes  
Province

# Under the Sun

My face fell in love  
with the sun.  
The soft ray kisses  
branded in freckles  
and a red glow  
my heart  
now beats in my cheeks.

Sweet impermeable  
romance  
that toasts my skin  
and makes my toes curl  
around spokes of grass.

Rings there are none  
as I invite you  
to lie under my love  
and share in ceremony  
of leaves in cured gourd  
passed round  
from his lips to my lips to yours  
to beyond.  
Love embedded on our tongues  
and in our stomachs  
even after the sun  
has passed  
and the celebration  
shifts to a new  
kind of love.

---

# THE IRON IN OUR VEINS



## CHAPTER 1: THE IRON IN OUR VEINS

### *Ecology of Ilex Paraguariensis*

The further north the bus traveled, the more rusty in color the soil became. It blurred outside the window, each individual granule of soil merging with its neighbor in the creation of one large mass, an endless sheet of oxidized iron. Here, the romance of iron and oxygen was proclaimed with red vigor, a sunset in the earth. When I stepped off of the bus, it took less than two minutes for my white sneakers to be completely covered, the dusty dirt irreverent of the Air Force 1's claim to purity. Instead, the earth opened an invitation to me. Forget the restrictions set by your society and walk with the land that birthed your culture. And so I covered my shoes in dirt.

From the marriage within the red soil comes the child, the perennial *Ilex paraguariensis*—commonly known as yerba mate—a subtropical plant endemic to South America. Yerba mate can only be found growing in the microclimate shaped by its soil and the hot, humid climate of northern Argentina, southern Brazil, and parts of Paraguay (Burgos and Medina, 2017).

Misiones and Corrientes—neighboring provinces—are Argentina's two principal producers of yerba mate and, as expected, some of the country's warmest regions. Even in full winter, I experienced 80F-degree days, though thankfully with less humidity than you would feel in summer. These provinces are in the northeast, where you'll find scattered phrases of Guaraní, the language of the native people from this region and some of the first mate drinkers. The following chapter will cover the history of yerba from the pre-colonial time of Guaraníes, but for preliminary context, yerba did not move into permanent plantation-style production until the 20th century.

For most of its cultivation history, the plant was harvested in the wild from trees that grew to between 10 and 30 m in height, with a trunk diameter of between 50 and 80 cm (Medina and Burgos, 2017). In its natural form, yerba mate grows alongside Paraná trees—also known as candelabra trees for their top-heavy branch distribution—that tower at 45+ m and protect *I. paraguariensis* from the intense sun and heat of the region, with the yerba in return protecting Paraná pine seedlings in their early stages of development from pests and other threats. Together the two plants reduce soil erosion and maintain healthy nutrient levels in the ground (Montagnini et al., 2011).

The yerba mate plant is particularly sensitive to dehydration and will reduce foliage area and dry weight of stems and leaves when under stress from water loss (Burgos and Medina, 2017). This susceptibility to dehydration when in cultivation conditions that are different from its native, humid environment has prevented yerba mate from being cultivated elsewhere in the world. However, some variations of yerba have proven to be particularly resistant to dry spells and therefore are more desired as mother plants in big plantations (Burgos and Medina, 2017).

The natural mutualistic relationship between yerba mate and the Paraná tree is maintained as a form of agroforestry in parts of Misiones, where you can find some of the oldest yerba plantations and arguably the most “pure” of its kind thanks to the preservation of the natural plant relationships, a knowledge passed down since the time of the Guaraní. Neighboring Corrientes, south of Misiones, went down a different route, adopting a more industrialized approach to cultivation that is similar to what we see with cash crops in the United States, according to Professor Davalos in the college of agronomy at the Universidad Nacional del Nordeste. This production format encourages monocropping that depletes the soil of nutrients and has rendered some acreage unproductive after many years of use (Montagnini et al., 2011).



The yerba trees found in these plantations are tailored to grow to only 3-6 m in height for agricultural practicality (Burgos and Medina, 2017).

Despite the artificial height modification, modern yerba production can be distinguished from crop production seen in other parts of the world by a deeply rooted appreciation for the cultural relevance of the plant and the land on which it is grown. As is said at Establecimiento Las Marias, one of the largest producers of yerba in the whole world, once you visit the land where mate is born, you will never experience it in the same way. The implication behind this idea can be engaged with the concept of bioregionalism, an idea that has various iterations across cultures: *querencia*, *land-place*, *terroir*, to name a few. What all of these terms have in common is the emphasis on the ecological and cultural conditions of a particular area that define the identity and composition of beings from that region (Glotfelty et al, 2012). As a plant that clings to its particular environment and is subsequently clung to by the people that inhabit that region, yerba is shaped from all sides by its bioregion. Visiting the land where yerba grows is akin to seeing a baby's womb, the place where they are first fed, cradled, and in their most untouched form. It's an intimate moment of connection, bringing you the closest you can be to that moment the life of a yerba tree first comes into existence.

Let's go to this land.

Establecimiento Las Marias occupies a beautiful expanse of land colored with rusty orange soil in the northwestern corner of Corrientes. The nearest town, Gobernador Virasoro, is a twenty minute drive away, accessed by a singular highway cutting across the entire province. As I approached the establecimiento, the first thing I saw was a completely white home, clearly *campestre* and practically radiating history. This is the original home of the founder of Establecimiento Las Marias, one Víctor Navajas who died in 1967 at the age of 64

(Establecimiento Las Marias, n.d.). His descendants no longer live on the property and the house is only used for particularly esteemed guests. Heading past this initial house, I arrived at the visitor center which was fully stocked with every kind of Las Marias merchandise imaginable. As I waited for my tour to commence, I browsed the selection, already mentally picking out the mates and potential accessories I was interested in purchasing.

I ended up on a tour with three other families, two from Argentina and one from Brazil, that took us through the property grounds, pointing out tea (*Camellia sinensis*) and yerba plants alike, the houses that some employees choose to live in, and the packaging facilities where bags of Taragüi and Unión (two of the principal brands Las Marias produces) moved along conveyor belts in perfect military-esque lines. I was greatly amused by each precise rectangle dropping off its belt like lemmings on a cliff, continuing forward with abandon—as if the yerba was eager to go off to the stores and come back to life at the touch of hot water. At this point in its life journey, yerba's relationship to its bioregion shifts. No longer buried in the soil, the life of the yerba is now fully contained in its relationship with its future drinker. Yerba leaves carry the taste of their land the way a person might carry the accent of the region where they grow up, but now instead of the land linking person to plant, yerba pulls on the senses to connect its drinker to its home.

It's when that hot water is poured into a mate that the polvillo in any given blend of yerba releases an earthy scent descriptive of its terroir, and a slight fizz from bubbles streaming up through the leaves. Las Marias invited us visitors to take a closer look at the layers that make up a yerba blend (figure 1); polvillo is the finest.

Going up from there you have dried leaves ground into larger and larger bits until it's no longer leaf, but palo that's blended in with the mix. The intensity of each blend is dependent on a few factors, the first being the ratios of polvillo and palo that are included. Polvillo is essentially like a powder, meaning that is able to dissolve in the water and is what produces most of that earthen scent described previously. It also releases the strongest flavor. Palo, on the other hand, provides the least amount of flavor given it is not actually



Figure 1: Layers of yerba, starting with polvillo, the finest layer, at the bottom.

part of the leaf but the stem, thus making blends “elaborados con palo” have a softer flavor. The other principal factor to consider in flavor intensity is the location where the yerba is grown. Because of the higher iron content in the soil, Misiones grows yerba with a more forceful flavor than Corrientes. Taragüi, the principal brand at Las Marias, named after the Guaraní word for “Corrientes,” offers varying degrees of intensity in its blends, each fueled with “intense passion” (Establecimiento Las Marias, 2022). Unión and Mañanita are softer and also generate less stomach acidity (because polvillo is also the main contributor to the stomach acidity mate can produce), with Mañanita described as “ideal for those who are new to the experience of drinking mate” (Establecimiento Las Marias, 2022). The fourth brand produced in Las Marias is La Merced, a brand that pays particular attention to the place of cultivation and treatment techniques (which we will explore momentarily). To make their blends that have Misiones-grown yerba,, Las Marias has cultivators in Misiones that provide for them.

So how does Las Marias know that their blends are just right? Allow me to describe what I've decided is my dream job: there are workers in the Establecimiento specifically dedicated to trying every single blend that is made in a day. Their work space had rows upon rows of glass mates prepared to be filled and tested. They use glass in particular because that is the material that will preserve the pure yerba flavor the most since it doesn't absorb flavor the way wood and gourd do. These people taste 500 mates a day, an amount that I can only imagine must do a number on their digestion and sleep schedules, considering that the caffeine in a cup of mate is comparable to that of a cup of coffee (Gawron-Gzella et al, 2021).

Let's detour for a moment away from our visit to Las Marias and take a look at the xanthine alkaloid (chemical stimulant) content of yerba mate.

Yerba mate contains three principal xanthine alkaloids: caffeine, theobromine, and theophylline. Of the three, it has the highest content in caffeine; followed by theobromine, most commonly found in cacao beans (IARC, 1991); and then theophylline, generally found in trace amounts in black tea (IARC, 1991). Theophylline has only been detected in small quantities in yerba (<0.1% dry weight), and has not, at the time of this thesis, undergone enough research to be included in the remainder of this review.

Because of the nature of how mate is traditionally served (refer to guide at the start of the thesis), it can be difficult to get an accurate view of the amount of caffeine and theobromine intake you get every time you drink mate. Gawron-Gzella et al. (2021) measured the amounts of these alkaloids found after various pours (Table 1).

Repeats	Caffeine (mg/100mL Infusion)	Theobromine (mg/100mL Infusion)
1st	13.7-26.4	2.8-6.4
2nd	6.5-19.0	1.7-4.4
3rd	2.3-13.6	0.6-3.1
4th	1.6-11.6	0.4-2.9
10th	1.0-7.3	0.3-1.6
18th	1.3-5.7	0.3-1.3
30th	1.5-6.6	0.3-1.6

Table 1: Purine alkaloid content found in Yerba Mate infusion after numerous serves. Infusion defined as: 85g of Yerba Mate brewed with 150mL of water at 75C for 30 seconds (Gawson-Gzella et. al, 2021).

As the yerba becomes more diluted, caffeine and theobromine content also decreases, which means you aren't getting the same amount of caffeine every time you drink a round of mate, but you do continue to accumulate caffeine intake with each round, just in smaller increments. Although comparable in caffeine content to coffee, mate is anecdotally known for giving energy without the subsequent crash usually accompanied with a coffee "buzz." This is in part because of the slow accumulation of caffeine through many rounds of mate and in part because of theobromine and theophylline counteracting some of caffeine's aggressive stimulant effects. Theobromine is known to be anti-inflammatory and can lower blood pressure, and its energizing effects are more slow-acting and gentle than that of caffeine (Martinez-Pinilla et al, 2015). Put these alkaloids in conversation with each other and the drawn-out method of drinking mate, and the result is a sustained energy boost that is simultaneously calming. Culturally, it's been long believed that mate contained its own chemical compound called "mateina" that was responsible for the unique stimulating effect of the tea. However, this theory has been disproven

in research conducted at la Universidad Nacional del Centro that found only caffeine, theobromine, and theophylline in the plant's chemical composition (UNL, 2011). Despite these findings, the myth of mateina still persists in much of Argentina (Folch, 2010).

Detour completed, let's now travel back to Las Marias, where I was now seated in the back of a van emblazoned with the Establecimiento's logo—a privilege I got as the only person in our group traveling alone and without a car—riding through the extensive grounds and pausing at the stations completing various stages of yerba processing.

The tour guide driving my van communicated to the group via a radio station, describing the purpose and function of each stop as we passed through. She informed us that Las Marias strives for sustainable practices in their agriculture, using compost produced on the Establecimiento's grounds as a fertilizer. In conversation with this idea of bioregionalism that we've been examining, this method of fertilizing creates a self-sustaining cycle that keeps the goods consumed on the land within the land, reinforcing the notion that the life yerba receives is particular to this region.

We passed by small tea bushes before getting to the short yerba trees, kept at the



Figure 2: Yerba trees at Establecimiento Las Marias

aforementioned 3-6 m optimal for industrial agriculture (Figure 2).

The small trees stood in rows, as militaristic as the packages they would soon become on that conveyor belt.

These plants only become reproductive two years after

propagation, or five if grown from seed. They flower in the spring, with fruit produced in the summer and fall from January to June (Medina and Burgos, 2017).

The day I visited Las Marias was a beautifully sunny winter day, meaning temperatures were in the high sixties (F) and the sky was a cloudless, brilliant blue. With that type of day, where the sun's rays reached down and wrapped around the stems and leaves of yerba, it would be easy to think that yerba must be a plant that loves the sun. However, until recently, it was assumed that yerba mate preferred shade. Because it naturally grows under trees and responds to shade by elongating its stems and increasing foliage area, yerba mate was long believed to favor shade. Closer research, however, suggests that plants that are tolerant to shade do not show responses of such plasticity to it (Burgos and Medina, 2017). When in reduced sunlight, yerba produces fewer new leaves and instead grows the ones it already has, which indicates that the plant is trying to maximize intake of sunlight. On the other hand, research observing yerba in intense sunlight showed that foliage area was reduced to minimize loss of water through transpiration, indicative of yerba's sensitivity to dehydration. The most recent conclusions in yerba research suggest that yerba prefers shade because it can adapt to shade at any age, while it can only tolerate full sun exposure at maturity (Burgos and Medina, 2017). Learning this, I couldn't help but think of the Paraná tree protecting the baby yerba until it is ready to face the sun. It's clear that these kinds of mutualistic relationships develop for a reason—that when we lay out the facts about the needs of yerba, the role of the Paraná tree seems obvious. Yet plantation-style cultivation tears that relationship apart, even at the hands of people that adore yerba. When these two pieces that are fundamental to the make-up of yerba mate are in conflict with each other, what does that mean for its terroir? Can the imposition of a human practice fundamentally break a species' bioregion? Since culture contributes to the definition of such a

thing, how far can a culture shift before creating an entirely new type of region? And is that even a question worth asking? These are all ideas we shall revisit in chapter 5.

But for now, let's finish our tour of the Establecimiento's grounds. As I've mentioned, yerba is endemic to this region, meaning it's built to thrive in the conditions of northeastern Corrientes and Misiones, exhibiting the most resilience and least risk of all other plants cultivated there. As I exited from my tour van, I noted how much more orange my sneakers looked, a coloring that wouldn't come out of the soles until I forced it to, in part because I was worried that TSA would flag my sneakers as potentially hazardous on my way home and have to deal with the hassle of them being swabbed for any "dangerous" substance. It seems incredible that something that could be considered a hazard by one can be the lifeblood of another.

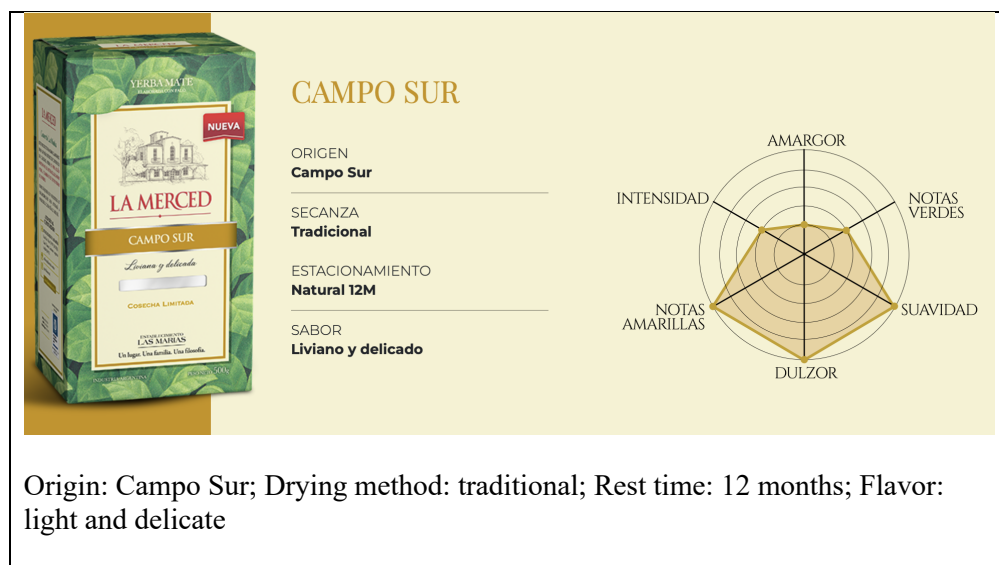
Soil condition and nutrient content are particularly important to the success of yerba cultivation. We already know that yerba thrives in the iron and aluminum-rich red soil of Corrientes and Misiones, and on top of these conditions, yerba mate also craves a clay-based soil; it is found in soils composed of 15-35% clay and >35% clay. Although fairly particular about its ideal conditions, yerba is considered tolerant to low-nutrient and degraded soils. In line with its desire for hydration, moist soils are best for growing, with water content found to be positively correlated with the number of leaves produced (Burgos and Medina, 2017).

As the tour came to an end, we were shepherded towards an in-house tienda with all of the Establecimiento Las Marias brands and products for purchase: rows upon rows of yerba Taragüi, Unión, Mañanita, and La Merced. With my new understanding of everything contained inside those half-kilogram bags, I was tempted to buy everything. In particular, my eye was drawn towards La Merced, a brand about which we'd gotten a special presentation about what makes its yerba blends unique. Of course, I will now share this knowledge with you.



## Cultivation and Processing of Yerba Mate

Yerba La Merced carries five different blend varieties named after the locations from which they are sourced and their method of treatment: Campo Sur, de Campo, Campo y Monte, de Monte, and Barbacua. The blends are curated based on the specific microclimates where yerba is grown, each determining the level of flavor intensity of the plant. The yerba is first planted in covered environments and when the plants mature at 12 months, they are moved to an outdoor environment that will yield the desired flavor. To help determine which blend will suit one's flavor preferences, La Merced rates their blends in terms of intensity versus softness, bitterness versus sweetness, and green notes (more bold flavor) versus yellow notes (more subtle flavor). Figure 3 shows these ratings as well as origin, treatment, and notes of flavor. Exemplifying the way environmental conditions impact the flavor of the leaves, the “campo” blends are grown in Corrientes and therefore have a softer flavor, while the “monte” blends come from Misiones, where there is higher iron content in the soil and therefore produces a stronger flavor. As suggested in the name, the “campo y monte” blend contains a mix of yerba grown in both Corrientes and Misiones (Yerba La Merced, 2020).





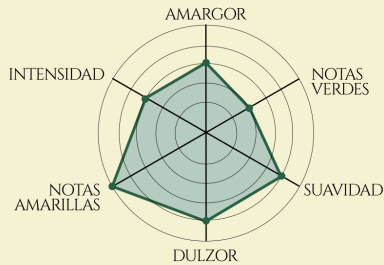
### DE CAMPO

ORIGEN  
**Nordeste correntino**

SECANZA  
**Tradicional**

ESTACIONAMIENTO  
**Natural 12M**

SABOR  
**Suave y amigable**



Origin: Northeastern Corrientes; Drying method: traditional; Rest time: 12 months; Flavor: soft and friendly



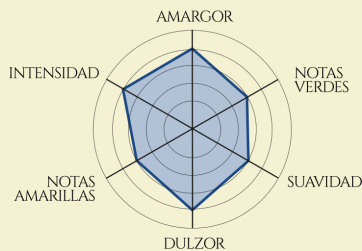
### CAMPO Y MONTE

ORIGEN  
**Mezcla**

SECANZA  
**Tradicional**

ESTACIONAMIENTO  
**Natural 12M**

SABOR  
**Suave y vigoroso**



Origin: Mixed; Drying method: traditional; Rest time: 12 months; Flavor: soft and vigorous



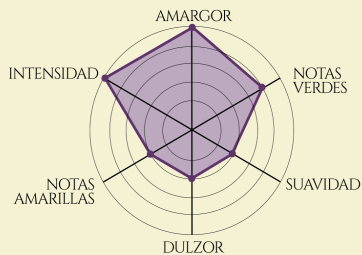
### DE MONTE

ORIGEN  
**Selva Misionera**

SECANZA  
**Tradicional**

ESTACIONAMIENTO  
**Natural 12-15M**

SABOR  
**Intenso y vigoroso**



Origin: Misiones Tropics; Drying method: traditional; Rest time: 12-15 months; Flavor: intense and vigorous

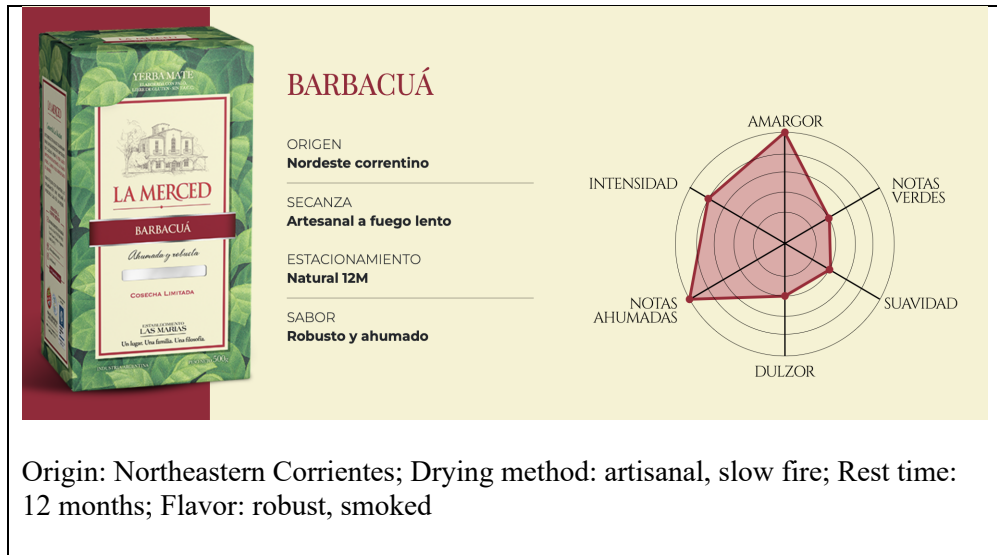


Figure 3: La Merced yerba blends (source: Yerba La Merced, 2022)

Once the plants are ready for harvest, special care is taken to clip branches at an angle and length at a distance from the trunk that allows for the plants to continue to grow fruitfully in the next season. After the leaves have been cut, they're passed through an oven of sorts to be dried. Master sapecadores, who are in charge of regulating drying conditions, will adjust the strength of the flame used for drying depending on the condition of the leaves (Yerba La Merced, 2020). The barbacua variety of yerba has a slightly different drying method from what's standard, following instead the artisanal methods of the Guaraní people from the Misiones region. While modern ovens can dry the leaves in 30-45 minutes, the barbacua method will leave the yerba in the heat for approximately 10-12 hours, lending them the distinct smoky flavor that is characteristic of this method (Isondú, 2015).

After the yerba has been dried, it is ground into big pieces and packaged before being left to rest in a climate-controlled area to mature. This process can take anywhere between 9 and 24 months. It is during this step that the yerba really develops its flavor and color, receiving periodic checks to ensure the integrity of quality. After the yerba has rested an adequate amount of time,

it is ground again before being blended and prepared for packaging and distribution (Noticias del Mate, 2022).

While La Merced places particular emphasis on naming their blends after the places where yerba is grown, other brands have different ways of centering the relevance of place in their blends. Many brands, for example, have blends with added yuyos (herbs) that will mix a different flavor with that of the yerba. The combination of herbs to add into the blend is often times determined by the herbs native to a particular region. The brands CbSé and Cachamate, for example, carry yerba mixed with a few different varieties: hierbas serranas, hierbas pampeanas, hierbas del litoral, to name a few. Each of these titles refer to a specific geographic region in Argentina. Las Marias lined up their boxes of La Merced on a shelf from softest to strongest in their store. I noted that my fellow visitors were just as eager as myself to get their hands on a box of the Barbacué variety, all of us intrigued by the particular drying method you won't find in just any type of yerba. Throughout my month in Argentina I visited a fair amount of grocery stores, tracking the brands and prices of yerba across provinces, and I found Barbacué in limited quantities. I wondered if that had to do with the extra time it took to be produced in comparison to other blends. Given its scarcity, I wasn't too surprised that it was the most popular product among us visitors.

I realized that I'd tried Barbacué before I'd known what it was, a week earlier with my cousin Mauricio in Córdoba. He'd mentioned to me that he'd bought a special variety of yerba that tasted like smoke and was expensive, but the pieces didn't come together until later on that he'd been talking about Barbacué. I remember when I first tried it with him, sipping from a yellow plastic mate while sitting on his apartment rooftop balcony, the sun setting at his back and in my eyes. I thought it was really bitter. Having grown up drinking mate with sugar, I

wasn't super accustomed to the more amargo taste of the pure yerba yet (refer to chapter 4 for more on dulce versus amargo) and the smoky flavor went down with a bit of difficulty. I liked it though, thinking it tasted the way I imagined fire would. By the time I broke into my own box of Barbacué a few months later, I was an old pro at drinking mate sans sugar, and I found the flavor a lot less jarring than I did the first time. I actually opened my Barbacué with a friend, mildly concerned it would be too much for her, but the moment I mentioned the artisanal practice behind it she put on a determined face and said she wanted to try it. As I poured out the water somewhere between 70 and 85 Celsius over the leaves, it bubbled and popped quietly like a little shimmer of laughter, releasing the earthy, smoky scent into the air. Centuries of tradition floated around us in those aromatic particles; I drank the first serving, a practice I've picked up after years of seeing squinched expressions from the particular bitterness of the first mate. After making sure the water was a drinkable temperature, I served a second cup and passed it over to my friend. She sniffed it first, then gently took the bombilla between her lips and drank. She was quiet for a moment, letting the flavor occupy all parts of her mouth before smiling and nodding, her subsequent "I like it" infused with a deep appreciation of the history and legacy I'd told her about before we opened the pack.

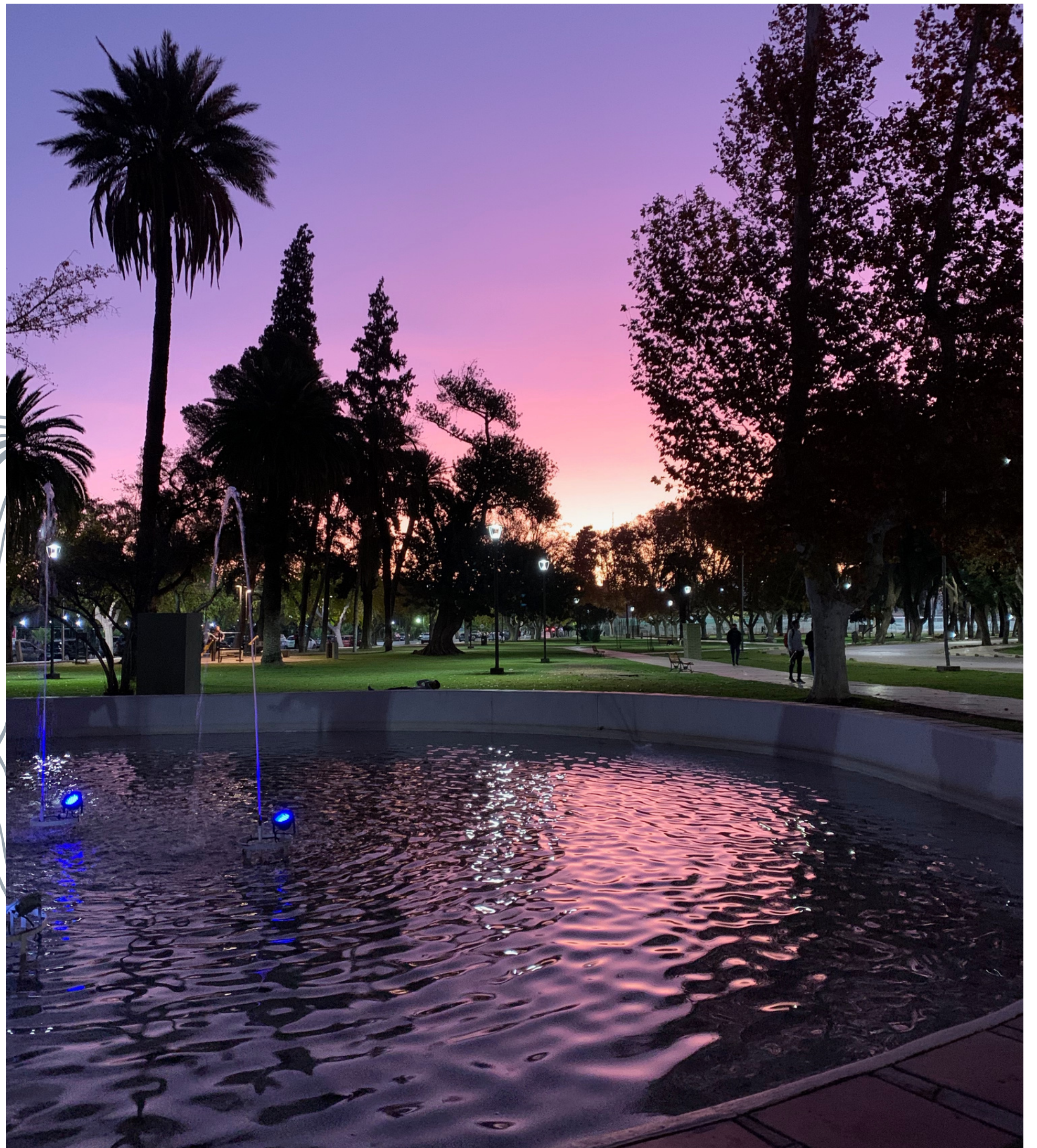
The whole process, from the moment the water came out of the thermos until it landed in her belly, was slow and deliberate. Apt, considering the twelve hours these leaves spent sitting in dry heat and absorbing the woody flavors of the logs burned around it. There's a certain patience that accompanies mate, whether in the drying process, the months-long rest time, or in the actual drinking: one person at a time, interspersed with conversation and study. Drinking mate with my grandma was always a test of patience; she was the type of person to talk endlessly, so when she had mate in hand, sometimes it would remain in her hand, undrunk, for long stretches of time

while she recounted some story or idea that was on her mind. I remember watching her lift the mate to her lips, about to take a sip—and then a new thought would emerge and she would put it down without drinking, leaving my mom and I to look at each other and laugh, because who knew how long it would be before either of us got a turn?

In a way, though, that's the way to do it that makes the most sense. The *barbacuá* process is a teacher itself, reminding us that it takes those ten to twelve hours to yield this rare flavor to draw you in. It's like the saying: Rome wasn't built in a day. And a good yerba wasn't dried in ten minutes or rested for just a month. To give the yerba process and ritual its due time and respect, it only makes sense to drink slowly and listen at length. Those moments of slowing down are the moments I remember most of my grandma, and some of the most important moments of healing and mindfulness I've needed.

The time came, eventually, to say goodbye to *Establecimiento Las Marias*. As my taxi rolled away from the grounds, I whispered my thanks to the beauty around me, hands holding tight to my new bag of mate products. Here was the point where I removed the yerba from its womb and carried it with me to my next destination, eventually making its way back to the US, where it continues to create a window into that memory. Maybe that's part of what *Las Marias* meant when they said that once you visit yerba's birthplace, your experience with mate is never the same. It's like when you visit a friend's family for the first time and you realize where all of their quirks and qualities come from; you gain a deeper understanding of that person, which can strengthen and develop your relationship. Now when I drink mate I know what the soil where it grew felt like, I know what the air smelled like, and I know, to a certain extent, what it once was and how it came to be here in my hands.

Parque de Mayo,  
San Juan Province



Río Paraná,  
bridge between  
Chaco and  
Corrientes



# Here,

I topple  
tumble and fall.  
My roots have been  
Ripped from underneath me.  
Teetering,  
I drop,  
a tear at a time.

All my time,  
my precious  
time,  
taken and dumped  
and trampled  
and yelled at,  
called useless  
unworthy  
ungrateful  
unwanted.

Like I never mattered at all,  
in the end.

~

Dear friend  
don't say that to yourself.  
Look  
at how you're standing.  
Your roots are so much  
deeper than this.

Take me in your hand,  
let me remind you  
of who you really are.  
Pour healing water  
and smell the air.  
Remember the earth?  
Remember the sun?  
Remember those magnolia trees  
that grew along the street?

Your life has its arms open,  
begging you to run  
and leap into its hold  
the way you once did  
back when you believed  
there was such a thing  
as joy.

What they say is  
what they say,  
but their truth  
is not  
the truth.

I'm molded to your hand.

Take me along with you  
and let me show you  
the extent of the world  
that cradles  
your life.



---

# THEY WHO SHAPED MATE



## CHAPTER 2: THEY WHO SHAPED MATE

### *The Roots of Yerba Mate*

Photo evidence tells me that I've been drinking mate since I was two years old. While I wish I could remember my reaction to those first sips of mate (I look like I'm in deep concentration and can only imagine the kind of divine inspiration I was struck with in that moment), my earliest memories drinking it go back to the Sunday mornings of my youth. My dad has a rotund mate cradled in a wire frame that he would use every Sunday morning while reading the newspaper before church. We didn't have an electric kettle at the time, so he boiled water on the stove in a squat silver one; I distinctly remember the bronze duck-shaped trivet that was parked on our kitchen table waiting to receive said kettle.

My dad liked to drink mate with heaping spoonfuls of sugar, so that was how I drank it too. Wrapping my small hands around the large mate while reading the color comics that only came in the Sunday paper, the beverage was solidified early on as a comforting presence in my life.

So how did mate get here? What journey did it have to go on to get to those quiet Sunday mornings that are cemented in my memory?

Let's voyage back to before the Spaniards ever "discovered" North and South America, to the time of the Guaraníes that lived in the region that would eventually become northeastern Argentina and Paraguay. In the sense of a date on a calendar, it is unknown when the tradition of drinking mate came to be. However, Guaraní legend offers four explanations, all centered on the spirit of hospitality that exists within Guaraní tradition. The first tells the story of the moon

goddess Yari who comes down to earth. While walking through the jungle she encounters a vicious jaguar, but before she is attacked, a Guaraní warrior shoots the jaguar down. Worried that it may happen again, the Guaraní man invites her back to his home for the night. Yari is touched by his actions both in saving her and offering her a bed and bestows upon him the gift of the yerba mate plant with specific instructions on how to dry and brew it (EarthStoriez, 2021)

Another legend tells of an old man that does not have the energy to continue moving around with his tribe and so when they move again he decides to stay behind. His daughter is torn but decides to remain with her father. Impressed by this act of love, an unknown shaman (like a god in disguise) arrives and gives the man a yerba mate plant with instructions to dry and grind up the leaves and brew a tea. This tea gives the man strength to journey once again and reunite his daughter with the tribe (EarthStoriez, 2021). The third legend begins similarly to the second but in this version rather than the emphasis placed on the daughter staying with her father, it tells of a stranger seeking shelter. The old man invites the stranger in and gives him the best food and accommodations he has. In thanks for the old man's generous hospitality, the stranger (an envoy from the god Tupa) sprouts the yerba plant in the forest, gifting the man and his daughter the mate infusion to always provide wonderful hospitality. The daughter became known as CaáYarii, the nurturer of yerba mate and the father as CaáYará, the watchful protector of yerba mate (Compartiendo Culturas, 2010).

The final legend tells of two brothers, Guaraní and Tupi, who feuded and split their people, each starting their own tribes named after themselves. The Tupi adopted a fierce, nomadic lifestyle that broke away from the agricultural tradition of their ancestors, while the Guaraní remained caretakers of the land and became god-fearing craftsmen. Pleased with the nurturing lifestyle of the Guaraní, their god bestowed upon them great knowledge of the land and

plants, the most important of which was the secret of how to harvest and prepare yerba mate. Mate imparted health and longevity to the Guaraní (EarthStoriez, 2021).

From the legends of the Guaraní, we can see the roots of the sharing tradition of mate that persists still today. Both mate and its ritual are central to their culture, which emphasizes a counter-colonial mindset of leisure and sharing of goods, rather than accumulation of personal wealth (Gómez, 2022). Following this tradition of community-based wealth, it is likely—and evidence suggests—that the Guaraní were the ones to introduce mate to the Spaniards when they arrived in South America (Burgos and Medina, 2017). The Guaraníes called it “caá-mate,” “caá” being the Guaraní word for “plant” and “mate” coming from the Quichua word “matí” that was used to refer to the calabaza from which the steeped beverage was drunk (Burgos and Medina, 2017). They had an extensive understanding of the plant and its ecosystem and were able to harvest it from the wild to then be treated and processed. The yerba leaves were not only steeped, but also chewed, particularly for energy boosts during expeditions or battle campaigns (Folch, 2010; Gálvez, 2013). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Guaraní people were the originators of the method used for processing yerba leaves; today yerba Barbacúá preserves the original drying method of the Guaraní and uses the heat from real fire to dry the yerba leaves rather than using an artificial means (Gálvez, 2013). Noted in records kept by Jesuit priests, the Guaraní drank mate with cold water rather than hot. It wasn’t until the Spanish adopted the mate tradition and altered it to use hot water that mate became a beverage most commonly taken warm. It is important to note however that mate is still drunk cold in much of Paraguay and the northeastern regions of Argentina, where summers can reach extreme temperatures. Taken cold, mate is referred to as tereré.

Despite the temperature difference, the ritual of mate we see today is the same as when the Guaraníes originated it: drunk out of a calabaza through a straw (Gálvez, 2013). It was a ritual taught to the Spanish by the Guaraní and—like mate itself—has stood the test of time.

As we enter the age of the conquistadors, much of the Guaraní perspective is lost to the records of the Spanish. The Guaraní relied on oral tradition to preserve their practices and culture, and even when a grammar dictionary was written for their language, it came from the hands of a European and lacked a fundamental understanding of how the language was actually spoken (Boidin, 2020). As a result, we must now turn to the records of the conquistadors and the Jesuits to continue to follow the “known” history of mate.

When said conquistadors first encountered mate, they struggled to figure out how to grow it. Guaraní knowledge said that the seeds of the yerba plant had shells that were too hard to simply be planted in the ground and grow; the seeds needed to pass through the digestive system of the birds that ate them to become soft enough for shoots to break through the shell. The Spanish were unable to figure out how to expedite this process for their plantation needs and instead went about harvesting the plant directly from the wild. Here the exploitative *encomiendas* came into play, a system where conquistadors were granted the “legal” right to the forced labor of indigenous peoples, in return providing them with military protection and the option to be converted to Christianity (Cartwright, 2022). As the only ones with knowledge of the yerba plant, the Guaraní people were used as cheap labor, forced to work in conditions that didn’t afford them any benefits or food. Many Guaraníes died under these circumstances, and of those that didn’t, majority left the region and the work (Burgos and Medina, 2017). The diary of a Spanish priest describes the conditions under which the Guaraní had to work to harvest mate:

*...es tan caluroso y tan húmedo, se mueren los indios de ordinario y aun de hambre, porque el español no tiene con qué poderlos sustentar. Se sustentan con fruta silvestre y comen arañas, gusanos y culebras, que da lástima contarlos. Deba cada indio dos meses de trabajo y les hacen servir dos y tres años por fuerza fuera de su casa, sin premio alguno y cuanto mucho les dan dos varas de lienzo a cada uno.*

...it's so hot and so humid, the [Guaraníes] die ordinarily and from hunger, because the Spanish don't have any sustenance for them. They sustain themselves with wild fruit and eat spiders, worms, and snakes, which I lament having to say. Each [Guaraní] owes two months of work and they make them serve two and three years away from their homes, without any reward sometimes and the times they do receive anything, the most is two sticks of canvas each (Gálvez, 2013).

The Spaniards have an interesting trajectory with mate—the drink was of course adopted from the native people, and at first, conquistador Hernando Arias de Saavedra upheld and lauded it as a desirable stimulant in 1592. Not long after, however, those of the upper class in Asunción (present day Paraguay) deemed it to be abominable and unfit for them. These people tried to rid the culture they were building of mate, although to no avail. They were backed, however, by that same conquistador—now governor of the region—who even went so far as to denounce and publicly burn yerba brought into the province (Burgos and Medina, 2017). The rejection of mate didn't last long, however, because soon after the Jesuits arrived and with them, their agricultural expertise that allowed them to establish plantations—yerbales—for growing yerba.

Before they started cultivating mate, though, the Jesuits originally too attempted to denounce mate. They came at it from a different perspective, their primary motive for rejecting it being to avoid encomiendas. But despite rejection of the drink from both governmental and religious sides, mate persevered. As a stubborn plant that refuses to grow in other regions and fights plantation agriculture, it seems only fitting that culturally the beverage is just as difficult to uproot from its tradition. Authors Burgos and Medina note that those that drank mate were largely unaffected by the push to leave it behind, instead keeping calabaza in hand (2017).

Eventually the Jesuits decided to stop fighting the yerba and instead embrace it, establishing the first yerbales sixty years after their initial rejection of the plant (Burgos and Medina, 2017). These yerbales were set up in reducciones, also known as Guaraní missions, and were one of two principal methods of collecting yerba. The other entailed expeditions of two to three months to forests around the Paraná and Uruguay rivers, where wild yerba grew and could be collected. In the missions where cultivation within the yerbales was successful, the second method was abandoned, as it was more time-consuming and labor intensive (Crocitti, 2002). Given available records, it is difficult to pinpoint how much of the agricultural cultivation of yerba can be attributed to Guaraní knowledge and familiarity with the yerba plant versus the Jesuit understanding of agriculture and scientific application. To attribute the discovery of yerba cultivation fully to the Jesuits would be to ignore the labor and knowledge of the Guaraní people; after all, it was the Guaraníes that were actually on the ground harvesting the plant and the ones with centuries of knowledge and experience with it. And while there are very few written records of Guaraní history and knowledge, this is due in large part to the purposeful hindrance of education that the Jesuits imposed on the Guaraní (Crocitti, 2002). To prevent the Guaraní from conducting their own trade with other Spanish settlers in Paraguay, the Jesuit missions attempted

to keep the Guaraní from learning the Spanish language. There is substantial hypocrisy behind these actions because the Jesuits purposefully sought out education in the Guaraní language to prove to the Spanish crown that they should be able to remove the Guaraní from the *encomiendas* and move them to their *reducciones* instead (Boidin, 2020). Furthermore, to tailor written Guaraní to their needs, the Jesuits added religious ideology and terms into the language; most of what was translated from Spanish to Guaraní were religious texts (Boidin, 2020).

The story of mate is not complete without the voices of the people that first harvested, treated, and steeped it; voices that have been and continue to be silenced. As I've written this chapter, I've found myself grappling with this reality and with the western eurocentric bias in much of the literature I've been reading from this time period. I question my own bias: how am I phrasing what I input in the JSTOR search engine? As someone raised Catholic, how has that shaped my preconceived notions about the Jesuits? Part of the difficulty of engaging with historical narratives is the understanding that what we read—although painted as objective—is highly subjective and only tells one part of a multi-layered story. This is particularly true with narratives about colonizers and indigenous folk. As scholar María Gómez (2022) writes in her paper grappling with the holes in mate's history: "the narratives [of yerba mate] derive from a process of nation formation that deliberately looked to leave behind the Indigenous presence in the story of [mate's] origins." It is clear that once the Spanish entered the picture, the Guaraní became a subject rather than an author in the mate story.

This matters in part because the Guaraní are the ones that hold traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) about yerba mate. TEK encompasses the knowledge, beliefs, and practices that hold together humans' relationships to each other, other living beings and their environment (Kimmerer, 2002). It "is born of long intimacy and attentiveness to a homeland and can arise



wherever people are materially and spiritually integrated with their landscape” (Kimmerer, 2002). Every Guaraní legend of the origin of mate hails the plant as a gift from the gods, something to the loved and nurtured, that will give back as much—if not more—as it is given in turn. In this way, mate is not “just a drink”—it is the bond through which the spiritual and physical worlds connect. It is an incredibly key piece of culture and life within Guaraní history, one that has remained nearly identical in design to this day. When the voice of the Guaraní is removed from the history of mate, that ancient spiritual connection is lost and the profundity of understanding between plant and person is weakened.

The Guaraní connection to their land and yerba is evidenced through their understanding of the plant’s life cycle. In contrast to the Spanish, who would fell full trees to harvest yerba, the Guaraní knew to only prune the most lush branches, leaving enough leaves for the tree to recover and be ready for harvest again within three years. This led them to return to stands of natural trees several times over generations (Nimmo & Nogueira, 2019). The previous chapter mentioned the resilience of yerba—this is evident through yerba’s ability to grow well in disturbed land, something the Guaraní understood and would take advantage of, returning to areas of previous agricultural activity to find flourishing yerba trees. The Guaraní understanding of yerba’s harvest cycle and the conditions required for its flourishing heavily influenced the way in which the Jesuits structured the yerbales within their missions (Nimmo & Nogueira, 2019). Study of the Guaraní language has shown that they had vocabulary referring to the management of forests and recognition of the differences between primary forests, mature forests, and secondary forests that grew in an abandoned plot of land (Nimmo & Nogueira, 2019).

In recognition of the Guaraní voices that never were given the space to tell their stories, I ask the reader to pause for a moment and spend time with the image I have created below of the

yerba plant, made up completely of words from the Guaraní language. The remainder of the narrative that follows is void of the Guaraní perspective; this image attempts to give back even a fraction of the page space their voices don't get to occupy. I acknowledge the image is imperfect but hope by including it to call attention to the extent to which the Europeans co-opted historical narratives and silenced indigenous perspectives.



\*translations included in Appendix A

Records as late as 1737 indicate that the Jesuits were prohibited from drinking mate, which meant that they had little to do with the nuance and particularities of yerba processing once removed from the tree (Nimmo & Nogueira, 2019). What's interesting about this is that the Jesuit missions were known for producing the high-quality "caámini" variety of yerba that sold for more than double the price of the Spanish-processed "yerba de palo" (Crocitti, 2002). Recall from the previous chapter that yerba blends with palo have a softer flavor than those without. While nowadays that's not necessarily an indicator of "quality," in the time of Jesuits this meant that the yerba was considered weak and not well-sifted. The knowledge to achieving this superior quality and flavor could only have been provided by the Guaraní, given their history of consumption and the Jesuits' lack thereof (Nimmo & Nogueira, 2019).

The erasure of Guaraní contribution to the development of mate cultivation is not an unfamiliar story in the time of colonization. The cultural practices of native peoples attributed to European "discovery" range far and wide and knowledge of yerba mate cultivation is no exception. It all plays into the larger narrative of European domination and conquering of these "foreign" and "primitive" lands. But in truth, Jesuit achievements with mate would not have been possible without Guaraní knowledge and labor (Nimmo & Nogueira, 2019).

As has already been described, the Jesuits exercised a dominating hand over the life and labor of the Guaraní people and missions. Although the Jesuits claimed to denounce encomiendas, their oppressive authority over the Guaraníes was not much better, their portrayal of the Guaraní people as gluttonous and lazy opening the door for the justification of the societies they constructed (Crocitti, 2002). There were thirty-two missions established in total, each split into hierarchical systems overseen and promoted by curas (Jesuit priests). The missions were tasked with cultivating crops, raising cattle, and producing other goods (such as

cloth) for trade. Each of these jobs were closely monitored by the curas, under the reasoning that the Guaraní were too lazy to manage things properly and would supposedly take the goods produced for themselves (Crocitti, 2002). Speculation suggests that the Guaraní people leaned into these qualities as a means of covering up secret trade they were conducting, but there aren't enough records to confirm the extent of this practice (Crocitti, 2002).

The Jesuits used yerba to fulfill tributary requirements to the Spanish crown—this came from an earlier distinction that labeled yerba as a mineral because it “sprang from the earth without human intervention” (Folch, 2010), allowing it to replace gold and silver as tribute. It didn't take long, however, for the crop to grow beyond its original tributary fulfillment and gain popularity in the colonial Andean region. In a reversal from the previous century, mate came to be seen as a status symbol particularly among the upper class colonists in the northern Andean region where mate was non-native and thus carried the appeal of the “exotic” (Jamieson, 2001). With the increase in trade came an increase in tensions between the Jesuits and colonists, who accused the Jesuits of unfair business practices that eventually led to the expulsion of the Jesuits from this region of South America in 1767 (Folch, 2010).

With their departure, yerbales were passed into the hands of royal and private owners, who were unable to achieve successful growth (Jamieson, 2001). The knowledge of how to grow yerba as a crop and not simply harvest from the wild was kept a secret from other colonists for a long time. It wasn't until 1774 after the Jesuits had already been expelled from the region—taking the knowledge with them—that the process was described: to get a viably plantable seed, freshly picked berries from the plant needed to be washed multiple times, a process that would release a soapy substance from the seed. After the washing the seeds could be dried and planting.

This process softened the hard outer shell of the seed, without which the humidity in the soil would not be able to penetrate and thus prevent successful growth (Folch, 2010).

With the transfer of power to royal and private landowners, the Guaraní people were pushed into exploitative, slave labor that caused most of them to eventually flee from the reducciones, eventually leading to the temporary end of yerbales. The few Guaraní that remained were sent to the wild stands to harvest the crop, given that further attempts at cultivation continually failed. The majority of these laborers died (Jamieson, 2001).

Considering the success of mate within the Andean region, it is not immediately evident why the same did not happen around the rest of the world. Around the same time mate started to take off in the Andean region, coffee, tea, and cacao also began to increase in popularity. These other drinks almost immediately took hold in Europe, in large part because their production was managed by powerful companies like the British East India Company. The economic structure of these companies were primarily focused on exportation to Europe and maximization of profit, though tea was under an imperial trading bloc and coffee more closely associated with free markets. In comparison, the structure of Spanish tribute systems proved detrimental to establishing the same kind of market for yerba. Furthermore, given the ability of tea, coffee, and cacao to be grown in many locations, it was easier for colonial powers to establish their own convenient plantations. Yerba's temperamental cultivation proved impossible to spread the plant outside of its native region, which inhibited flexibility to grow the plant in regions more accessible to naval transportation (Folch, 2010).

In addition to the logistical difficulties of mate globalization, the drinking practices associated with the beverage clashed with the culture of the western Global North. Still a deterrent we can see today, the practice of sharing the same bombilla with everyone present was

ill-received in Europe and the US, seen as something dirty and uncivilized. This, coupled with the economic structure of yerba production prevented mate from taking off when it was introduced to European markets. Already content with their tea and coffee practices, there was no particular inclination to accept what was seen as a “lower class” practice into European society (Folch, 2010).

Within Latin America, a big shift in mate consumption and production came in the latter half of the 19th century when the War of the Triple Alliance broke out between Paraguay and the united powers of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. The scope of the War of the Triple Alliance cannot be covered in full in this thesis; acknowledging that the complexities go far beyond what is described here, my primary purpose in addressing the war is because of its impact on the trajectory of yerba producers. Up until this time, Paraguay had been the principal producer of yerba. However, when Asunción was taken in 1870, marking the end of the War of the Triple Alliance, Paraguay’s yerba crown toppled (Burgos and Medina, 2017) The war itself decimated Paraguayan production, leaving Brazil to take up the role as principal producer (Burgos and Medina, 2017). Yerba-producing lands were taken by Brazil and Argentina, notably the province of Misiones that now occupies the northeast corner of Argentina (Folch, 2010). It wasn’t until the early 20th century that Brazil turned its attention to more lucrative coffee production and was surpassed by Argentina in the 1930s in yerba cultivation. To this day, Argentina continues to be the largest producer of yerba in the world, with Misiones as the leading province.

Throughout its storied past, mate remains consistent in a few ways; it has never been easy to cultivate and the deeply rooted culture formed around it has never been fully quashed or compromised. And while it is true that many hot beverages have a legacy of culture rooted in ancient tradition, mate didn’t leave its region of cultivation en masse until the later 20th century,

when it was taken to the Middle East (discussed in more detail in the following chapter). Mate does not carry the same legacy of colonization as beverages such as tea and coffee. Yes, colonizers first started producing yerba commercially and it is undeniable that the Jesuits had a heavy hand in shaping the history of mate. However, unlike tea and coffee, which, once discovered by their colonizers, were uprooted and globally exported, mate production and consumption remained primarily in South America up until the past seventy or so years. In this way, mate remained very much itself for most of its history. The culture assigned to a drink defines it as one thing or another. For example, British versus Chinese culture and practices when it comes to tea are very distinct—enough so that while coming from the same plant the beverages are hardly the same. Although there is nuance in the way different countries in Latin America drink mate, they all stem from the same practice and tradition. This is to say there was never a wholly new culture assigned to mate that aimed to replace its origins. Even in the Middle East, as we will soon see, while there is a distinct mate culture, it is still very reminiscent of mate's roots. The Middle East's adoption of mate does not take the way British colonialism did tea and coffee.

Before we move into a modern global context, however, we must look at the politics that reigned mate production throughout the 1900s and into the early 2000s.

### *The Modern Mate Industry*

The legacies of colonialism continue to permeate through many cultures today, shaping economic and social systems around the globe. In the following chapter we will discuss globalization, placing mate in context of widespread commodification as well as a global environmental lens. Prior to this approach, however, I would like to give a brief overview of the

contemporary labor practices and economic restrictions mate has undergone in Argentina itself. In entering this discussion, I will point out that the scope of this topic extends beyond the confines of this thesis and that there is much more nuance and context than can be presented here. However, as a part of the story that has brought mate to how it exists today, it is important that this perspective be mentioned, even if briefly.

With the rediscovery of how to grow yerba in a contemporary agricultural format, plantations of both large and small size began to emerge in Misiones and Corrientes. The aforementioned Las Marias produced its first harvest in 1930 (Fochesatto, 2019). With production steadily increasing, the yerba mate market became oversaturated, causing small producers to struggle in competition with the ever-growing yerba giants. In response to this, the Argentine government established the Comisión Reguladora de la Yerba Mate (CRYM) that set production quotas limiting the amount of yerba a plantation could produce in a given year as well as regulating prices and providing technical support to increase efficiency and yield to small plantations (Smith, 2014). Despite the regulations, large producers such as Las Marias managed to find loopholes that allowed them to increase their production; Las Marias in particular split their land into “small farm” sectors that were owned by employees of the brand and could logistically be counted as individual producers of yerba (Fochesatto, 2019).

During this time, much of the labor force in both big and small plantations came from indigenous and poor rural communities that had been displaced within Misiones and Corrientes due to waves of immigration in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Smith, 2014). In the 1970s, a “Green Revolution” arrived in Argentina, bringing with it agricultural development through research, machinery, and agrochemicals. The introduction of these advances benefitted larger producers that could afford the new technologies, further driving the divide between large and small yerba



growers. Eventually the CRYM was abolished under the neoliberal Menem government in 1991, allowing for big producers to grow even bigger and small producers to be forced to move into urban sectors (Smith, 2014). For Las Marias, this meant that the previously divided sectors could once again be brought under the same name with no quota to adhere to (Fochesatto, 2019). Small farmers attempting to stay afloat during this time of little to no regulation that once again led to an oversaturation of the yerba market, turned to the cheap labor of undocumented migrants from Paraguay and Brazil (Smith, 2014).

Ten years after CRYM was abolished, the Instituto Nacional de la Yerba Mate (INYM) was established in 2002 in response to demonstrations by small farmers and laborers protesting the low prices of yerba that earned them a mere two cents per kilo, as opposed to the twenty they got in 1991 (Smith, 2014). The INYM sets the selling price for yerba yearly and at the time of its inception was considered a friend to small farmers by being able to assert regulations over the industry. However, today the INYM—although the biggest and most important governing body of yerba mate—is criticized for turning a blind eye to malpractice on the end of large producers. Despite there being over 18000 producers of yerba in Misiones and Corrientes, 30% of these producers account for approximately 70% of the yerba produced and only five companies hold control over 50% of the market (Dohrenwend, 2019). This is possible through the selling of whole leaves, also known as *hoja verde*. Small producers will sell unprocessed *hoja verde* to the large producers, who then can process the yerba into *hoja seca* and sell the final product. This has been causing problems for small producers, who are charged processing and transportation fees by those purchasing *hoja verde*, and therefore do not receive the full value of the payment laid out by the INYM (Smith, 2014). Recall that Las Marias has blends with yerba from Misiones and Corrientes—these are sourced from small producers as described here. On its own

Las Marias has been hovering around holding control of approximately 20% of the market in recent years (Dohrenwend, 2019).

This puts a bit of a damper on the perspective in the previous chapter of the relevance of place—if it isn't sourced fairly, does that land-distinction carry the same reverence? Here, we must contend with the way humans have interacted with their environments throughout history to the modern day. The main argument of the previous chapter was centered on the relevance of place and how the ecosystem interacts with the yerba plant and lends it its flavor. Although the brands and sayings of Las Marias are useful for illustrating that point, that does not mean that the company is the owner of that relationship or reality. Regardless of who is producing yerba, the plant and its flavor and growth qualities are still informed by the ecosystem that it inhabits. The agricultural decisions made by the producers (for example, monoculture versus agroforestry) will impact the quality of the plant because they impact the ecosystem—monocultures deplete the soil of nutrients while agroforestry techniques keep a balanced community of decomposers and nutrients in the soil—regardless of whether they are implemented by a big or small producer. This is one of the most significant indicators relating ethics to ecological impact given that historically more sustainable practices have been adopted by smaller, usually organic producers while practices like monocropping are used by larger producers looking to maximize yield and profit. However, many small producers cannot afford to go organic, particularly given Argentina's economic instability, so ultimately it is difficult to draw a direct connection between the ethics of a company and the quality of the product they produce. Las Marias still curates blends that are emblematic and representative of the way place impacts *I. paraguariensis*. But the company does engage in unethical and unfair practices. I would make the claim that this does not detract from their yerba's relationship to the land, but it does make more questionable the

company's claims to honoring mate and its tradition. If mate is so closely tied to the theme of hospitality and sharing as initially described by the Guaraní, then to take advantage of small producers would appear, to me, to be nearly the antithesis of the mate tradition.

### *Laboring Hands*

Since the arrival of the Spanish, people have suffered for the demand for yerba. Another lasting legacy of colonialism, the exploitation of labor is something that continues to this day in the yerba mate industry. A documentary created in 2015 by Posibl, an Argentine company geared towards the creation and elevation of content promoting social change, highlighted the work of the NGO Un Sueño Para Misiones in their mission to bring awareness to the horrible working and living condition of tareferos, the people that harvest yerba. In particular this organization has worked to uncover the truth about child labor in yerba plantations and hopefully bring about its end. The documentary interviews not only the founders of the movement but also tareferos themselves, revealing harsh labor practices they must follow. Of particular note is that tareferos are paid per kilo of yerba collected—to augment the amount they can get at once, whole families will go out to the yerbales, often including the children. The leaves collected are thrown onto a tarp-type material that will be manually hauled up and down the rows of trees as the workers pick, becoming more heavy with each tree harvested. Many of the workers interviewed expressed that this was the only life they'd ever known and had been working from as young as eight years old. Kids are pulled from school to work, if they even went to school in the first place, despite nearly every parent dreaming of being able to send their kids to get an education that would pull them out of the tarefero cycle.

The documentary takes the viewer to a neighborhood of tareferos where we can see that their homes barely have four walls and they must go to the river to bathe themselves. Drinking water is accessible through a well, although there was no filtering system so the potability of the water is not actually certain. Food is not a guarantee on the day-to-day, often times leaving the tareferos to have to rely on each other to ensure everyone has something to eat.

The national awareness of child labor in yerbales came about because of an accident in 2013 where a truck carrying twenty-five laborers—fourteen of whom were children—lost its breaks and crashed, killing seven people (Oquendo, 2016). Other accidents involving children started to come to light, including the death of a baby that was brought to the yerbales because his parents had no one to take care of him and was run over by a truck.

Un Sueño Para Misiones was created with the goal of bringing awareness to this issue, starting the campaign “me gusta el mate sin el trabajo infantil” (I like mate without child labor) (Figure 1) and pushing for a new certification that would signal to consumers whether their yerba was harvested with child labor or not. The creators of this campaign estimate that a certification of this style would only increment yerba prices by \$0.10 USD, and the money would go directly to the tareferos (Oquendo, 2016).

Although the movement continues to push forward with a petition on change.org receiving over 140,000 signatures, no notable changes seem to have been made in the yerba industry.



Figure 1: Campaign poster used by Un Sueño Para Misiones condemning child labor in yerbales.

Understanding the troubled past and present of mate in the Southern Cone, we now turn to mate as it exists in the rest of the world. The legacies that have shaped and continue to shape this beverage are key to understanding the different forms in which mate exists and the perspectives that people have on it. Although the story presented in this chapter is not known by all, the product of it—mate in the present day—is known by all that consume mate. With this knowledge of mate’s past and present, we are able to examine the beverage, its environment, and people’s relationship to both with a more informed eye.



Mate and criollitos  
in Córdoba  
Province



Flowers in  
Córdoba Province



# Spoons

Chaos in the  
silence of  
your choked breath.

Labour and love  
spoon fed  
to tradition  
the silver ladles  
passed down by  
consumption  
silver that makes  
the coins  
silver that makes  
the land  
silver that they see  
embedded in  
this tree.

Theirs if they  
say so  
theirs because  
they do.

My spoon is a filter  
attached to  
a straw.

My spoon is made  
for scooping  
to then  
build anew.

The spoon I hold  
the spoon you intended  
for sharing.

We choose our spoon  
they impose theirs.

Forced to feed  
the thing you love,  
can they break  
what you have  
can they take  
all you know?

There's chaos in  
the silence  
and your tears  
in the rain.

---

# RECIPROCITY IN THE ROUNDS





### CHAPTER 3: RECIPROCITY IN THE ROUNDS

Guayaki,  
You frustrate me.

You sell my culture,  
Our traditions,  
As an energy drink,  
You call it

Glowing  
With 140mg of caffeine  
Perfect  
For every tired hipster college student  
Running on empty  
Who doesn't want to drink coffee  
Who wants to be

Organic  
Natural  
Cultured

I think of my home  
Of lying between sierras at night  
passing around the mate  
Passing around fernet con coca  
Of sitting on riverbeds playing cards

Último mate—te casarás el año que viene!

Of slouching on a balcony  
Four floors up  
Watching the world go by  
In the high-pitched shrills of sirens  
And the shouts of the corner grocery  
While las clavelinas del aire  
Dance on the electric wires

I remember el mate de mi abuela  
Su bombilla de plata  
Her favorite Taragüi yerba  
Tinged with orange

Then I taste the tereré

As it slides from the Maize-yellow bottles  
Of Guayaki Yerba Mate  
And I want to scream that

You can't bottle my family  
You can't bottle our history  
You can't bottle our culture

And sell it for \$2.99  
((Less than a smoothie))

-Victoria Albacete, "BOTTLED" *Oberlin College Plum Creek Review 2015*

Despite its failed globalization in the past, at the turn of the twentieth century contemporary industrialized yerbaes were reestablished, opening the doors for mass production of yerba.

Although consumption remains concentrated in the southern cone, it can be found in other parts of the world, though no longer in its traditional form in many parts (Folch, 2010). In some of the regions where mate has spread, its roots remain and it is adopted wholly as it is into the culture. In other parts of the world, mate has been commodified and appropriated. It was my rage about this latter form that spurred this thesis and is largely what I aim to combat with the work I am doing here. We've already seen the story of mate two-fold—as a living being gifted from the earth and as an entity that has shaped the history and identity of a people and place.

Throughout this chapter we will engage with what it means to become "globalized." Although the topic of much study and literature, there remain many definitions encompassing the various lenses through which globalization can be viewed. Which is to say, there is no one way to define it (Steger, 2003). In the context of history, we framed globalization as a phenomenon where a local good or tradition gets spread to and is adopted by other cultures. Although that statement is relatively objective in tone, we understand that in the centuries discussed in the

previous chapter, globalization happened primarily through colonization and a forceful taking of goods that originated outside of the western global North. This was mostly done by Europeans, and for mate specifically, the Spanish and Portuguese. Set in a contemporary context, the form of globalization most reminiscent of that of the colonial powers is also referred to as “americanization” (Steger, 2003). It’s a form of globalization defined by consumerism that boomed post WWII and the worldwide spread of American staples such as McDonald’s (PBS, n.d.; Steger, 2003). It is something driven by economic forces, particularly the US capitalist system. This is the form of globalization that I would argue compromises cultural integrity and is one I will push-back on the most.

However, it’s important to not ignore that there are other forms of globalization, encapsulated in cultural exchange of traditions and practices. This kind of globalization is built more on community, appreciation, and sharing and is the form that I will argue in favor of. I love sharing my culture with other people and would never hesitate to offer unos matecitos to nearly anyone. But the intention is not to give away my culture, it’s to share it and hopefully along the way do as Robin Wall Kimmerer (2020) writes and “inspire an authentic revitalization of relationship with the land [and those that inhabit it]...by finding your roots and remembering how to grow [them]” (p.XII). The economy of this form of globalization is rooted in the gift economy, an idea that will be expanded upon later. But first, let’s see what happened to mate when it departed from South America.

### *Yerba Mate in the Middle East*

Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine make up the biggest consumers of mate outside of Latin America; it’s interesting to note that the cultural methods of drinking mate that deter the global North from

fully adopting the drink—primarily the sharing of the bombilla seen as unhygienic—are closer to practices from these Middle Eastern cultures and thus don't serve as deterrents for them (Folch 2010).

So how did mate gain its market in the Middle East? As a consequence of a storied past of wars; from 1860 to the early 1900s, floods of Syrian and Lebanese people migrated to South America in the face of religious conflict and the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The following world wars also pushed new waves of migrants out of the Middle East and to the south (Matero, n.d.). Yerba mate was adopted by these newcomers, many of whose later generations moved back to the Middle East when much of South America went into economic and political crises in the 1970s and 80s. Although no longer in the land of yerba's origin, the tradition was kept alive in the Middle East, particularly among the Druze in Syria and Lebanon (Folch, 2010). Just as it plays a role of identity in Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Southern Brazil, so mate is a key part of the identity of the Druze people, particularly those in Lebanon. It distinguishes them from the other predominant culture in southern Lebanon, the Shi'a. Given the Shi'a were largely unable to leave the country in times of turmoil the way the Druze did, mate points to a more "global" identity for the Druze and highlights their wealth in contrast to the poorer Shi'a (Folch, 2010).

In an interview conducted by Daniel Campos for i24 News (2017), residents of a Syrian Druze city describe it as something that was brought over from Argentina, was first popular in Syria and Lebanon, and then spread to Palestine as well. The middle eastern way of drinking mate shares similarities but also has many differences to how it is taken in South America. For example, in this same interview, it is described as a "woman's drink," a trait noted by Christine Folch (2010) as well in her ethnographic research conducted in Syria. It is common to see a

circle of women drinking mate, but rarely, if ever, will you see a group of just men drinking it. This is contrasting with Argentina, where I saw people of all genders and backgrounds drinking mate. There it is commonly associated with the image of the gaucho in the campo of Argentina and Brazil, usually male, and shows up in gatherings of both just men, just women, and mixed groups (Folch, 2010). It didn't matter where I went in Argentina, I found equal participation in males and females. This could be attributed to different cultural practices and norms between South America and the Middle East, and potentially also simply to the fact that mate consumption is more widespread in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Southern Brazil than Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, because of accessibility and a longer history.

Other notable differences can be found in the accessories of mate: the containers used in the Middle East tend to be much smaller than those found in the Southern Cone, with more narrow openings and shorter bombillas. The containers themselves, rather than taking the name of *mate*, take the Arabic word for "gourd": *qar'a* (Folch, 2010). The mate is also prepared differently, filled only half-way with yerba and then stirred after water is poured to mimic more of a steeped tea (Matero, n.d.). This is a large contrast to the way it is most traditionally done in Argentina with the mate filled  $\frac{3}{4}$  with yerba and then the yerba shaken to create a little wall on one side.

It is curious to think about these differences when I consider how some folks I ran into in Argentina were offended to even consider mate served in such a way that you could actually see the liquid with leaves floating in it. They light-heartedly called it a "piletita" and told me that if they received a mate like that, they would tease the person that served it, making jokes like "I could go fishing in here!" Having grown up with mate in a very narrow context, I'd only ever seen it served the way my dad and my grandma would do it, and neither of them paid particular

attention to the placement of the yerba. My grandma because her mate was too small for the nuances and my dad because his was too big and that method uses up a lot of yerba at a time, a scarce resource for us considering we would only go to Argentina once or twice in a year. After visiting in the summer of 2022, however, I found that nearly everyone I ran into served their mate with the little mound method, a habit I quickly adopted in part because it caused a lot less spillage than when served with a piletita!

### *Marketing mate on a global scale*

Understanding the history of the mate tradition, we now turn to mate as adopted by the US through the brand Guayakí. Guayakí is the most well-known international brand of mate and nearly every project or paper I found written about mate took a look at it. I first heard of Guayakí around 2017—despite the company being around since the 90s—because my sister saw it being sold in her small rural college and was quietly enraged (refer to the poem at the start of this chapter). She'd never seen mate sold in a bottle before and it felt *wrong*, a sentiment I've always echoed and, as I've been working on this research, continue to echo even more loudly. There are mixed opinions about Guayakí, and when I heard Professor Davalos from the UNNE in Corrientes mention it, he had more than a touch of skepticism in his voice. The moment he mentioned the name of the company, he looked at me to see if I recognized it and when I did with a rolled-eye expression, he nodded in what I can only describe as understanding. Guayakí is the brand that the Instagram influencers adopted when they decided it was cute, and as someone that really made sure I left his office with the understanding that what makes mate *mate* is the culture behind it, I can imagine he mustn't hold it in the fondest regard. What I did find interesting though was that none of the students there with me seemed to recognize Guayakí. It

felt almost like the Professor and I had an inside joke of united disdain while the students looked on in confusion.

For a company that likes to preach about culture, it really was fascinating that in *Corrientes*, one of the biggest yerba producers in Argentina, the name was barely known.

One of the only brands whose target audience is Americans, Guayakí is an example of how globalizing mate, taking it out of its cultural context and adapting it to fit another can affect the identity of the drink within a global context. Different from the more traditional mate brands like Taragüi, Cruz de Malta, Rosamonte, etc, Guayakí's primary form of selling mate is in cans and glass bottles (Figures 1 & 2).



The beverage is sold in five different forms, the most prominent marketed as “high energy cans.” Each of its different flavors contain a word typically related with endorphins and gym benefits in the title. The other forms are “sparkling cans,” “low sugar and unsweetened sparkling cans,” “tereré bottles,” and “loose leaf yerba mate.”

When I tried to explain this americanized concept of mate to folks in the desartic, small town province of San Juan, the best comparison I could make was “it’s sold in cans like coke.”

Standing in the middle of a massive grocery store with shelves stocked to ceiling with different brands of yerba, the idea felt even more absurd than when I'd first learned about Guayakí.

“¿Cómo *coca*?” The shock and confusion on Mica's face, paired with the Argentine-Italian pinched finger gesture perfectly encapsulated the reactions I would get across the board whenever I brought up the way mate has become popularized in the US.

“What do you think of the American form of selling mate as this “shot of energy” type of thing?” Pia snorted in response and took another sip out of her bombilla, shaking her head slightly. I glanced at my uncle and then back to her; although I'd expected some reaction of the sort, I was a little surprised to get it from someone who's spent a considerable amount of time outside Argentina and immersed in an outward facing industry.

“They don't get it,” she said, squirting sweetener over the semi-lavada yerba and readjusting the bombilla before pouring fresh water and handing the mate over to me. I sipped the mate slowly, still not fully accustomed to the stingingly sweet dulcorante Pia chose to use. Born in Córdoba, Pia moved to the metropolis of Buenos Aires to pursue the career of modeling. Despite circulating in spaces of wealth and upper class, she never stopped drinking mate. My uncle, a now retired rugby player, has many friends that move in similar circles and although not an exhaustive scope, those that I met were not avid mate drinkers. They seemed to be under the impression that it's more of a drink of the campo, although one friend noted that lately it seemed to be increasing in popularity thanks to celebrities partaking. Knowing many people in the city myself that drink mate, I recognize that their perspective is heavily biased by their own social circles. Still, that is a circle that occupies space in Buenos Aires and therefore carries its own level of merit.



In fact, it was seeing their attitude and knowing that Pia circulated a similar social arena as them, that made me surprised when I learned how present mate was in Pia's life. She would drink it every day at any and all times of day; it was her companion, a recurrent theme I would find throughout every province I visited in Argentina. When I asked Pia if she considered mate to be a part of her identity, she nodded without hesitation. I find this particularly poignant when looking at the way mate is marketed in the US because the question begs to be asked: can you market culture? Pia's scoff at the "shot of energy" marketing Guayakí uses told me that she clearly thought not.

As I already pointed out with Mica and Professor Davalos from the UNNE, most of the folks I encountered were critical of the idea of mate as an energy blast. Is mate used to help students pull all-nighters? Sure. And as we've already seen, the beverage has caffeine in it, so there's no question that it acts as a stimulant. However, nowhere I went did I find mate treated the same way as coffee. As we compared in chapters prior, mate sustains while coffee blasts. Mate isn't a quick-fix; deciding to boil water, pull out your mate, bombilla, and yerba, is a commitment. Although cebando is a reflex to most mate drinkers, the ritual isn't a one and done like preparing a mug of coffee. Mate is most traditionally drunk over a sustained period of time and in this way Guayakí's cans seem almost like an antithesis of the cultural practices behind mate.

Although co-founded by an Argentine, Guayakí's mate seems culturally uninformed to me. By attempting to adapt the drink to an American audience, the company essentially strips the beverage of its cultural context. Now this is not to say Guayakí is a bad company; if you visit their website, you can learn about their efforts to create community and practice ecologically

sustainable agriculture. Their catchy motto “come to life” could be interpreted in any number of ways, hardly any one negative.

However, as the leading brand in a relatively uninformed population, Guayakí has the privilege to brand mate basically however they want. They paint it as a beverage of adventure and nature, “led by spirit.” The company claims to have a “true commitment to the culture of yerba mate” yet traps it in cans and bottles, perpetuating the idea of mate as “high energy.”

Similarly to other foods from Latin America, such as quinoa and chia, mate is marketed to the fitness gurus and influencers that are eco-conscious when it’s most convenient for them. It’s depicted as having an “other” culture that is adapted in the most palatable and “understandable” way for US culture. Folch (2010) describes Guayakí’s marketing strategy as “salvation through consuming the primitive,” referencing Guayakí’s appeal to the consumer to go back to their roots and connect with nature while still never mentioning the Guaraní people by name.

Digging deeper into this near-exploitation of native culture, I found that Guayakí was not the only brand to use this form of strategic greenwashing. Yachak Organic (Figure 3), another brand that sells mate in cans, leans on the same kind of marketing as Guayaki.



Figure 3: Yachak yerba mate cans (source: Yachak)

The title “Yachak” comes from the name the indigenous Kichwa (also known as Quechua) people of the Ecuadorian Amazon give to their Shamans (Yachak). The brand declares a commitment to preserving the plant and wildlife in the Amazon as well as

uplifting the local communities that live there. They've partnered with One Tree Planted to work on restoration of the Amazon rainforest. I mention this to point out that while Yachak's branding intentions may be misplaced that doesn't mean the company deserves to be villainized. They still show a commitment to ecological sustainability which, given the amount of eco-branding on their mate, is only appropriate.

All of this said, however, if the brand intends to use native people and old tradition as their selling point, one would expect to see a little bit more of that reflected in the product itself. As previously mentioned, Yachak's yerba mate is sold in cans also marketed as an "energy drink." In fact, the biggest body of text (aside from the brand name) on the cans call it a: "plant-based energy tea." When I read this I couldn't stop myself from chuckling; of course it's a plant-based beverage. Yerba is a plant. Just as all tea comes from a plant. This clearly obvious point is depicted as a huge benefit, meanwhile I would be concerned if it *wasn't* 100% plant based. In a classic show of greenwashing, Yachak dupes their target audience into thinking they'll be especially connected to the earth if they drink this particular yerba mate.

Another point of contention I found with Yachak was the information they share on their website stating that their yerba is grown in Paraguay, Uruguay, and Southern Brazil. While particular brands of yerba are dried and blended in Uruguay, the country does not have the conditions to grow the plant on a commercial scale. It is only found in small regions that are housed in nationally conserved land (Grela, 2018). As a plant that was slow to globalize in part because of its particular environmental needs, it is fairly problematic for Yachak to make this erroneous statement. The brand's selling point is how eco-conscious it is, yet it is misinformed about the source of its own product. This would be problematic for any type of product, but

particularly with yerba where the ecology of place is a defining trait of the plant and one of the reasons it holds a critical spot in the culture of the region.

So how does this fit into our discussion of globalization?

It is easy to make the assertion that globalization is anti-environment. Maritime shipping alone produces 3% of the world's carbon emissions and is a large contributor to sulfur pollution (Pierson & Su, 2021). As a system driven by economic means and entangled with capitalism, globalization uproots and clumsily replants goods, breaking stems and dehydrating them along the way. It tears them "from their life-worlds to become objects of exchange" (Tsing, 2015, p.121). This is what we see from companies like Guayakí and Yachak. The treatment of mate without regard for its legacy of hospitality and sharing and instead fitting it inside a box of stimulants engineered for productivity isolates it from the land and people from which it first came. Tsing (2015) refers to this kind of action as alienation, a built-in step of capitalism and the consumerism born from it. She makes the case that something becomes commodified when it is taken by those unfamiliar and with no interest to learn about its journey and made into inventory, an item prepared for blind exchange. It's when the mate is canned and stocked on grocery store shelves for any trendy youth to scoop up for the aesthetic and promised revitalization. Part of what makes mate and the particular way it is drunk unique, are the yerba leaves that stuff the whole cup. You cannot interact with the beverage without knowing, to a certain extent, where it came from. Even a simple "this was once a plant" is enough to put us in touch with the living mate and appreciate the life that plant gave so we can be here now enjoying the fruits of its existence. The yellow aluminum that makes Guayakí stand out, builds a barrier preventing us

from shaking hands with the yerba plant. There is hardly any *I. paraguariensis* left in a yerba mate can, much less the story of its bioregion.

It is, in effect, a heartbreaking loss of identity facilitated by economic globalization.

But it doesn't have to be.

As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, globalization is not something that needs to prioritize wealth. In its most barebones sense, globalization means “to make global.” Alternatively, I propose “to make one with the world,” a phrasing that I use drawing from the works of environmental writers that aims to bring into light the relationship aspect of globalization. Environmental philosophers O’Neill et al (2008) make the argument that “the best human life is one that includes an awareness of and practical concern of the goods of entities in the non-human world” (p.121). They argue that the flourishing of the things that nourish us as humans directly contributes to our own flourishing (O’Neill et al., 2008). Building off of this framework, we can consider globalization in a sense to be a call to humans, that we become aware of how we exist in the world and how we contribute to the betterment of unifying relationships between the human and non-human world.

The treatment of mate globally provides us with an excellent example of what this can look like. As a plant that didn't become industrialized until the 20th century, much of mate spread to the world by accompanying immigrants. We've seen this with the Middle East; it was adopted by a people that came to know the culture behind mate well, and when it traveled back with them to their homeland, it became a part of a different side of the world. What's key about this interaction is the “they came to know the culture well” part. The heart behind the mate ritual remains alive in the Middle Eastern version of it. This is a cultural exchange, building upon and entangling with the history that is already there rather than attempting to erase and rewrite it.

In return for this respectful globalization, mate readily gives back. Speaking as the daughter of two immigrants, mate was the one thing from Argentina we always had year-round. The alfajores would expire and the empanadas go bad, but yerba has a shelf-life of three to four years, and we were nearly never short. Part of my extended family lives even further than we do, in Qatar. Still, they pool together with the other Argentines that live around them and order yerba in bulk. Mate is the knot that ties us back to our roots, that makes us one with a part of the world that is an ocean away. It is only right that we carry mate—*all* of mate—into our lives and homes with love.

The kind of economy that places reciprocity at its center is what the literature has called the “gift economy.” At its core, the gift economy creates a relationship where “things are extensions of persons and persons are extensions of things” (Tsing, 2015, p. 122). Mutual benefit and reciprocity are built in to this kind of connection. When thinking about this idea in the context of mate, I was reminded of an interaction I had with a street vendor in Buenos Aires. He was selling hand-carved wooden mates that were in a few different shapes and had designs of all kinds. I was looking to buy a mate as a gift for my friend that has been one of the principal reasons I’ve been able to keep mate very present in my life in the midst of my fast-paced school environment. Which is to say, it couldn’t just be any random mate (although whether any mate is “just random” is debatable), and I was looking for something that captured the bond mate had built between us. As I browsed his mates, I asked the man whether he’d been a mate drinker his whole life; surprisingly the answer was no. My understanding of the beverage thus far was that it tended to be passed through generations—most people that didn’t have family that drank mate didn’t drink it themselves (there are always exceptions to this, to be clear, my own dad being one). This man told me that his interest in mate stemmed from a curiosity and eventual passion

for creating the vessel. Each mate had a unique design following what he could only describe as a feeling. It's a time consuming craft, wood-carving, and he felt that every mate encapsulated the journey of the emotion that was poured into its creation. There was no mate without its own story.

The man and the mate spoke to each other and gave to each other. The former giving the mate love and meaning, to be passed on to whoever held it next, and the mate giving the man a way to express himself and his passion. When I eventually bought one of his mates for my friend—a particularly rotund one that made me feel like I was giving a hug when I held it caught my eye and wouldn't let go—there was more than just an exchange of 1200 pesos for a mate. The mate and the wisdom and insight that came with it were gifts immeasurable by numbers. In telling his story here and passing on the mate he labored over to someone very dear to me, I hope to pay forward and in a sense pay back all that was given to me.

Kimmerer (2020) ties the act of giving to a celebration of “kinship with the world” (p. 31). By participating in reciprocity, we connect more fundamentally with both the living and non-living, human and non-human world. Similarly to a friendship that gives space for both individuals to mutually reach out their hands to each other and see each other wholly, giving back to that which you have received from allows for the development of a relationship built on love, respect, and honesty. And what are those if not the qualities that make you want to invest even more into something? Not only inspiring a further investment in the other person or being yourself, when we see and know the goodness that these kinds of relationships can produce, we can pass that understanding forward. Thich Nhat Hanh (2021) teaches that when we work to bring ourselves closer together and nurture relationships in community, then we “can bring

transformation and healing to ourselves and to our society,” creating a true union within the world (p.294).

Fundamental in mate culture are the ideas of sharing and reciprocity. When traditionally drunk with other people, one person will be the cebador, the one tasked with serving the mates. They will fill the gourd with water after each turn, sending the mate on its rounds to all those participating. The mate passes back and forth multiple times, a gift given three, four, ten-fold and so on. Kimmerer writes that “the more something is shared, the greater its value becomes” (p. 27). As the mate goes back and forth, the time that the drinkers spend together grows along with their understanding of each other. Hanh (2019) says it best: “In two hours of drinking tea together...we do get life” (p. 17). There’s an old tradition—that largely isn’t followed anymore—where you don’t say thank you to the cebador until you’ve had your fill of mates. Once the cebador hears thank you, they know to skip that person the next time they are supposed to receive a mate. There’s a certain beauty in the circularity of this tradition—once a mate is served, it creates an open loop that is eventually closed not with a rejection of the thing, but an expression of gratitude. The cebador and the drinker mutually share the responsibility of opening and closing the ceremony.

The participation in ritual or ceremony is a critical piece to following the framework of globalization as “to make one with the world.” Ritual, when it is respected, can be a unifying force between people of different backgrounds. When a ritual is as intimate and engrained as mate is for many that drink it, to open that up to someone else—especially someone unfamiliar with it—is a show of trust and respect. Many times it is a recognition of companionship, something that is fundamental to mate’s function (this will be explored further in the following chapter). Ritual “marries the mundane to the spiritual” (Kimmerer, 2020, p. 36). It is fully



cultural and takes this thing we may consider non-living—dried leaves in a cured gourd—and lends it life. Culture breathes—from the Guaraní to today, mate has been in that breath and by opening the ceremony to someone else, we are welcoming them to take it in their lungs, too.

This is the globalization unites. Not through erasure, not through homogenization, but through reciprocity, gratitude, and a willingness to be a part of a greater kinship with the world.



Lower Circuit, Iguazú Falls, Misiones Province



Garganta del Diablo, Iguazú Falls, Misiones Province

# To Reach Eternity

And in 80 years  
there'll be more colors  
in your kaleidoscope eyes,  
shiny drops of  
silver as we stare  
at the sun,  
passing back and forth  
the mate,  
the foundation  
of how we got here.  
The one that holds  
the memories—  
when our brains get tired  
and our words slow—  
of sitting  
on a balcony  
with the fading sun  
painting our cheeks gold.  
Back when the future was  
our ocean  
and all that mattered  
was that we had this mate,  
a buoy to hold onto  
amidst the chopping waves.

You'll have walked  
on seven continents  
and I'll have swum  
in seven seas.  
But all it will take is  
one bombilla  
one mate  
to come back to  
one home,  
a mobius strip  
that refuses  
to break.

---

# MATE AS AN ARGENTINE



## CHAPTER 4: MATE AS AN ARGENTINE

### *The Companionship of Mate*

“Companion” is a word merged from two parts: “com” meaning “together with,” and “panis” meaning “bread” (Oxford Languages, n.d.). Inherent in the word we can see the concept of sharing, and not only that, but sharing food. From the time we had a word to describe a bonded relationship between two beings, the idea of nourishing each other was built into it. A companion is someone or something that is there for another throughout both the triumphs and losses of life. A companion is one that revitalizes the other. As I moved through Argentina, asking folks what mate meant to them, I kept finding a common thread, one that I started to realize I’d known my whole life but never said out loud: mate is a companion. It’s a constant, something built-in to people, as much a part of them as the languages they speak and limbs they carry. Although people were quick to point out differences between the drinking practices in the various geographic regions of Argentina, when looking at their own experiences, it didn’t matter what region someone came from. Consistently mate accompanied life, its absence more notable than its presence.

This stood out to me most strongly in Corrientes. I was walking along the Costanera with my cousin, Federico, backpack with thermos and mate slung over his shoulder, the winter sun heavy on our cheeks. All around us vendors walked with bags of chipá, a cheesy bread from the region, and churros, hawking their goods. To our left was a stretch of sand reaching out to the Rio Paraná, populated with groups of people huddled closely together against the strong winds rolling off of the river. If I couldn’t see the other bank, I would have thought I was looking at the ocean.

We made our way down to the shore, my cousin pointing out how each group of people we passed was huddled around their mate. Eventually, as we sat in the sand and Fran started shaking yerba into his mate, he commented: “Honestly, it’s so normal to have mate with you, that it’s weird to *not* have it.” As intuitive as a pair of sunglasses on a sunny day, mate was a key part of social gathering, just another friend invited along.

This raises the question of how much an inanimate object can provide something like companionship, a sentiment that is traditionally attributed to living beings. Here I turn to culture. Culture is something fundamentally human, created by and for us and can be split into two dimensions: material and nonmaterial. Material culture refers to physical objects and artifacts that carry importance within a social group while nonmaterial culture refers to the ideas, beliefs, and ethics of a social group (Lohman, n.d.). The key elements between these distinctions is that regardless of whether it is material or nonmaterial, culture is always shared and a unifier among beings. In that sense, it can be carried by anyone and anything. Mate is such a thing—it is a piece of material culture fundamental to the Argentine identity that invokes the material through its ritual and tradition.

A group of teachers I met in Buenos Aires told me that they couldn’t imagine their day without mate—it is an essential part of their routine, the first thing they prepare as soon as they get home, despite having already had mate throughout the day. These women described mate as something that “revived” them and brought them back to themselves. No matter the kind of day they had, mate was always reliably there for them.

Another girl I met echoed this sentiment, taking it a step further and saying that her day felt off until she had mate. This girl, August, had a strong personality: forceful, extroverted, and energetic—not someone I would initially expect to sit down and partake in something slowed

down the way mate is. But that is part of the beauty of mate—it defies expectations. As soon as you think you have an image of what it is in your head, someone will come along and tell you how they drink it and their story, and the image will adjust, even if just by a little bit.

August shared that she enjoyed drinking mate with others, but she also greatly enjoyed drinking it by herself. In the midst of a fairly tumultuous living situation, mate was the thing that brought tranquility to her schedule and led her back to herself. She didn't necessarily pay special attention to the mate as she would drink it, the ritual more of an instinct than an intention.

Something that is guided much more by feeling than by thought, and is exactly how I would describe what happened when I met the bookkeeper of Federico's university and she invited him and myself to join her for unos mates. We stopped by to say hello in part because Fede wanted to check his grades but also because he said she was the sweetest person on campus and someone I simply had to meet. With a winning reputation like that, how could I say no? Fede introduced us and mentioned that I was here from the US working on a thesis; the moment I told her that my thesis was about mate she became excited and asked if I had any questions for her. By now I was at my fourth stop in my travels and should have been used to the excitement, yet it continued to pleasantly surprise me how eager everyone was to talk about their mate traditions.

Right off the bat Monica opened with “mate is the companion of the person that lives alone.” She'd been dealt a tough hand in life, having had a violent husband and son that took his own life and of whom she still carried a photo around with her everywhere. Now that she was alone she said that mate was her constant. At one point during the conversation she cut herself off with “ay tengo unas ganas de tomar unos mates,” and invited us into her office, not a second thought for the masking regulations that were still in place around the university. That pressing need to drink mate enough to override health concerns. Her office space was small but the three

of us fit with no problem. Monica talked to me as she prepared the mate, describing how she liked to drink her mate strong, usually using Kurupí, a brand from Misiones that was described to me by many folks as not for the faint of heart. In particular, she liked the menta y boldo blend, boldo being a plant that counteracts some of that acidity that accompanies strong yerba blends. She told me that when she drinks with her son (not the previously mentioned one), she blends the Kurupí with Mañanita, a brand grown in Corrientes (cited in the ecology chapter as the perfect blend for beginner mate drinkers) to soften the flavor. For us, she prepared Kurupí.

To be completely honest, I cringed a little bit when I first tasted the mate. I'd never tried boldo before and this was an in-your-face way of doing it. I also wasn't still fully accustomed to drinking mate without sugar (more on that in a moment) and the bitter flavor gave my tastebuds a vigorous shake.

As the mate started to make its round, Monica showed me pictures of her son with these massive golden fish that are caught in the Rio Paraná. She spoke of him with that fierce warmth and love you so often find in a parent. As she spoke, I couldn't help but think of how easy it had been (I was on my third week of travel) to talk to people about mate. People were surprised that I would choose it as my subject of study, as if by hearing this it made them realize that this thing that was so natural to them could be a novelty for other people. Many folks said that they felt important having their voices be a part of my thesis that they knew I would use to introduce people to mate.

As I was sharing mates with Mónica and listening to her speak, a student passed by her office to sell her a raffle ticket. When she informed Monica that she was from the school of agriculture, Monica immediately told her that she must take me to the student union and they must put me in contact with a professor. The girl seemed a little taken aback—I was too—but



somehow, before I knew it, I was standing in the school of agriculture's student union building with my cousin and a bunch of strangers being handed homemade chipá as well as tea-bag-style mate (commonly known as “mate cocido,” although this iteration is a fairly recent development, “mate cocido” originally referring to mate that was steeped over a fire in a similar fashion to loose leaf tea infusion) and traditional mate.

One student called his professor explaining to him that I was a student from the US (that seemed like a big selling point, which I found kind of funny) that would love to talk to him about mate and yerba research. As we waited for the professor to finish up some work before talking to me, the students pointed out these tall metal cabinets in the room that were stocked with mate kits. To check one out for the day you had to turn in your student ID, which would be given back to you when you returned the kit. It struck me to see how mate was so built into the culture there. It was something considered so essential that it was made readily available to every student. Yes, they did have to buy their own yerba, but you could find that at any grocery store for less than 300 pesos (at the time, around \$1.50USD). As my cousin Mauricio said: “[students] live off of bread, rice, and mate.”

After about an hour Federico and I found ourselves accompanied by five other students to their professor's office in a small but new building that I mostly remember for its white floors and walls. This was when I met Professor Davalos, whom I have mentioned throughout this thesis already and who provided me with key information as well as gifting me a book with all the newest yerba mate research being done. It struck me—and we chuckled when I recounted the day's events back to my family—that these other students decided to simply hop on along with me. They came equipped with their mate, which they passed around the circle as Professor Davalos spoke, and asked questions right along with me about the research he shared with us.

Before the night was over the professor showed us a little lab where different weeds were being grown and talked about the different properties they carried that prompted people to add them to their personal mate blends.

As mentioned in chapter three, Professor Davalos not only shared the biological research being done about yerba with me, but he also hammered home the point that there will never be a home for mate like Argentina. He said it basically runs in people's veins; it's a built in part of not only their lifestyle but who they are. He said that whenever people leave Argentina, the one thing they make sure to take with them is mate. As the sole foreigner in the room—and one for whom mate was the principal way she remained connected to Argentina—I nodded solemnly in agreement. What was most beautiful about the sentiment though was that Professor Davalos tied this idea into the difficulty of growing yerba elsewhere in the world. It's a native plant, so of course it grows best there, he said. It's native to the land and to the culture and no one will love mate the way Argentines do (some Uruguayans and Paraguayans would argue otherwise).

### *Mate as a National Symbol*

There's no question that mate is important to Argentine culture. Like Professor Davalos said, it's in people's veins. Mate is visibly drunk by the national futbol team, which is greatly adored within most of the country. It's so well loved that it holds the highest possible title—national drink of Argentina. On February 21, 2002, the Instituto Nacional de Yerba Mate (INYM) was signed into existence as the authorial body overseeing all aspects of mate production. The group was created in response to a crisis that disbanded the previous governing body (the Regulatory Commission of Yerba Mate), greatly affecting the sector encompassing mate production (INYM, n.d.).

The INYM can be considered the “governing body” of mate production in Argentina. They oversee all parts of commercialization as well as the chain of production, and invest in new technology and methods to improve the production process. The INYM works with yerba producers of all sizes to develop programs that help the sector grow (INYM, n.d.). In addition to the governing and administrative sides of the organization, the INYM also promotes cultural growth of mate geared towards both Argentines and as a form of tourism. One example of this is the Feria MATEAR, a festival celebrating mate and giving exposure to yerba cultivators. Approximately 130 brands and organizations affiliated with INYM set up booths in a shared space with the goal of creating and encouraging exchange between consumers and the gastronomic, cultural, and commercial sectors involved with mate. The fair encourages attendees to bring their own mate and has free hot water stations available (figure 1).



Figure 1: Flier for Feria MATEAR 2022 and a map of the venue detailing the organizations present.

As a means of further spreading mate culture, the INYM has established the Ruta de la Yerba Mate (RYM), a series of itineraries spread throughout the yerba-growing region that take you to various plantations, museums, hotels, and other commercial businesses that have something to do with mate. While the RYM website has suggested transportation companies to book tours with, all of the circuits are laid out in detail, allowing those following them to travel at their leisure and pick and choose which activities to do and sites to see. Because I was limited in my transportation options—particularly while up in Misiones where most of these circuits take place—I wasn't able to fully follow one, however, I used the RYM's suggestions of museums, stores, and hotels to inform my stays in Iguazú and Posadas (the capital of Misiones). In Iguazú I stayed in a hotel called El Pueblito Iguazú where I found products made with mate that I never would have imagined: shampoo, soap, cream, to name a few (figure 2).



Upon reflection I have come to realize that the use of all of these products is likely a marketing tactic; Iguazú is a highly touristic area and it would seem only natural that the businesses would capitalize on the novelty of yerba mate for many visitors. There's an interesting dynamic between Misiones's cultural relationship with mate and the way it is used as a marketing tool for visitors. In a sense, it feels like that fine line between the ideas of globalization we visited in the previous

chapter. On the one hand, it is being turned into a commodity, leaning into the “exoticity” of the

plant. On the other hand, mate still is treated with abundant respect in Misiones. There were hot and cold water stations (figure 3) all over Posadas so people could have mate at any and all times. I encountered various signs promoting the unifying culture of mate and tying it to a revitalization project the city was undergoing. Just the act of relating mate to revitalization says a lot about the power the beverage holds in the culture there. Mate is such a characteristic part of Misiones, both past and present (this is the piece of land Argentina acquired after the War of the Triple Alliance that used to be inhabited largely by Paraguayans and the Guaraní), that I'd be inclined to say if it were even partially acceptable to



Figure 3: Thermos refilling station in Posadas. The left is for hot water and the right for cold.

turn mate into a market commodity anywhere, Misiones would be the place. Even in turning it into a commodity, nowhere in Misiones did I get the sense that they were attempting to erase and redefine mate. It's a complicated relationship to navigate, one that I'm not fully sure how to define. A question for us to keep asking ourselves as we encounter this kind of marketing to various degrees for many types of products.

A fun form in which I found mate—again found from the RYM—was an ice cream shop called Polaris in Posadas that carried a mate-flavor. I thought the ice cream tasted very artificial—reminiscent of bubble gum—and not at all like mate, but it was interesting to see that this flavor had been developed at all and that the shop advertised it so proudly.

There is no question that mate holds a special place in Argentine culture and this can be very clearly seen through the establishment of the Día de la Yerba Mate, celebrated on

November 30th, the birthday of Andres Guazurari the first and only indigenous man to become federal governor. The official date was signed into existence in 2015 (teleSUR, 2015).

### *Amargo y Dulce*

In honor of my cousin Mauricio who insisted I devote an entire chapter of my thesis to the debate between sweet and bitter mate, I will give it its own section.

I grew up drinking mate sweet. My abuela had a huge sweet tooth and would not hesitate to lump on the sugar with every round, eventually getting the mate to a point where it was cloyingly sweet and drinking any more of it made my belly hurt. Granted, that was always after at least an hour of mates, which meant that the natural laxative properties of the beverage were probably acting on me too. My dad also has a huge sweet tooth and he had a massive mate that took a while to become too sweet. I remember sometimes serving myself a mate after the water had gone cold and the yerba had lost most of its taste, which left me basically drinking straight sugar-water. I still loved it though.

I knew there were people that drank mate without sugar. I'd met a few people during my family's yearly trip to Argentina that drank it amargo and I thought it was absolutely disgusting. Why would you relegate yourself to that bitter flavor that sat on your tastebuds for a long while afterwards when you could just add in sugar?

It turns out if you expose yourself to nearly anything long enough, you'll start to enjoy it despite your first hesitations. This was what happened for me with mate amargo this summer. But before we get into that, a little bit more on mate dulce and its drinkers.

People from all over Argentina drink mate dulce. I found more of them in Buenos Aires than the northeastern provinces, but that isn't to say that they weren't there. After all, my grandma herself was from a northern province.

My favorite sentiment I heard attached to the reasoning behind drinking mate dulce was that "life is already too bitter to drink mate amargo." This came from a school secretary in Buenos Aires that eagerly showed me her step-by-step process of preparing mate. Something that stood out to me about her version of the ritual was that she would brew a citrus tea in her hot water, which gave a little extra flavor to the mate. She said that the other teachers made fun of her for it sometimes but that she needed something to temper the strong flavor.

Part of what makes mate the perfect subject of study for me is its malleability. Everyone drinks it in their own preferred way. For Caro, the aforementioned secretary, the cards she'd been handed in life left her to seek out comfort in the little parts of life. As a constant companion, it's crucial for mate to be able to nourish her and give some of that comfort. By adding in the sugar and citrus tea, Caro could change the mate in the way that was best for her. She changes some of the composition of the beverage, but that doesn't remove its ability to still be a companion and hold memories and tradition.

The reason I bring up this debate at all is because of Mauricio, who lives in the province of Córdoba. When I first arrived at his apartment, located in the province's capital, he immediately offered me mate and we set up on the rooftop balcony overlooking a sea of squat apartments. We were drinking amargo because he insisted that was the "proper" way to do it. Having just come from staying with Mauricio's family in San Juan, I was aware that there was a notion that drinking amargo was superior. Having also grown up with the influence of my abuela, however, the others drank a mixed bag of sweet and bitter, everyone having their

preference but usually fine with either option. Mauricio, on the other hand, was vehemently opposed to sweet mate. He is one for a flair for the dramatics, though, so I knew to take it all light-heartedly and with a grain of salt. But when his roommate, Daniel, appeared and joined us on the balcony, Mauricio did not hesitate to lay on the slander about Daniel's preference for sweet mate. Particularly when Daniel decided to make himself a whole new mate rather than sharing with us because he didn't like it bitter at all.

Could this division of preferences be something that breaks apart the sharing nature of mate? I wondered to myself. But no, there's more to the sharing of mate than just sipping from the same straw. It's also embedded in the practice and the desire to be in the same space as others, partaking in the same tradition even if in different vessels. This was evident in terms of COVID and how that changed mate-sharing, but more on that in a moment.

While majority of the split between sweet and amargo drinkers is purely pride, there are some particular reasons why someone may prefer one over the other. Adding sugar or sweetener to your mate will make the leaves lavadas (lose their flavor) faster than when drunk amargo. The argument can also be made that sugar will hinder one from getting the full flavor of the yerba, but given many people add sugar for that exact purpose, that argument will likely lead to a dead end.

Taragui (n.d.) publishes on their blog "you should never sweeten a mate gourd that has been cured to drink bitter mate." Mates made from calabaza need to be cured before they can be used to (1) prevent the calabaza from cracking due to contact with the temperature difference of the hot water and (2) avoid the absorption of unwanted flavors. As a naturally porous material, calabazas will absorb the flavor profile of that which is put in it. Wooden mates are recommended to be cured for this same reason, although they are not at the risk of cracking.



Typically mates are cured with a plain yerba blend (refer to Appendix B for a step-by-step guide to curing a mate), although Mauricio informed me that on the occasion someone looking to spice up their mate might add in a hint of whisky or another flavor while curing the mate so all their future mates in that vessel carry a hint of that taste. Knowing just how sensitive mates can be to added flavors, it's reasonable that Taragüi would advise to not drink mate dulce in a gourd intended for mate amargo; traces of sweetness can remain in the vessel for a long time. Of course, this doesn't matter if your mate is not made of wood or calabaza, so for those that like to dabble in both types of mate, they can easily use a mate made from plastic, ceramic, glass, metal, silicon or any other non-porous material.

For those that don't enjoy a super strong mate but are also looking to avoid sugar, a common practice is to add herbs (yuyos) and other flavor enhancers to the mate. This can include plants like mint and lemon balm as well as bits of orange peel. It's common among some big mate drinkers to pick leaves from plants they encounter along the side of the road to dry out and add to their mate. This actually happened one evening when I was walking with Mauricio's girlfriend, Cande, back to his apartment. Born and raised in Corrientes, Cande told me that it was a bit of culture shock when she moved down to Córdoba capital where people drank mate much less liberally than back home. One time she was walking in the city with her dad, drinking mate as they went along, and were asked if they were from Uruguay. That "take mate anywhere and everywhere" behavior is more commonly seen in Uruguay than Argentina, especially the further south you go. Coming from a northern province close to both Uruguay and Paraguay, however, Cande was accustomed to walking with mate in hand. We were discussing this when Cande abruptly veered in front of me to examine the bush that to me looked like every other bush we'd passed.

I don't remember the exact name of the plant, but I do remember Cande handing me a couple of the leaves, telling me to let them dry overnight so I could add them to my mate the next day. Unfortunately I was traveling the next day so I lost track of the leaves in my bustle to pack everything, but the interaction made me start to look at the plants around me a little differently, wondering if any of them could add a little flare to my mate. It's beautiful how organically mate and nature interact in this way—these little bits of nature can serve to make mate more palatable for some people, in a sense making it and its tradition more accessible.

### *COVID-19 and mate*

“Cada Uno Con Su Mate.” Each with their own mate. That was the slogan pushed forth by the INYM when the 2020 pandemic hit, sending everyone into their homes with recommendations from both the government and INYM to stop sharing mate. When putting forth this recommendation, the INYM acknowledged and even pulled on mate's tradition of sharing, stating that now it was a shared responsibility to take care of each other and make sure everyone have their own mate (La Nación, 2020). Sales and production skyrocketed in 2020 and 2021, with 2021 seeing 282 million kilos of commercialized yerba and an increase in the amount of mates themselves sold (La Nación, 2022). A vendor of mate noted that he was seeing more of the small cups being sold as opposed to large ones, which are easier for sharing (Calatrava, 2020). These stats put together with the vendor's observation would indicate that overall mate was in larger circulation than before, simply because everyone carried their own mate.

Most interestingly about all of this however, is mate in a post-pandemic world. The INYM indicates that everyone with their own mate is a practice that is here to stay. With COVID seemingly here for the long term, as well as the multitude of other sicknesses that are passed

through body fluids, the practice of sharing the bombilla has been called into question (La Nación, 2022). A study conducted by la Universidad Autonoma de Entre Rios and la Universidad Nacional de Rosario analyzed the return—or lack thereof—of mate sharing practices post-pandemic. The study found that sharing does continue to exist but is largely limited to people’s intimate inner circles. Of the subjects interviewed, 96% reported that they used to share mate within their workspace, at school, etc. but only 50% of those have intentions of returning to those widespread sharing habits (Arrabal, 2021).

I was struck when reading these reports and statistics because it only felt fitting for part of what I observed while in Argentina. Understanding that of course I didn’t experience an exhaustive scope and don’t claim to make generalizations for an entire region of the country, what I tended to see and hear was that those in bigger cities and closer to the middle of the country seemed to share less, while those further northeast had already returned to old habits. In Buenos Aires I most starkly saw the effects of the pandemic. Pia (mentioned in the chapter previous) had her friend over one night and I noted that each of them had their own mate. One mate vendor that I spoke to while perusing her store mentioned that mate had never been a hugely social thing for her, but now with the pandemic it was an entirely non-social tradition. The teachers that I mentioned previously in this chapter noted that since the pandemic, mate had become a much more solitary tradition. It was still present when they were together, but in a different sense now that everyone carried their own equipment. Of course, some elements of sharing can always remain; as INYM noted, the hot water thermos can easily be shared without risking contamination (La Nación 2022).

Going a step further north, San Juan and Córdoba were also slow to readopt old mate habits, though further along than Buenos Aires, from what I observed. In San Juan, my aunt, a

university professor, told me that, pre-pandemic, mate would always circulate a classroom. There would be one student preparing it and the mate would make its rounds, usually being offered to her as well. With the pandemic that stopped, and now it was very slowly returning. Mates won't make their way around an entire classroom, but within circles of friends, there is some sharing to be seen again. My aunt and my cousin Rosalí—currently attending university—both seemed to be under the impression that while older folks were more cautious about bringing mate back, many of the youths seemed to be beyond ready to reignite the tradition. Unfortunately I was not able to observe the classrooms while in San Juan because the teachers of both private and public schools were on strike, effectively canceling class.

In Córdoba I heard much of the same, that mate wasn't as widely shared as it used to be. Mauricio's personal belief was that fewer people overall were drinking mate, but given the record numbers of yerba production and sales in 2020 and 2021, I would be more inclined to think that he hasn't been seeing people sharing with random strangers and acquaintances nearly as much, which could lead to his overall belief that fewer people are drinking mate. I did note that everywhere we went we would see only two to three people to a mate, but no concrete conclusions can be pulled from that observation other than people will share mate with their close circles, something already confirmed by the research previously discussed.

The bigger difference came when I got to Corrientes. It just happened that I arrived at a time when students were in the middle of exams, so I couldn't visit any of Federico's classes. He said that he would have liked for me to visit the classes so I could see how people passed mate around the entire classroom, including sharing it with the professor. Already different from the other provinces I visited, mate in Corrientes appeared to have gone back to old sharing practices. Furthermore, as previously mentioned when I was talking to Professor Davalos, the students with

me were happy to pass a mate around, sharing with Fede and I even though we'd met only a few hours previous. I don't want to discredit the bias that was likely built in to the fact that I was there to study mate and mate traditions; while I never asked for them to share with me, the knowledge that I was there precisely to learn about their customs likely played a role into how willing they were to share with me.

Moving further north, to the province where I was nearly overwhelmed by the sheer amount of mate present, it was hard to tell how people have adapted to pandemic habits just by observation. Nearly everyone around me in Misiones had mate with them. In the national park of Iguazú, you could tell who was from the southern cone and who was from elsewhere in the world based on whether they had mate with them. There were multitudes of families carrying it around under their arm and passing it between each other. For the most part, it was families that were visiting Iguazú though, so it wasn't odd to see them sharing. Unfortunately, the time I spent in Posadas were overcast days, so there weren't many people out and about for me to observe or talk to. I noted that many street vendors would have their mate next to them while they sold their goods, but again, nothing particularly indicative of the impact of the pandemic.

While nothing can be said for certain about the long-term effects of the pandemic on mate consumption and habit, it is evident that the tradition of sharing has been impacted and possibly permanently altered. When reading La Nación's articles about mate in the time of COVID, I looked through the comments and found many people expressing a displeasure for the practice of sharing the bombilla existing at all (some went so far as to call it "uncivilized"). Others seemed to take the stance that eventually the practice would return, it would just take time. It is important to note that La Nación is Argentina's more conservative-leaning news source and, as with all journalism, the people that read and leave comments will be biased

towards that frame of thought. However, whether the tradition can be called inherently “good” or “bad,” it’s clearly something that will change dependent on the drinker. As with dulce vs amargo, mate isn’t static and can be adapted to suit the needs and the tastes of any drinker.

When we consider mate as a companion, it’s only fitting that as universal as it may be, it is also very particular to an individual. We all need nourishment, but what that looks like will vary from person to person. There are just as many—if not more—types of mate vessels as yerba blends, allowing the drink to truly have something for everyone. At its heart, mate carries what we all need: love, comfort, and companionship.

Paseo Bosetti,  
Posadas, Misiones  
Province



Mate by the Río  
Paraná, Corrientes  
Province



# Lifeline

The first sip tastes bitter.

*Aw shit, did I burn the leaves again?*

It can be hard to salvage a burnt mate.

*No, no, let me try again.*

Sprinkle the sugar.

Pour the hot water.

Listen to the barely audible pops as it filters through the leaves  
and releases that sweet, earthy,  
words-don't-do-it-justice-but-I-promise-I'm-trying-my-best  
smell of home.

Sip.

Sip Sip.

*Mmmm. There we go.*

The pleasant burn hits my chest

A sensation that reverberates through my bones

And awakens my memories,

every past version of myself

tied to this lifeline.

Beneath the umbrella of the willow,  
warmth.

Hand to hand the mate goes,

the water filling all of our mouths

made sweet by the same

set of leaves.

I'm starting to forget the last time I said

goodbye to the people

I love the most.



### **1. Turn on the kettle**

Kindness,  
embodied in one voice  
with consonants soft like sea glass.

Abuelita only stops talking  
to take a singular sip,  
and though I'm impatient  
for my turn with the mate,  
I don't want her to stop.

*Te quiero, Abuela Emma. And I miss you.*

### **2. Fill the gourd with yerba and insert the bombilla**

The straw kisses  
everybody's lips,  
but germs hardly matter  
when you're gathered 'round a swimming hole,  
releasing a sweet symphony of laughter  
to the wind.

“¡El ultimo se casa primero!”

The last slurp gets married first!  
Silly traditions.

### **3. Sprinkle the sugar**

My backyard is in bloom  
with the flowers that watched me  
grow up, mate in hand.

I hope they're proud  
of the girl that once traipsed  
among their petals and stems  
and now strokes their leaves  
with words and adoration.

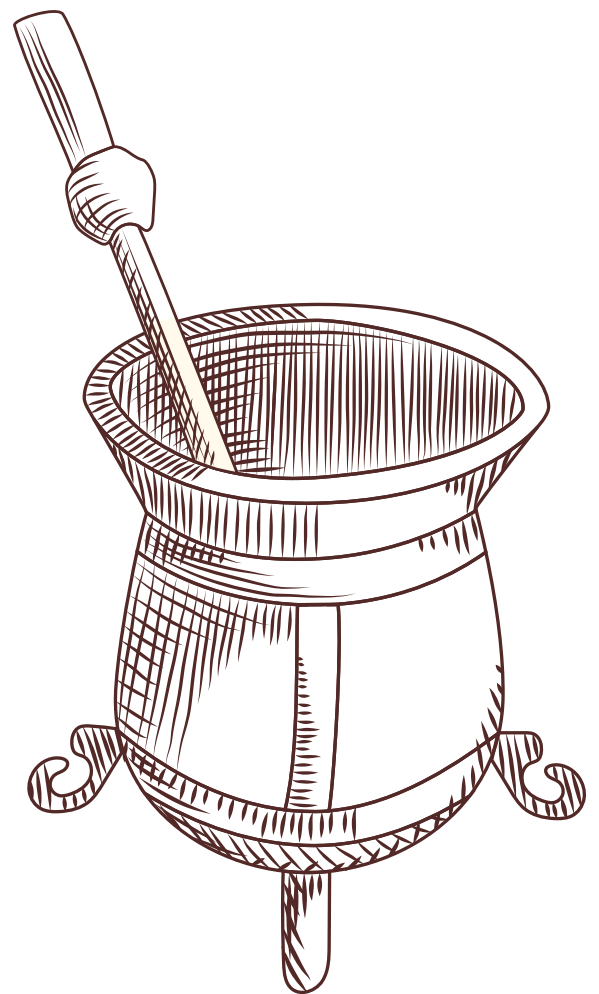
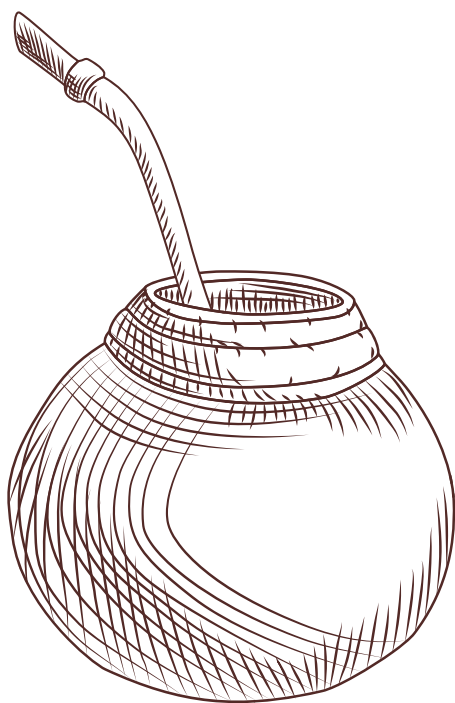
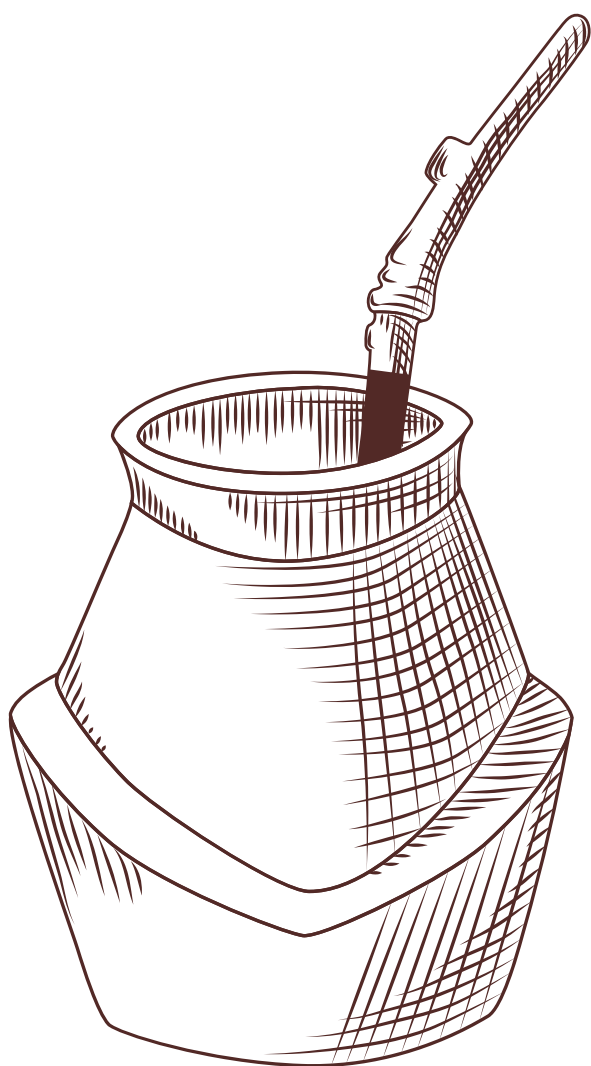
#### **4. Pour the hot water**

Some water spills as the mate leaves my hands.  
Here is my home,  
my heart,  
the shape of my soul.  
Here is the hand I held onto  
when I walked through shadowed valleys,  
the sole witness to every tear,  
and the one that wiped them away.  
When my eyes were shut tight,  
willing the world gone,  
this was the voice that told me the stars were out.  
I hand this all to you.

Wholly new fingers cradle the gourd,  
their palms making prints that I'll never wash away.  
I see the care in each sip,  
the outbreak of a smile,  
the ease into conversation as the mate starts  
to make its round.  
“It gets better every time!”  
“Yeah, that might be because there's more sugar every time.”  
Or maybe it's because we're sitting in a circle, infinite  
Embedding this moment of existence into  
the grass,  
the wind,  
the trees,  
all while holding onto a lifeline.

---

# COMPAÑERO DE POR VIDA



## CHAPTER 5: COMPAÑERO DE POR VIDA

One of my most vivid memories of drinking mate is in the sierras of Córdoba. It was raining, and four of us sat huddled under the draping branches of a willow tree, bundled together in hopes of warding off the cold. My cousin Jorge had a cylindrical wooden mate with some sort of yellow dye on the outside for decoration that was starting to bleed onto our fingers as we passed the vessel around the circle. Steam rolled off of the water as it poured out of the thermos, the droplets eager to join their raining brethren. My teeth were chattering, but the moment the mate hit my tongue, I was flooded with warmth, feeling as if a flower had just bloomed in my chest.

At that moment, there was nothing but mate and each other.

I found that feeling echoed six or seven years later, walking with those same cousins down the streets of San Juan; the sun already set, taking with it any kind of warmth. I had, unfortunately, not really thought about the fact that I was in a desert and it would get cold once the night sky painted over the day, and was inappropriately dressed in a light sweater. My teeth were chattering and my fingers were starting to turn a little purple despite my having tucked them under my armpits. Jorge glanced over at me and laughed.

“Pobre, la Clari! Ahora te sirvo un mate.” He filled the mate, this one made of glass with an outer covering depicting Mafalda, an old Argentine cartoon character. I gratefully accepted it, the heat from the water radiating through the mate and into my stiff fingers, bringing them back to life. As we walked, visiting the university he used to attend and other old haunts, I carried the mate, Jorge automatically refilling it whenever I finished, the habit built into years of cebando for himself and for others.

He'd told me earlier that the reason he really started to drink mate was because he felt like he was missing out on an Argentine staple. We shared a devoted mate-drinking abuela, but he said that outside of her visits, he used to not drink mate much.

Now, however, mate was everything. He said that during the 2020 quarantine he would sit on the roof of his house—the only place where he could be alone, coming from a family of nine—and drink mate, a habit that stayed with him even after the quarantine was over. Mate traveled with him wherever he went: the park, museums, school—the only place he didn't take it was to work because he liked his mate time to be something relaxing, which his workplace environment was not. Many of his colleagues brought mate to work, though, he informed me.

Some of his favorite times to drink mate were when he would go camping with his friends out around San Juan's lakes. There they would prepare an asado, drink mate, and celebrate each other and their time together.

My cousin's outdoor mate-drinking habits are something I saw reflected nearly everywhere I went. Across San Juan, Córdoba, Corrientes, Chaco, and Misiones, the most consistent sight was small pockets of people scattered around parks, a mate and thermos nearly always seated between them. It's true that mate is also frequently drunk indoors, but for a moment I'd like to focus on that outdoor small-group-sharing-mate dynamic. It was something almost everyone I spent an extended period of time with wanted to do with me; they were so excited to show me the hot spots for hangouts.

Most people admitted that mate wasn't an intentional companion, it just happened to hop along for the ride. That, however, is what I believe to make mate truly a companion. It's nearly always present, something that nourishes and connects without having to be asked. If we want it

to be there, it's there. It's there whenever we need it, sometimes even when we don't know we need it. The capacity of what mate can provide is boundless.

Let's explore how mate asks us to pay attention. The nature of how mate is traditionally drunk calls us to connect with the beverage and all the elements that are a part of it, whether alone or in a group. When drinking alone, mate asks us to pause what we are doing every few minutes and come back to the environment around us, to the movement in our bodies, to our life in the present. Thich Nhat Hanh (2021) tells us that "once we touch reality deeply in the present moment, we touch the past, we touch the future, and we touch eternity. We are the environment, we *are* the Earth, and the Earth has the capacity to restore balance" (p.14). While this idea of restoring balance can seem lofty and romantic, mate shows us that it's actually simple. Like August told me in the previous chapter, mate was a way for her to come back to and ground herself. There's no philosophical jargon involved, it's just the act of sitting in the moment and paying attention to it that can fuel this connection to the Earth and help us find balance.

When drunk in community, mate continues to help us be aware of ourselves and our environment, but also aware of each other. Whether chatting or working or sitting in silence, the back and forth of the mate round calls us to pay attention to each other, to be aware of when the mate is being handed to us and to whom we need to hand it back. It can seem like nothing, but in this day and age where the technology and happenings of the world pull our attention in ten different directions, mate calls us back to the here and now—to the hand extended towards us in invitation.

I remember my abuela used to start her day with mate and her rose-scented rosary: two kinds of ceremony that complemented each other and made the spiritual corporal and the corporal spiritual. Both are repetitive rituals, mate with the pour-drink, pour-drink and the rosary

prayed in a call and response style reiterating the same pattern of prayer five times. There's something to be said about the automation of repetition; after doing or saying the same thing so many times, you start to become unaware that you are even doing it. Yet you still do. Like the subconscious has reached out and latched on to the ritual, the familiarity built from its frequency functioning as a form of comfort. Even when you're barely aware that you're doing it, the words and actions soothe and root your soul.

What's beautiful about it is that these rituals can go with you wherever you are. They are vehicles to connect you to something bigger than yourself. My abuela prayed the rosary because she had a deep devotion to the Virgin Mary and was able to speak to her through the ceremonial prayer. She drank mate out of habit, a tradition passed down to her that carried the past, present, and future in it all at once. Both of these rituals brought her peace and kept her spirit strong to the end, despite the suffering she was dealt in her life. They traveled with her wherever she went.

Religion doesn't speak to everyone, so for some it may be just a sweet story to hear. But mate can be shared by anyone and be a teacher to anyone. It can show us what it means to bring a spiritual dimension to your life, regardless of your religious beliefs. The acts of repetition, paying attention, and mindfulness that accompany mate are accessible to anyone. They are what keep us from being "swept away...so we can handle our suffering and take care of our happiness...to go home to ourselves" (Hanh, 2021, p. 97). And not only go home to ourselves but also go home to the Earth, to the place that holds us with a love much of humanity still needs to learn to reciprocate.

But in saying this, I would like to circle back to our discussion from chapter three about taking versus partaking when it comes to cultural traditions. When I say that mate is accessible to anyone, I mean it; I'm not here to gatekeep mate. However, that doesn't mean that it should

become everyone's daily pick-me-up. It is very much a product of its culture. I'd like to raise again this quote from Kimmerer (2020): "I hoped always to inspire an authentic revitalization of relationship with the land, not by borrowing it from someone else, but by finding your roots and remembering how to grow your own" (p. XXI). Mate is a teacher for everyone. Mate can be a companion to anyone. But most importantly, mate can hold anyone's hand and guide them to the traditions of their own heart and culture. It can help people renew their relationship with those roots and learn to see them and love them through the lens of what mate has taught them.

I don't write this thesis to tell everyone to go adopt mate into their daily routine. I write it to illustrate how our cultural practices are interwoven with the Earth and how they can communicate with each other to bring us all into a more loving relationship with our planet and each other. I write it to celebrate our differences and the understanding that despite how distinct our cultures can be, they all inhabit the same home.

Now let's come back to the questions we raised in our very first chapter: can the imposition of a human practice break a species's bioregion? In the previous context, this question arose because of plantation-style agriculture tearing yerba away from its relationship with the Paraná tree. There's dissonance between the expressed love for mate from the people that grow it and the practices that they impose upon it. Recall that plantation-style agriculture also stunts the yerba tree growth to 3-6 m in height. We know that part of what defines a plant's bioregion is the culture of the people that grow and interact with it. For a long time, mate was harvested from wild stands and didn't settle into how it is grown now until about a century ago. Has industrialization done enough to alter yerba's bioregion?

How we answer that question depends in part on whether we consider that land can hold history. Environmental scholar Monica White would argue that it does, saying that "land is both



a site and source of oppression and liberation” (Hennessy, 2019). Land holds memory—particularly of how it has been used. Legacies of plantations and unsustainable agriculture persist around the world in sites depleted of nutrients and rendered “useless” for their ability to grow crops. Most historical plantations were worked by slaves and are now a symbol of both the duration and the end of their oppression. The non-productiveness of those plantations today speak to the lasting harm of that era (Martens & Robertson, 2019).

The land on which mate is grown today remains much of the same land on which it was grown in the time of the Jesuit reducciones. The soil carries the memories of the forced labor of the Guaraníes just as it carries the memories of the eras before the Jesuits, when the land and the people were left to exist as they did. The duality in the land—that “oppression and liberation” existing simultaneously—heavily complicates our question. The region has always been changing, yet it also has always remained habitable and sustaining for yerba. So can human activity have enough power to redefine yerba’s bioregion? Can industrialized mass production in combination with climate change be the thing that separates the yerba of yesterday from the yerba of tomorrow?

I don’t have answers to these questions. All I know is that they are important ones to be asking as we look to the future of yerba mate and the preservation of its past.

With all of what I’ve said, you might find yourself confused. Can I drink mate? Who does it belong to and how do I partake without taking?

First, if someone offers you a mate, please do drink it if you wish! Offering a mate is like offering a welcome; it’s so intrinsic to so many that drink it that opening it up to someone is like opening a piece of oneself. It’s a gift, and as we discussed in chapter 3, a part of accepting a gift

is by reciprocating and engaging with the person that offered the mate. If you're unfamiliar, ask for their story with mate. Be present. We'll probably chuckle if you make a face at the bitter flavor but remember that even if it's not to your taste, that flavor is part of what shapes the mate and speaks of its place of birth.

Partaking without taking is something we are all constantly learning how to do on this constantly changing globe. As cultures shift and merge and dissolve and enlarge, so do their traditions. I mentioned tea earlier—that although it comes from the same plant, Chinese green tea is hardly the same as English breakfast tea is hardly the same as Indian chai. It all came from China originally, but as it moved through cultures—stolen, introduced, and adopted—tea became redefined. The ceremony of drinking, the treatment of the leaves, the modes of preparation—all of these and more are what define the different “brands” of tea in the world. It's not inherently negative that all these branches have developed—these styles of drinking tea are a direct result of past lives and entanglements. To ignore history is to disrespect every form of tea and the trials and tribulations it and its drinkers underwent to get where it is today.

We already know how the Guaraní were removed from the narrative of mate and how its cultivation success has largely been attributed to the Jesuits. But remember that the same soil and the same sun and the same air that feeds the yerba plant today are those that fed the yerba plant when it was first harvested by the Guaraní—earlier, even. These parts of mate will never be erased by colonial narratives, even as the systems built from their legacies exacerbate climate change. The past two summers have brought heat waves to northeastern Argentina like never seen in recorded history. There have been fires raging through yerba land, including in Establecimiento Las Marias itself. In 2022 alone, over a million hectares of land burned in Corrientes (Paddison, 2023; Sigal, 2022). Colonialism, capitalism, consumerism—these systems

that keep pouring gasoline and rigging powder kegs to fuel climate change try very hard to break things like mate from the earth.

But mate persists. It stubbornly carries tradition and history and legacy no matter what changes come about. And to partake without taking, we must understand and appreciate the resilience of both plant and tradition, recognizing that even as it changes, it remains made up of the same parts.

So who does mate belong to? The Uruguayans will call it theirs and the Argentines will get mad about it. The Argentines will call it theirs and the Paraguayans will get mad about it. The Paraguayans—you get it. The culture behind mate was born in the Paraguayan, Uruguayan, northeastern Argentine, and southern Brazilian region, but it's rippled outward and even reached the tip of the world at Tierra del Fuego. Mate was shaped by the people that first drank it. Mate accompanies those who live with it. But perhaps the only one mate belongs to is the Earth herself.

# San Juan Province



# Butterfly in Iguazú Falls, Misiones Province



# Salvavidas

El primer sorbo sabe amargo.

"Pucha! ¿Dejé que el agua se calentara demasiado?"

Puede ser difícil rescatar un mate quemado.

"No, no. Pruebo de vuelta."

Vierto el azúcar.

Después? Vierto el agua sobre las hojas.

Escucha como las burbujas sigilosamente suben a la superficie y emana un aroma a familia, corazón y tierra.

Sorbito.

Sorbito. Sorbito.

Mmmmm. Ahora sí.

Encierro la bombilla entre mis labios y con dos sorbitos,  
siento un agradable ardor en mi pecho

que se expande

hasta mis huesos.

Con el calor en mi alma,

me surgen recuerdos

de mi pasado

todos conectados por este sustento...

Sentados debajo del parasol que forma el sauce,  
la calidez familiar.

El mate viaja de mano en mano  
colmando nuestras bocas  
con el agua endulzada por las mismas hojas.  
Me voy olvidando de la última vez que les dije:  
"hasta la próxima"  
a las personas que más quiero en este mundo.

Tranquilidad  
encarnada en una voz,  
embebida en consonantes suaves como  
vidrio acariciado por el mar.  
La abuela solo para de hablar  
para tomar un pequeño matecito  
Y aunque espero impaciente mi mate  
quiero que siga charlando.  
Te quiero mucho, Emma. Abuela Emma.  
Y te extraño como nunca.

Todos besan  
la misma bombilla  
cuando están sentados alrededor de la Olla del César,  
cantos de risa  
tirados al viento.

Mi jardín brota  
con las flores que me conocen desde pequeña,  
siempre con el mate en la mano.  
Ojalá estén orgullosas de mí.

Ahora gotas de agua caen del mate cuando te lo entrego.

Este es mi hogar,

mi corazón,

la forma de mi alma.

Esta es la mano que me agarró fuerte  
cuando caminaba por los bosques oscuros,

el único testigo de cada lágrima

y el que siempre me las secaba.

Cuando cerré mis ojos fuertemente,

deseando que el mundo desapareciera,

esta es la voz que me hizo recordar

que las estrellas todavía brillaban en la noche.

Esto es lo que te entrego.

Nuevos dedos abrazan el mate,

sus palmas imprimiendo huellas que nunca abandonarán la calabaza.

Veo el cariño y cuidado en cada sorbo,

el inicio de una sonrisa

y la conversación comienza nuevamente mientras el mate hace sus rondas.

"¡Sabe mejor con cada vuelta!"

"Quizás por que cada vez hay más azúcar"

O quizás porque estamos aquí

Sentados en un círculo sin fin

Esculpiendo este momento en

nuestros corazones,

los árboles,

la tierra,

el viento,

Recuerdos inolvidables

Uno amarrado al otro con esta fuente de vida,

el mate.

## AFTERWORD

The thermos is almost out of water, and we are reaching the end of our time together. We've spent the past five chapters together exploring the different ways mate has existed and continues to exist in the world and what it can do for you and me as beings on this planet. But before we go our separate ways, I have one last question to raise: why should you care about this?

I could bring up Kimmerer's quote about finding your own roots again, but I think we know well enough what she was saying with that. And that is a large part of this thesis—there is no culture on Earth that exists outside of the environment. Every culture has its rituals and traditions that can be vehicles to bring us closer to the planet. Before I knew what I was going to write this thesis about, I did a research project about tea agriculture that led me down a deep dive exploring the cultural complexities and messy histories behind tea in China, India, and Japan. As I read about the different twists and turns in tea's history from before the colonial era, I found myself drawing parallels to the little I knew about mate's history at the time. I went on after that project to do research with my professor about greenwashing specifically as it pertains to some superfoods from Latin America and once again, I found myself continuously tying ideas back to mate. When I took my first class in creative ecowriting, my heart brought me to mate and I wrote a poem about it (that's in this thesis) introducing it to this special group of people that I was learning with.

Mate has always called out to me. As with so many I talked to, it was my companion—I just didn't really notice its voice until I heard it through something else. I started to see just what kind of a role mate has always played in my life: how it keeps me connected to my abuela even 5 years after her passing, how it created space in conversations with my mom that allowed me to navigate the early years of my mental health struggles, and how it has been key in teaching me



how to properly and openly share with other people. Now, mate is my rock. It's the thing that helps me practice mindfulness, that lets me share my culture with other people, that keeps me grounded even in the midst of the school bustle. For all of these reasons and more I knew that the only way I could truly reciprocate all that mate has given me was through this thesis.

So why should *you* care? Because the lessons we can learn from mate are universal. Let's revisit: in chapter one, *Ilex paraguariensis* taught us that we and the beings around us are shaped by the land and people from which we come. In chapter two, we learned that stories are told by the voices that are given power; when we think about who came before us and the impact they had on that which is important to us, we must make sure we don't forget those that violent histories have tried to crush. In chapter three we saw mate as a globalized beverage and we had to ask ourselves how can we responsibly share cultures so as to preserve and celebrate them as unique wonders? Chapter four gave us a view of how mate accompanies Argentina today, reminding us what it means to nourish and truly be a companion. And in chapter five, we turned to mate to learn how to be more in tune with our world and ourselves.

This is how our planet functions. She is always teaching us through the languages that we speak. For myself and for many Argentines, Paraguayans, Uruguayans, etc. mate is our language, that "contact zone" we discussed in the introduction that bridges the gaps between different types of knowledge and values. Now I would like to be clear and emphasize that the view I present in this thesis is not a universal view. Mate is not seen by all that drink it as a teacher and the lens through which I examine mate is not in line with everyone's belief systems. As stated in the introduction, the environmental humanities is a field that is still growing and is not fully understood by all that engage with it, especially when for the first time. It can appear idealistic, but not without reason. Yes, it is important to be able to look at and interact with the world with

a critical eye. Nothing exists without its problems, and I am not here to refute that. However, if one can open themselves up to this perspective informed by the environmental humanities and look at the world through a loving lens, then it becomes easier to find teachers in many aspects of culture and nature. It becomes easier to exist in the present moment and understand that things we do and say right now matter; with every seed sown of love and understanding, the daunting troubles of the world can become just a little bit less terrifying. And at the end of the day, very few people—least of all, ourselves—are helped by doomsaying and despair. If we can instead learn to connect to our planet through our cultures and languages, then perhaps we can find a reason to care and preserve. By reading this thesis I hope you too can feel that on some level you understand the language of mate and, by extension, how the Earth speaks through it. It is when we start to hear her in the rituals and traditions we hold near to our hearts that we can learn to truly grow closer to, love, and protect her.

And so, we've reached the end of this mate circle. The water is out and our bellies and hearts are hopefully full. In honor of tradition, as I pack my bag and prepare to say goodbye, allow me to close our rounds of mate in the best way I know how: by saying thank you.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are immeasurable amounts of people to thank for making this thesis possible. First, thank you to Dean Kimber and Assistant Dean La Riviere for funding my travel to Argentina and making all of these first hand accounts of research possible. To Professor Davalos and the students of the Facultad de Agronomía de la UNNE for welcoming me with open arms and imparting on me so much knowledge and wisdom, along with the textbook that was key in much of my scientific understanding of yerba. To Augusto, Jime, Heli, and Pia that have continued to support me even after only having met me once. To all of the unexpected strangers I met in Argentina that did not hesitate to talk me about their lives and traditions. Of course to my family—Albacete, Calani, and Yedro—that housed me and helped me immensely not only while I was in Argentina this summer but throughout my life and travels there.

To Professors Humston, Hamilton, and Green, thank you for taking the time to help me with specific portions of this thesis—your insight and expertise have not only informed my work here directly, but have also molded much of how I view and interact with and in the world. And to all of my professors throughout the disciplines I’ve studied, thank you for shaping me as a student and for allowing my different passions to intersect and interact in such beautiful ways. This thesis is a direct product of all that you’ve taught me.

To all of my friends that have shared mates with me, listened to me ramble about this on and on, and given me the space to get excited and nerd out about not just mate but also anything, environmental or otherwise. You are the people that make me believe there’s worth in what I say and do and that someone wants to hear all of it. I will never be able to fully say all that your support has meant to me. To Maggie, thank you for sharing mate with me every week for the past year and a half. You are the reason mate has stayed so present in my daily life and it is

because of our time together that I've even been able to see all that mate has given and continues to give. Mate gave me irreplaceable time with you and for that I am eternally grateful.

To mom and dad, thank you for raising me on mate. Thank you for taking me to Argentina yearly. Thank you for teaching me spanish. Thank you for giving me the opportunities to grow into the person I am and achieve this level of education.

To Caroline and Victoria, thank you for everything. For reading all my drafts, for answering all my questions, for giving me your insights, for giving me confidence in my writing, my ideas, and my self as a person. I never would've reached here without you.

A huge thank you to my thesis committee. Professors Perez and Botta, you've been key to this whole process. Thank you for your insight, thank you for challenging me, thank you for coming on this journey with me so willingly. Your guidance throughout this process has been incredibly valuable.

And of course none of this would have been possible without my wonderful advisor, Dr. Chelsea Fisher. Thank you for believing in me from day one. When I said I wanted to do a thesis you said "okay!" and it didn't matter that it hadn't been done in a while, it didn't matter that a humanities one hadn't been done *ever*, you never doubted me and my vision. You knew before I did what my topic needed to be—thank you for saying straight up "I think you should write about mate" because you were absolutely right and I can't imagine having put this much effort into anything else. Thank you for supporting me throughout my entire college career in so many ways, for giving me the space to grow creatively and academically, for encouraging me to follow my instincts and question the system. You are the best mentor and friend I could have ever asked for; I know that the impact you've had on me will never be lost. I am always always infinitely grateful.

And finally, one last thank you to the person that started this all, mi querida abuelita Emma.

Your name and spirit are synonymous with mate and everything it embodies and there is no limit to the love for you that I carry with me wherever I go. Gracias por todo.

Thank you.

## Bibliography

Albacete, V. (2015). BOTTLED. *Oberlin College Plum Creek Review*

*Argentina celebrates mate drink.* (2015). TeleSUR.

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Argentina-Celebrates-Mate-Drink-20151130-0004.html>

Arrabal, V. (2021, October 29). Una sola ronda con varios mates. *Universidad Nacional de Rosario*. <https://unr.edu.ar/una-sola-ronda-con-varios-mates/>

Boidin, C. (2020). Beyond linguistic description: territorialisation. Guaraní language in the missions of Paraguay (17th-19th centuries). *Cultural Worlds of the Jesuits in Colonial Latin America*. University of London Press, Institute of Latin American Studies.

Britton, A. (2005). *Guaraní-English, English-Guaraní: Concise Dictionary*. Hippocrene Books.

Burgos, A. M., & Medina, R. D. (2017). Origen e Historia. In P. L. Capellari & R. D. Medina (Eds.), *Yerba Mate: Reseña Histórica y Estadística, Producción e Industrialización en el siglo XXI*. (pp. 13-20). Consejo Federal de Inversiones.

Burgos, A. M., & Medina, R. D. (2017). Ecofisiología. In P. L. Capellari & R. D. Medina (Eds.), *Yerba Mate: Reseña Histórica y Estadística, Producción e Industrialización en el siglo XXI*. (pp. 59-72). Consejo Federal de Inversiones.

*CAÁ YARÁ y CAÁ YARÍ Protectores del Mate.* (2010). Compartiendo Culturas.

[https://compartiendo culturas.blogspot.com/2010\\_02\\_07\\_archive.html](https://compartiendo culturas.blogspot.com/2010_02_07_archive.html)

*Cada uno con su mate. Por el coronavirus piden no compartirlo.* (2020). LA NACION.

<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/economia/campo/cada-uno-su-mate-por-coronavirus-piden-nid2343210/>

Calatrava, A. (2020, March 20). Virus fears curb old mate custom in parts of South America. *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/health-caribbean-uruguay-south-america-virus-outbreak-a60926d725de1c169ae1696cb3fbe08f>

Campos, D. [NoBorders Campos]. (2017, October 30). *YERBA MATE CRAZE IN THE MIDDLE EAST i24News*[Video]. Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSiKqE7vSIM&t=197s>

Cartwright, M. (2022, June 15). Encomienda. *World History Encyclopedia*.

<https://www.worldhistory.org/Encomienda/>

*Companion.* (n.d.) Oxford Languages.

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj628j5noz-AhWWElkFHbH->

[DP8QvecEegQIGBAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Flanguages.oup.com%2Fgoogle-dictionary-en&usg=AOvVaw3kNBXVjbAIAFeyFOVCJmJF](https://www.oup.com/google-dictionary-en&usg=AOvVaw3kNBXVjbAIAFeyFOVCJmJF)

Crocitti, J. (2002). The internal organization of the Jesuit missions among the Guaraní. *Internal Social Science Review*, 77(1,2), 3-15.

Dohrenwend, A. S. (2019). Socio-Environmental Impacts of Argentine Yerba Mate Cultivation: “El Problema es el Precio Bajo.” *University of Kansas*.  
[https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/30084/Dohrenwend\\_ku\\_0099M\\_16527\\_DATA\\_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/30084/Dohrenwend_ku_0099M_16527_DATA_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

¿El fin de las rondas del mate? Qué opinan los especialistas de este hábito después de la pandemia. (2022). LA NACION. <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/sociedad/el-fin-de-las-rondas-del-mate-que-opinan-los-especialistas-de-este-habito-despues-de-la-pandemia-nid17042022/>

Establecimiento Las Marias (2022). *Brands*. Establecimiento Las Marias.  
<https://www.lasmarias.com.ar/marcas>

Fochesatto, A. (2019). Yerba Mate: National Project to Emerging Superfood. *University of Illinois*. ProQuest.

Folch, C. (2010). Stimulating Consumption: Yerba Mate Myths, Markets, and Meanings from Conquest to Present. *Comparative Studies in Society and Histories*, 52(1), 6–36.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40603070>

Gálvez, L. (2013). *De la tierra sin mal al paraíso: Guaraníes y Jesuitas*. Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial Argentina.

Gawron-Gzella, A., Chanaj-Kaczmarek, J., Cielecka-Piontek, J. (2021). Yerba Mate—A Long but Current History. Bordoni, A. (Ed.) *Nutrients*, 13(11). DOI: [10.3390/nu13113706](https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13113706)

Glotfelty, C., Armbruster, K., Lynch, T. (2012). Introduction. *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place*. (pp.1-18). The University of Georgia Press.

Gomez, M. (2022). (Yerba) mate is bittersweet: Narrating the power, silences and changes of history. *York University*.

Grela, I. (2018, April 11). Yerba Mate: the Spirit of Uruguay lives in UPM Forestal Oriental’s natural forests. *UPM Pulp*. <https://www.upmpulp.com/news-and-materials/blogs-and-stories/ivan-grela/yerba-mate-the-spirit-of-uruguay-lives-in-upm-forestal-orientals-natural-forests/>

Guayakí Yerba Mate (2023). *Our Vision*. Guayakí. <https://guayaki.com/our-vision/>

Hanh, T. N. (2019). *At Home in the World*. Parallax Press.

- Hanh, T. N. (2021). *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet*. HarperCollins.
- Hennessy, E. (2019, December 16). What is land? A Conversation with Tania Murray Li, Rafael Marquese, and Monica White. *Edge Effects*. <https://edgeeffects.net/land-plantationocene/>
- How to sweeten your yerba mate*. (n.d.) Taragui. <https://www.taragui.com/en/discover/how-to/how-to-sweeten-your-yerba-mate>
- Isondú. (2015). *Barbacuá System*. Isondú Yerba Mate. <https://isondu.com.ar/en/barbacua-system/>
- International Agency for Research on Cancer. (1991). Theobromine. *IARC Monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risks to Humans*, 51(1). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507032/>
- International Agency for Research on Cancer. (1991). Theophylline. *IARC Monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risks to Humans*, 51(1). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507021/>
- INYM (n.d.) *Historia*. Instituto Nacional de la Yerba Mate. <https://inym.org.ar/historia.html>
- Jamieson, R. The Essence of commodification: caffeine dependencies in the modern world. *Journal of Social History*, 35(2), 269-294.
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2002). Weaving Traditional Ecological Knowledge into Biological Education: A Call to Action. *Bioscience*, 52(5), 432-438. <https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/52/5/432/236145>
- Kimmerer, R.W. (2020). *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Milkweed Editions.
- Lohman, L. (n.d.) Material & Non-Material Culture: Facts, Creations, and Beliefs. *Study.com*. <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-culture-material-and-nonmaterial-culture.html>
- Marchese, D. (2023, January 29). You Don't Have to be Complicity in our Culture of Destruction. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/01/30/magazine/robin-wall-kimmerer-interview.html>
- Martens, R. L. & Robertson, B. (2019, March 28). How the Soil Remembers Plantation History. *Edge Effects*. <https://edgeeffects.net/soil-memory-plantationocene/>
- Martínez-Pinilla, E., Oñatibia-Astibia, A., Franco, R. (2015). The relevance of theobromine for the beneficial effects of cocoa consumption. *Frontiers in Pharmacology*, 30(6). DOI: [10.3389/fphar.2015.00030](https://doi.org/10.3389/fphar.2015.00030)



- Medina, R. D., & Burgos, A. M. (2017). Sistemática y Morfología. In P. L. Capellari & R. D. Medina (Eds.), *Yerba Mate: Reseña Histórica y Estadística, Producción e Industrialización en el siglo XXI*. (pp. 37-55). Consejo Federal de Inversiones.
- Mitman, G. (2019, June 18). Reflection on the Plantationocene: A Conversation with Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing. *Edge Effects*. <https://edgeeffects.net/haraway-tsing-plantationocene/>
- Montagnini, F., Eibl, B. I., Barth, S. R. (2011). Organic yerba mate: an environmentally, socially, and financially suitable agroforestry system. *Bois et Forêts Des Tropiques*, 308(2). <https://drflorenciamontagnini.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/organicyerbamate-agroforestrybft-2011.pdf>
- Nimmo, E. & Nogueira, J. (2019). Creating hybrid scientific knowledge and practice: the Jesuit and Guaraní cultivation of yerba mate. *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 44(3), 347-367. DOI: 10.1080/08263663.2019.1652018
- Noticias Del Mate. (2022). *¿Qué es el estacionamiento de la yerba mate? ¿Para qué sirve?* Noticias Del Mate. <https://noticiasdeltmate.com/que-es-el-estacionamiento-de-la-yerba-mate-para-que-sirve/>
- O'Neill, J. et al. (2008). *Environmental Values*. Routledge.
- Oquendo, C. B. (2016, July 12). Trabajo Infantil: el trago amargo del mate, la bebida nacional argentina. *BBC Mundo*. [https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-36644713?utm\\_source=change\\_org&utm\\_medium=petition](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-36644713?utm_source=change_org&utm_medium=petition)
- PBS (n.d.) *The Rise of American Consumerism*. PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/tupperware-consumer/>
- Paddison, L. (2023, March 15). 'Endless, brutal heat': Argentina's late-season heatwave has 'no similarities in history.' *CNN*. [https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/15/americas/argentina-record-heatwave-climate-intl/index.html?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_term=link&utm\\_content=2023-03-15T22%3A00%3A16&utm\\_source=twCNNi](https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/15/americas/argentina-record-heatwave-climate-intl/index.html?utm_medium=social&utm_term=link&utm_content=2023-03-15T22%3A00%3A16&utm_source=twCNNi)
- PARAGUAY: On the origins of mate*. (2021). EarthStoriez. <https://earthstoriez.com/legend-mate/>
- Pierson, D. & Su, A. (2021, November 10). Supply Chain Crisis gives once invisible shipping industry record profits and adversaries. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-11-10/china-global-shipping-supply-chain-crisis>
- Posibl. (2015, July 9). *Me Gusta el Mate sin Trabajo Infantil – Documental* [Video]. Youtube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KaDL\\_aaH\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KaDL_aaH_A)

- Sigal, L. (2022, February 18). Argentina fires rage on in Corrientes, burning an important wetland. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/argentina-fires-rage-corrientes-burning-an-important-wetland-2022-02-18/>
- Smith, F. (2014). Exploring Fair Trade Yerba Mate Networks in Misiones, Argentina. *University of Miami*.  
[https://scholarship.miami.edu/discovery/fulldisplay/alma991031447938602976/01UO ML\\_INST:ResearchR epository](https://scholarship.miami.edu/discovery/fulldisplay/alma991031447938602976/01UO ML_INST:ResearchR epository)
- Steger, M. B. (2003). *Globalization: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- The History and Traditions of Yerba Mate in Lebanon and Syria*. (n.d.) Matero.  
<https://yerbamatero.com/blogs/history/history-traditions-yerba-mate-lebanon-syria>
- Tsing, A. L. (2015). *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton University Press.
- UNL. (2011). *La Mateína no existe*. Universidad Nacional del Litoral Noticias.  
[https://www.unl.edu.ar/noticias/leer/8809/La\\_mateina\\_no\\_existe.html#.ZBYvjS1h2u5](https://www.unl.edu.ar/noticias/leer/8809/La_mateina_no_existe.html#.ZBYvjS1h2u5)
- What is the Environmental Humanities?* (n.d.). The Environmental Humanities at UCLA.  
[http://environmental.humanities.ucla.edu/?page\\_id=52](http://environmental.humanities.ucla.edu/?page_id=52)
- Wagner, J. (2022, December 13). What's Powering Argentina at the World Cup? 1,100 Pounds of Yerba Mate. *New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/13/sports/soccer/argentina-yerba-mate.html>
- Yachak Organic (n.d.). *Yerba Mate*. Yachak. <https://www.yachak.com/yerba-mate/>
- Yerba Mate La Merced. (2022). *Conoce Los Detalles*. Yerba Mate La Merced.  
<https://www.yerbalamerced.com.ar>

## APPENDIX A

### Translations of Guaraní Words in Chapter 2 Illustration

**ananá:** pineapple

**arai:** cloud

**ary:** year

**atōiha:** musician

**Avañe'ẽ:** Guaraní (language)

**caá:** plant

**carpincho:** capybara

**echa:** to see

**gua:** from, originating from

**guépa:** an exclamation

**guerova:** to move, to lead to, to transfer

**guilili:** murmur, bubble (of water)

**ha:** and; but

**haitypo:** to nest

**havi'u:** caress

**he'emby:** bitter

**hendu:** to listen, to hear

**henyhemba:** complete

**hesayva:** sorrowful

**hípa:** what a shame!

**ho jey:** to return

**hovyū:** green

**ipoty:** flower

**irū:** friend, companion

**itakandua:** iron

**jedesouliga:** to give birth

**jerombyasy:** compassion

**ka'aguy:** forest, woods

**kuarahy:** sun

**kuarepoti:** iron

**kypy'y:** sister

**kyvy:** brother

**mborayhu:** love

**ñoty:** plant

**oga:** home

**ogapegua:** household

**po:** hand

**pu:** sound  
**py'a:** stomach  
**pytā:** red  
**so'o:** meat  
**sy:** mother  
**ta'yi:** bird  
**tata:** fire  
**tatatī:** smoke  
**teko:** the environment  
**tekove:** person  
**tesa:** eye  
**Tupá:** God  
**túva:** father  
**y:** water  
**Yari:** Moon Goddess  
**ypykue:** indigenous  
**ytovorō:** waterfall  
**yvy:** earth  
**yvyra:** tree  
**yvytu:** wind

# HOW TO CURE A MATE

ACCORDING TO MATEMIJO



1. Fill your mate with water, leave it for a few seconds and then empty it
2. Rinse your mate with room temperature water
3. Fill your mate with moist yerba and some room temp water
4. Leave the yerba to rest in your mate for one day
5. Empty out the yerba and and rinse your mate
6. Huzzah! you've successfully cured your mate

