

# **Colonia Finlandesa**

*The Second Ship,  
The Rise and Fall of a Finnish Colony  
in Northeast Argentina and  
The Spread of Anomie*

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is twofold: a) with the help of new empirical data from the Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos (CEMLA) immigrant digital database in Buenos Aires, offer a comprehensive picture of the composition of the first Finns that founded Colonia Finlandesa in 1906; and b) study the environmental, economic and social impact that caused the demise of the Finnish colony in northeast Argentina as well as how anomie subsequently spread.

One of the biggest discoveries that the CEMLA database revealed is that Colonia Finlandesa's founder, Arthur Thesleff, travelled on two ships to Argentina instead of one as previously thought. The thesis will analyse the new empirical data and compare it with existing research by the late historian Olavi Lähteenmäki.

The economic failure of the colony, due mainly to self-inflicted environmental destruction and volatile agriculture commodity prices, had a severe impact on the small Finnish colony. While there are generous amounts of accounts in the oral histories and in my field notes that reveal that some colonists saw alcohol consumption as a problem of Colonia Finlandesa, we have not understood yet its role or how widespread it was. In studying this aspect of the former colony, Finnish values such as cleanliness-tidiness and norms on drinking played important roles in demarcating the marginal, or the non-anomics from anomics.

When did anomie, or a state of social disorganisation described by Emile Durkheim, begin to spread at Colonia Finlandesa and which families were inflicted by it? Who were the anomics and non-anomics? While these are interesting research questions to resolve, part of the answer has been unfortunately lost to time. However, if historical material and oral histories are anything to go by, we can still rescue a lot of information about the challenges and what inflicted the small Finnish community in Argentina

**KEY WORDS:** Colonisation, immigration, anomie, alcohol, cleanliness, racial stereotypes.

## Research Questions

1. The thesis will attempt to address the following questions about Colonia Finlandesa:
2. What was the composition of the first group of Finns that founded Colonia Finlandesa in 1906? How many ships brought them to Argentina?
3. What are the discrepancies between CEMLA and Olavi Lähteenmäki's findings?
4. What were the main environmental, economic and social factors that impacted Colonia Finlandesa and caused its irreversible demise?
5. Why and when did anomie spread at the Finnish colony?
6. What role did cleanliness-tidiness play at Colonia Finlandesa?
7. What roles did alcohol and racial stereotypes play?

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# 1. Introduction

A lot has been written in Finland about Colonia Finlandesa since it was founded in July 1906 in the northeast Argentinean province of Misiones. Despite its small size, the former colony has attracted a lot of interest from writers such as Olavi Paavolainen,<sup>1</sup> historians Olavi Lähteenmäki<sup>2</sup>, Olavi Koivukangas,<sup>3</sup> as well as scores of journalists and curious visitors.

The colony's founder, Arthur Thesleff, was an amateur ethnographer-linguist born in 1871 who never gained academic recognition for his work on the Roma. Before 1906, he studied the Finnish Kaale Roma and was appointed to a government commission to study "the Gypsy Problem in Finland."<sup>4</sup> In 1893 he published a guide to edible mushrooms in Finland. One of his favourite pastime passions was travel literature. Gunilla Lundgren wrote, "His dreams filled him so totally, that his friends nicknamed him 'Madagascar.' Later he was given other nicknames such as 'Mushroom-Thesleff' and 'The Gypsy Baron.'"<sup>5</sup>

Thesleff envisioned Colonia Finlandesa becoming a Finnish settlement comprising of as many as 2,500 families and that its inhabitants would become rich in 20 years.<sup>6</sup> He believed that establishing a colony in Misiones was a unique undertaking in all of history because it was going to be founded by "civilised and highly educated people."<sup>7</sup> However, the first group, comprising of about 145 Swedish-speaking Finns and 8 Swedes, was the first and last large group to settle the colony.

Why has Colonia Finlandesa attracted so much interest? Possibly it continues to symbolise for some of us a romantic perception of Finns living in a subtropical community, where summers are eternal offering a Russean perception of freedom, where society could exist without the state watching over it. From the colony's historic literature and oral accounts I have collected through fieldwork, it becomes clear that Colonia Finlandesa was far from being a paradise. For some, life at the colony was riddled with hardships, even abject poverty for some families.

Colonia Finlandesa not only offers an opportunity to acquaint ourselves with the life and death of a fascinating Finnish settlement in subtropical Misiones that started its irreversible decline in the 1930s, it also gives us an opportunity to study how a small community of Finns survived in a diverse social and geographic environment. One matter that characterised the colony, and which is impossible to avoid in some of the oral histories, is the widespread use of alcohol.

Emile Durkheim started to study anomie at the end of the 19th century.<sup>8</sup> In general terms, anomie is a state of social disorganisation whereby society loses its ability to guide its members towards a

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<sup>1</sup> Olavi Paavolainen: *Lähtö ja loitsu*, kirja suuresta levottomuudesta. Gummerus. Jyväskylä 1937.

<sup>2</sup> Olavi Lähteenmäki: *Colonia Finlandesa Uudessa Suomen perustaminen Argentiinan 1900-luvun alussa*. SHS. Helsinki 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Olavi Koivukangas: *Kaukomaiden Kaipuu*. Siirtolaisuusinstituutti. Turku 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Gunilla Lundgren: *The blond bandit Arthur Thesleff*. Committed scholarship in early Finnish Romani Studies and today. Thomas Acton (ed.), *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies*. University of Hertfordshire Press 2000. Printed handout, pp. 1 & 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Paavolainen, p. 300.

<sup>7</sup> Lähteenmäki, p. 117.

<sup>8</sup> Emile Durkheim: *Suicide – a study in sociology*. The Free Press. New York. 1979.

collective goal. In the case of Colonia Finlandesa, anomie could be pictured as a jeep that swerved off the road thousand of kilometres from Finland and got stuck permanently in a ditch. At the beginning, everybody tried to pull the vehicle back on the road. After many futile attempts, some lost hope and these became the anomics.<sup>9</sup> Contrarily, the ones who did not give up, or the non-anomic group, never gave up trying even if they knew they would not succeed. Admitting defeat would have meant joining the anomics.

My interest in Colonia Finlandesa stems from my Finnish and Argentinean backgrounds. When I grew up in Los Angeles, California, I never imagined that there existed a Finnish colony in Argentina. Thanks to some of the children and grandchildren that I met during fieldwork, my sense of cultural isolation ended thanks to them. For this I am eternally grateful.

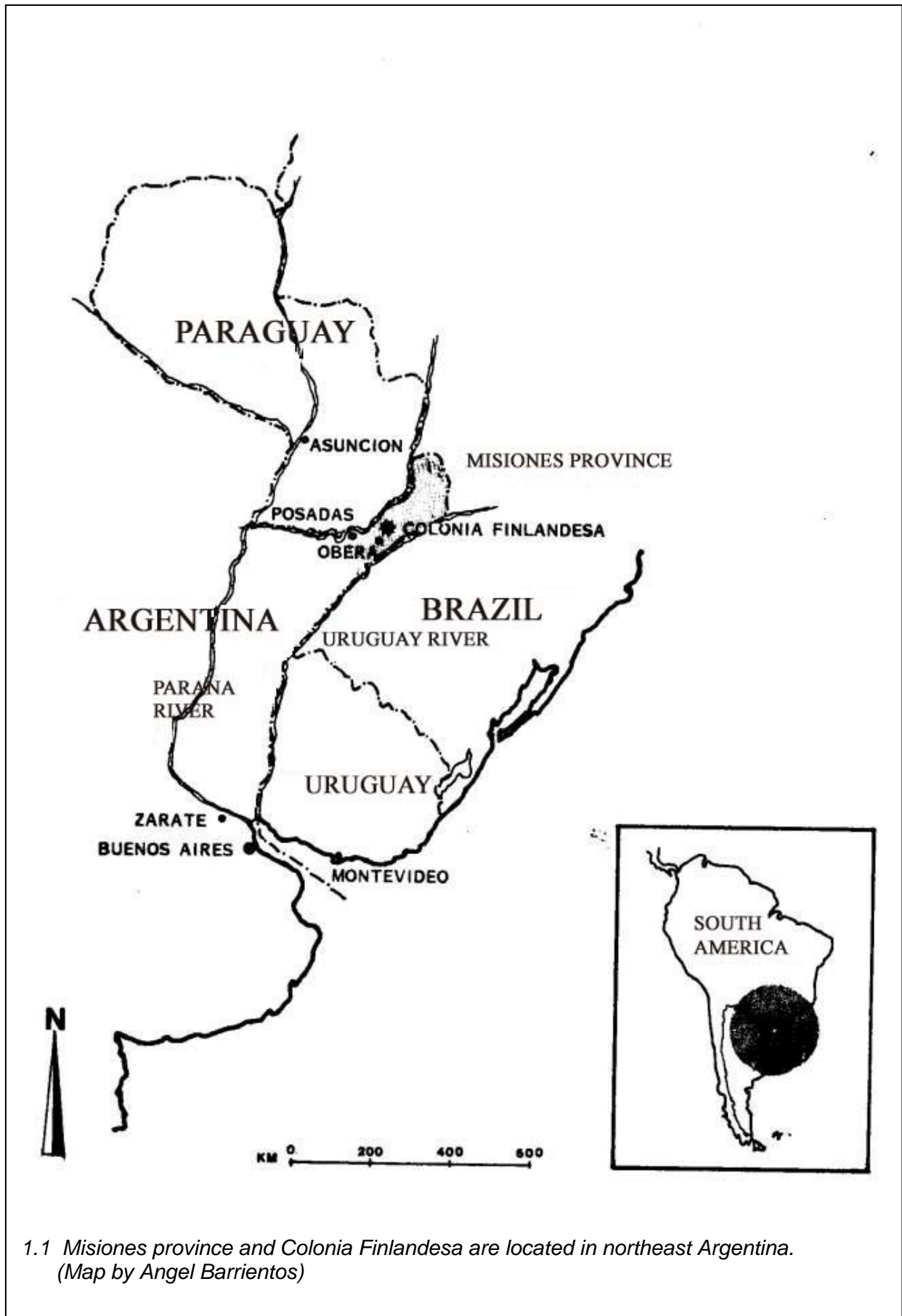
When I started doing fieldwork on the colony in July 1977 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, some of the first-generation settlers I met were already well in their 70s and 80s. Colonia Finlandesa, which was at the time a very dispersed community numbering under 100 Finns and their descendants, had shrunk considerably from the early 1930s, when it may have comprised of about 400 inhabitants. The latter figure includes settlers that lived in the adjacent municipalities of San Martín, Mártires, Almafuerite, and Caa-Yarí.

If I had had to rely exclusively on fieldwork and oral histories I collected during 1977-78, my findings would be different from today thanks to new sociological-anthropological research. Apart from the work of sociological classics such as Durkheim as well as those by anthropologists Mary Douglas and Dwight B. Heath, have helped me gain a better grasp of the roles of alcohol and cleanliness-dirt. My thesis will also look at the role racial stereotypes played at the small Finnish community.

Thanks to the CEMLA electronic database of Buenos Aires in Argentina, it is possible today to get a comprehensive view of the names, numbers, ages, professions of the first group as well as the ships they travelled on to found Colonia Finlandesa, Latin America's biggest and first permanent Finnish colony.

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<sup>9</sup> Some like Maire Ida Elin Lemmetyinen said that many of the people that lived at Colonia Finlandesa lived in a sort of limbo, or their lives "had no aspirations."



1.1 Misiones province and Colonia Finlandesa are located in northeast Argentina.  
(Map by Angel Barrientos)

## 2. A Background of Colonia Finlandesa to 1950

### 2.1 The first steps

Colonia Finlandesa's long and winding path to fruition started in 1889. In the spring of that year, the colony's mentor, Konni Zilliacus, sailed from Finland to New York to study the plight of Finnish immigrants in the United States. The journey lasted four years and included visits by Zilliacus to Costa Rica and other Central American countries.

In a book published by Herman Gummerus in 1933 about Zilliacus,<sup>10</sup> the publisher wrote that the then 33-year-old writer and steadfast champion of Finnish independence from Russia felt embittered as he sailed from Helsinki to the United States. Zilliacus wrote 21 years later, in *Vandringsår* (1920), that the main reason why he left Finland was because his life had reached a dead end and had become untenable.<sup>11</sup>

During the years he spent in the United States, Zilliacus wrote over 50 articles for the Swedish-language daily *Hufvudstadsbladet*.<sup>12</sup> Only a few of these, however, were on Finnish immigrants. One important conclusion he made while living abroad was that the United States was not a good country for Finnish immigrants. Zilliacus felt that the best way to help his countrymen, and ensure they would return back to Finland, was to direct them to economically suitable places<sup>13</sup> such as tropical regions.<sup>14</sup>

With the imposition of the February Manifest by the Russian Empire, which launched in 1899 the much-dreaded Russification era that put in jeopardy Finland's autonomy, Zilliacus' idea of directing immigrants to suitable regions took on new life. The main idea behind such a plan was to direct especially Finnish political exiles of Russification to a "New Finland"-type colony, which would serve as a temporary refuge for these activists.<sup>15</sup> While Zilliacus favoured Canada as a suitable country to establish such a colony, Eero Erkkö wanted it to be founded in Cuba.<sup>16</sup> Even Iceland offered its desolate landscapes for such a colony, but the group did not consider it a serious option.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Herman Gummerus: Konni Zilliacus – Suomen itsenäisyyden esitaistelija. Gummerus. Jyväskylä 1933.

<sup>11</sup> Lähteenmäki, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-58. See also Ritva Jarva: Cuba – "Paradise" for Finns. Publication no. 3. Publications of the Institute of General History University of Turku. Vilho Niitemaa (ed.). Turku 1971. pp. 23-38.

<sup>17</sup> Lähteenmäki, p. 57.

By spring 1903, the political situation in Finland had worsened, when Russian Governor-General Nikolai Bobrikov was given dictatorial powers to impose Russification policies in Finland such as conscription in the Russian Imperial Army.<sup>18</sup>

Argentina came into the picture at about the turn of 1904 when Zilliacus' followers met in Stockholm with John Gustaf Högberg, an Argentinean immigration representative. The Swedish Argentinean had been sent by his government to Sweden to promote immigration to areas such as Patagonia, located in the extreme south of the South American country.<sup>19</sup>

Together with Högberg, Zilliacus' followers such as Thesleff travelled in October 1904 on a government-sponsored fact-finding mission to Argentina with Per Dusén, Ernst Arell and Carl J. Mystén, who had studied in 1899 a suitable country to establish the "New Finland" colony.<sup>20</sup> The only Finnish national of the fact-finding mission was Thesleff.<sup>21</sup> At the time of their departure, the political climate in Finland continued to be bleak due to Russification.<sup>22</sup>

Expectations by the Argentinean government that Nordic nationals would be well suited to settle Patagonia's harsh climate and terrain were not well founded. Anyone who has travelled to Santa Cruz in southern Patagonia, is immediately struck by its immense bareness and arid landscapes that are only suitable for sheep farming. I visited Santa Cruz in 1988 and travelled to a former sheep farm called Estancia Helsingfors, founded in the 1910s by Alfred Ramström on the shores of Lake Viedma. The Siuntio-born Swedish Finn travelled with Thesleff in 1906 to found Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>23</sup>

Lähteenmäki's post-mortem book, *Colonia Finlandesa – Uuden Suomen perustaminen Argentiinaan 1900-luvun alussa*, expresses surprise why Thesleff had chosen to go to Misiones after Patagonia, since both regions were so geographically distinct. Was going to Misiones such a surprise? Why would a group of Finns want to move from one cold country to another? The Argentinean government's plan to settle so-called well-suited Finns to inhospitable far-flung areas such as Patagonia were based more on naïve cultural knowledge of Nordics than anything else. After seeing so much desolation in Patagonia, Misiones' lush untouched Atlantic Rainforest landscapes must have been a comforting sight to Thesleff.<sup>24</sup>

Interest in establishing a colony in Argentina hinged closely on the political climate in Finland. When Thesleff returned from Argentina in early December 1905, the situation in Finland had changed considerably. On June 16, 1904, a student called Eugen Schauman had assassinated Governor-General Nikolai Bobrikov.<sup>25</sup> Russia's grip on Finland had been further undermined by its

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p58. See also Eino Jutikkala and Kauko Pirinen: A History of Finland. Praeger Publishers. New York 1974. p. 238-239.

<sup>19</sup> Lähteenmäki, pp. 80-81.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-96

<sup>23</sup> Enrique Tessieri: Viimeisiä suomalaista etsimässä. Apu 33, Aug. 19, 1988. pp. 42-47. For a general account on the settlers that inhabited Santa Cruz and the Lake Viedma region see Andreas Madsen: La Patagonia vieja. Editorial Galerna. Buenos Aires, 1975.

<sup>24</sup> This is confirmed by T.Z Sulín. Suomalainen siirtokunta Misiones'issa. Suomen silta No 1, 1952. p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Jutikkala and Pirinen, p. 239

defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), and the General Strike of November 1905, which helped abolish conscription and curbs on political activity.<sup>26</sup>

Despite Finland's brighter political prospects at the end of 1905, Thesleff was determined to move ahead with plans to establish the Finnish colony in Misiones. He felt that the promises he had obtained from the Argentinean authorities were too good to pass by.<sup>27</sup>

### **2.1.1 Argentina: "To govern is to populate"**

The famous phrase coined by Juan Bautista Alberdi, one of Argentina's greatest statesmen, sums up the demographic and economic challenges that Argentina faced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Alberdi, Argentina would never become a developed and prosperous nation as long as it had a population of one million in a country that could comfortably house 50 million people.<sup>28</sup>

When he published in 1852 his most famous work, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina*, the country had endured over three centuries of Spanish rule and suffered from decades of feuding between two rival political factions: the Federalists and Unitarians, which wanted power to be concentrated in the capital Buenos Aires. Argentina had also seen the violent overthrow of Federalist President Juan Manuel de Rosas, who had ruled the country during two terms: 1829-32 and 1835-52. As many brilliant Argentinean political minds of those times, opposition to Rosas' policies meant that Alberdi had to go into exile in Uruguay and Chile.<sup>29</sup>

Alberdi's most famous book laid the groundwork for Argentina's 1853 constitution that openly encouraged immigration after Rosas was forced to flee the country. Argentina's population started to grow from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century thanks to a favourable policy that promoted and encouraged immigration. During 1881-1914, over 4.2 million immigrants moved to Argentina. The majority of these were Italians (2 million), followed by Spaniards (1.4 million), French (170,000) and Russian nationals (160,000).<sup>30</sup> During this period, Argentina was the most popular destination for European immigrants after the United States.<sup>31</sup> Were there Finns that were registered as Russian nationals during the above-mentioned period? While this is a difficult question to answer, and if there some who were registered as Russian nationals, there numbers must have been very small taking into account that only 230 Finns are registered in the CEMLA database during 1882-1919.

Argentina's first census of 1869 showed that 12.1% (210,000) of the country's total population of 1.527 million was made up of foreigners. The census of 1895 and 1914, however, helped the country's population to jump to 2.948 million and to 5.527 million, respectively. The proportion of

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<sup>26</sup> Lähtenmäki, p. 107

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 109

<sup>28</sup> Juan Bautista Alberdi: *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina*. Editorial Plus Ultra. Buenos Aires 1974. p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> Harold Eugene Davis: Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Americanist*. Journal of Inter-American Studies, Vol. 4, No. 1. (Jan., 1962), p. 62.

<sup>30</sup> Fernando Devoto: *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina*. Editorial Sudamericana. Buenos Aires 2004 (second edition).p 247

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

foreigners to natives in the 1895 census was 25.5% (1.007 million), while in 1914 it had risen to 30.3% (2.358 million). In 1914, 49.4% of Buenos Aires' population was foreign-born.<sup>32</sup>

### **2.1.2 Argentina in the early 20th century**

Argentina's economy was experiencing rapid expansion at the time when Colonia Finlandesa was founded in 1906.<sup>33</sup> Some economists compared Argentina's economy with Australia and Canada. These latter two countries also attracted large numbers of European immigrants. Some characteristics that made the three countries similar to each other was that they were large nations and sparsely populated. They also had lots of open plains for growing agricultural cash crops such as grains.

Even though the economic future looked promising for Argentina up to the early 1910s, the country's economy did not grow in lockstep with Australia and Canada. The reasons behind Argentina's failure to become a regional economic powerhouse are today a much-debated topic among historians, political scientists and economists.

Alan M. Taylor believes that the decline of Argentina's economy began as early as in 1913, when it got the closest to becoming an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country.<sup>34</sup> The economist argues that compared with Australia and Canada, Argentina's economy went into steady decline in the past century due to its heavy reliance on external capital, high birth rates and immigration, which gave the country a sizeable young population he calls "dis-savers,"<sup>35</sup> or people who did not consume.

Even so, from Thesleff's perspective in 1904-05, everything pointed towards Argentina becoming an economically prosperous nation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **2.2 The first European settlers of Misiones**

The first European settlements of Misiones were the Jesuits. Eleven of the 30 missions the Jesuits established between 1609-1707 were located in Misiones, with the remainder being in Paraguay and Brazil. After the Jesuits got expelled from Brazil in 1759 by the Portuguese crown, and from lands under Spain's jurisdiction in 1767, European interest in Misiones waned.<sup>36</sup>

After some unsuccessful attempts at colonising Misiones after the Triple Alliance War (1865-1870), when Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay were at war with Paraguay, the biggest hurdle to colonise the region by the federal government in Buenos Aires was Corrientes province. Misiones formed part

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<sup>32</sup> INDEC (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos): Anuario estadístico de la República Argentina 1973 pp. 82-83.

<sup>33</sup> Alan M. Taylor: *Eternal Dependence, Demographic Burdens, and Argentine Economic Decline After the Belle Époque*. *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol 52, No.4 (Dec. 1992). p. 912-914.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 911.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 929. A "dis-saver" is a young person who didn't contribute to domestic capital or savings. Taylor states that the lack of domestic capital made Argentina dependent on external foreign capital.

<sup>36</sup> Robert C. Eidt: *Pioneer Settlement in Northeast Argentina*. The University of Wisconsin Press. Madison, Wisconsin 1971. p 7



of Corrientes province until 1884, when it became a national territory.<sup>37</sup> At first the federal government attempted to lure with the help of cheap land Argentinean farmers to Misiones. When this failed, it turned to European settlers.<sup>38</sup>

Government-sponsored colonisation-promotion campaigns to Misiones had helped attract in the late 19th century Poles, Ukrainians and 12,000 landless German Brazilians.<sup>39</sup> By 1903, there were a total of 2,045 foreign families living in Misiones. The biggest group were the Poles, with 810 families, followed by Brazilians (502), Argentineans (311), Paraguayans (116), Italians (72), Russians (70), Germans (59), Spaniards (38), French (30) and Swedes (15).<sup>40</sup> While some sources claim that Misiones' population in 1889 totalled 30,000 people,<sup>41</sup> Robert Eidt estimates it to be about 2,000 in 1869, rising in 1884 to 9,000 inhabitants.<sup>42</sup>

Misiones gave a lot of advantages over southern Patagonia since its weather and flora offered good opportunities for planting cash crops such as tobacco. At the time, the federal government was also attempting to colonise other regions of the country such as La Pampa and Chaco, where it was flat, not so rainy nor "infested with poisonous snakes and innumerable biting insects."<sup>43</sup> The tobacco market was well developed in Argentina at the time and responsible for the federal government decreeing on October 3, 1895 that all landholdings in Misiones must be between 25 and 100 hectares. In these holdings, which were 50, 75 and 100 hectares in size, 4, 6 and 8 hectares of tobacco had to be planted, respectively.<sup>44</sup>

### **2.2.1 Finnish group settlement to Misiones**

One of the biggest challenges of researching Colonia Finlandesa in the past has been access to reliable databases. One of these that I discovered in August 2007 was CEMLA, which is based on passenger lists handed to immigration officials at the port of Buenos Aires.<sup>45</sup> Original passenger lists for ships such as the Frankfurt, operated by Norddeutscher Lloyd of Germany, and previously believed to be the only ship that brought Finns to Argentina in June 1906, had been destroyed during World War 2.<sup>46</sup> The original passenger lists of the Hamburg Süd-operated Cap Verde, the hitherto-unknown ship that brought the majority of Thesleff's group to Argentina, no longer exist as well.<sup>47</sup>

Like others historians at the time,<sup>48</sup> Lähteenmäki believed that the first Finns that settled Argentina sailed only on the Frankfurt from Bremen to Buenos Aires. The late historian did not access databases such as CEMLA since they were not at the time in electronic format, but preferred instead to rely

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<sup>37</sup> Misiones officially became a province in 1953.

<sup>38</sup> Eidt, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-93.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>41</sup> F. Latzina: *Geographie de la République Argentine*. Félix Lajouane. Buenos Aires 1890. p. 463. Eidt states that in 1869 the population of Misiones stood at 2,000.

<sup>42</sup> Eidt, p. 79.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>45</sup> Interview in autumn 2007 with CEMLA head of research Alicia Bernasconi.

<sup>46</sup> Telephone conversation with Reino Kero, Turku, October 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Telephone conversation with Thorsten Paschburg of Hamburg Süd, who said that they do not have passenger lists from 1906 because they were not kept on a systematic basis. He could not say if they were destroyed in World War 2.

<sup>48</sup> T.Z Sulín: *Suomalainen siirtokunta Misiones'issa*. Suomen silta No 1, 1952. p. 10.

solely on archival material in Finland and Sweden.<sup>49</sup> One of the first matters that the CEMLA database would have revealed to Lähteenmäki is that the Finns and a handful of Swedes sailed in May-June 1906 to Buenos Aires on two ships instead of one. The CEMLA database reveals that the majority (88) of the 112 passengers of the first group sailed on the Cap Verde, with the remaining 24 passengers, which comprised of women, children, and a handful of men like Thesleff and six Swedes, came on the Frankfurt. The Cap Verde docked at Buenos Aires on June 17, while the Frankfurt arrived 9 days later, on June 26.

Even though a total of 112 Finnish passengers travelled on both ships, the figure must be slightly higher since passengers such as Magnus Sand and a few others do not appear on the CEMLA lists.<sup>50</sup> Another big discrepancy between CEMLA and Lähteenmäki's findings is that there were no new Finnish arrivals to Buenos Aires in 1907.<sup>51</sup> The historian claims that a few Finns were still colonising the settlement during that year.<sup>52</sup>

While the CEMLA database is far from being a perfect source, it offers us information that was unknown to us about the settlers and on what ships they sailed on to Argentina. Apart from Buenos Aires, other ports of entries to the country in the early 20th century included Bahía Blanca and Rosario. Immigration lists from these ports have not yet been converted to electronic format.

## 2.3 What kind of a colony was Colonia Finlandesa?

There are basically two schools of thought over what type of a settlement Colonia Finlandesa was from an historic perspective. One group sees it founded on nationalism while another one considers it a utopian colony. Lähteenmäki's believed that Colonia Finlandesa was founded on nationalism, which is also a sort of utopian thought since it idealises one's own national group and the "purity" and "goodness" of its people over others. He bases his argument on one of the colony's key mentors, Rolf Lagerborg, who was not only critical of Russian but of Finnish encroachment on the Swedish-speaking minority of Finland. In the spring of 1905, Lagerborg wrote that Finland was "a country of darkness" and that its national culture was on a misguided path. "We Finnish-born Swedes, who from olden times have been the fertile ground of culture, are losing space, being set aside and separated from the whole picture," he wrote. "We Finnish-born Swedes, who forge culture, are becoming ever more estranged from our own homeland..."<sup>53</sup>

Teuvo Peltoniemi published in 1985 a book on Finnish utopian settlements, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, in which Colonia Finlandesa is included.<sup>54</sup> He wrote that, "This is a book about those brave Finns whose ideals were so high, and hope for a better world so strong, that they dared to turn these ideals into reality even in Africa or in the jungles of South America."<sup>55</sup>

Certainly there is a very good case that Colonia Finlandesa was founded on utopian values since it was, like Matti Kurikka's Sointula established in 1901 in British Columbia, based on idealism,

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<sup>49</sup> Lähteenmäki, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> Enrique Tessieri's field notes 1977-1978.

<sup>51</sup> See CEMLA list for 1906-1908.

<sup>52</sup> Lähteenmäki, pp. 139-141

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>54</sup> Teuvo Peltoniemi: *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*. Otava. Keuruu 1985. pp. 160-181.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

enthusiasm and great hope. Another similarity between Colonia Finlandesa and Sointula was that they were founded by charismatic leaders such as Kurikka and Thesleff.

If there were similarities, there are also differences between both colonies. While Sointula's population mainly comprised of Finnish speakers, the first colonists of Colonia Finlandesa were mostly Swedish-speaking Finns. Contrary to Sointula, which sought social equality for its inhabitants through ideals such as free love,<sup>56</sup> Colonia Finlandesa promised its settlers that they would become rich in 20 years. If there was a case for Colonia Finlandesa being founded either on nationalism or utopian principles, there is probably a stronger one for utopia. If the colony was established to further the cause of Swedish nationalism, why didn't the settlers ever build a school or other institutions that advanced the cause of Swedish-Finnish culture? Certainly the original aim of the colony received a hard blow since two thirds of its settlers and leader Thesleff had abandoned the colony by 1909.

During the first decades of its founding, Colonia Finlandesa must have been a comforting sight for many Finns that visited it since it was a small Finnish community faraway from home. Part of Colonia Finlandesa's charm resides in its natural beauty. Fanny Lepistö, whom I interviewed in 1977 and 1978, moved to the colony in 1914. At the age of 81 she claimed that Thesleff's lack of knowledge of the Spanish language caused him to be misguided and settle an area where the land was poor for farming. Even so, Lepistö claimed that these first settlers fell in love with Colonia Finlandesa because "it was just like Finland."<sup>57</sup>

Lepistö was not the only settler who compared Colonia Finlandesa's rolling lush subtropical landscape with Finland. T.Z. Sulín, who travelled with Thesleff to Misiones in 1906, wrote that the landscape was a subtropical copy of Finland. "...he (Thesleff) presumed that Finnish settlers would adapt well to this landscape because it reminded them of Finland."<sup>58</sup>

Colonia Finlandesa's natural beauty has been cited in numerous articles and observed by the first settlers.<sup>59</sup> V. Lunnasvaara pictured the Finnish colony in the following words in an article published in 1932. "Every day there is movement and life in the jungle. Monkeys and squirrels have fun in the shelter of the foliage and butterflies, as well as hummingbirds, compete with their colours with the flowers. The majestic condors floating high above, or hawks resting on dead branches; parrots, toucans, magpies among other countless masters of music, ensure that one does not feel alone..."<sup>60</sup>

Paavolainen wrote his impressions of the colony in 1937. "But why do we feverishly think about becoming rich? The absurdity of the white race's 'vigour' has already destroyed lots of virgin land. Those ten days I spent in Misiones' unselfish and indolent atmosphere were the happiest (of my life)."<sup>61</sup>

Initial impressions can be deceiving as Artturi Heino pointed out to me in 1983. "With Jukka Hyvärinen we went there for the first time in September 1933... In my opinion, the colony was a beautiful place and I was satisfied with what I saw. To be frank, I fell in love with the people. I thought they were totally free and could go to work whenever they pleased. I did not know back

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> Tessieri's field notes, June 10, 1978.

<sup>58</sup> Sulín, p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Lähteenmäki, p. 178.

<sup>60</sup> Lunnasvaara: Colonia Finlandesa. Misioneksen suomalaissiirtola. Terra. Suomen Maantieteellisen Seura aikakauskirja 1932, pp. 20-21.

<sup>61</sup> Paavolainen, p. 321.

then how hard their lives were. All I could do was envy them.”<sup>62</sup> He also admitted that moving to Colonia Finlandesa was a mistake. “I never told this to anyone, but the biggest mistake I made in my life was when I decided to live in (Colonia Finlandesa) Misiones. Back then I could have still got a job with the Finnish Railways. I could have enjoyed holidays and wait for my retirement and then rest eternally under soil. At least I would have had enough money to pay for my funeral.”<sup>63</sup>

One of the reasons why some of the first settlers of 1906 did not abandon Colonia Finlandesa was because they were broke.<sup>64</sup> Johan Edward Jansson, an agronomist, was one of 1906 settler that could not return to Finland because he had allegedly been involved in financial graft.<sup>65</sup> His father, a high-ranking civil servant, gave him two choices: Be sent to Siberia or go to Argentina. Before moving to Argentina, Jansson signed an agreement whereby he forfeited his right to an inheritance. In return, he got money for the journey to Argentina and to buy a farm in Misiones.<sup>66</sup>

## 2.4 Growth and irreversible demise

For many of the first settlers, it became rapidly clear that taming Colonia Finlandesa was not going to be easy. Apart from the strenuous work of clearing dense jungle land for farming, Thesleff’s group faced numerous setbacks. Apart from the shock of living and struggling to survive in a very different environment from Finland, the colonists suffered during their first year from a severe drought that caused forest fires; a rare invasion of locusts that had also devastated their crops.<sup>67</sup> The hardships that the settlers endured were played down in a news story published on October 15, 1906 in Buenos Aires daily *La Prensa*. Misiones Governor Manuel Bermúdez disclaimed rumours that the Finnish colonists had disbanded. He said that “not even 5%” of them had abandoned the colony.<sup>68</sup>

The number of the first group of Finns, which totalled about 145 settlers, had shrunk by 1907 to 79 and by 1909 to 50-60 Finns.<sup>69</sup> Despite the sharp fall, enough of them remained at Colonia Finlandesa to attract new Finnish settlers. Some of these new Finns that arrived in the 1910s and 1920s came from neighbouring Brazil as well as directly from Finland through the port of Buenos Aires.

Janne and Hedvig Töllinoja de Niskanen was a couple that had walked in 1912 all the way from the Brazilian border town of Puerto Lucena in Rio Grande do Sul state to Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>70</sup> Their journey on foot was over 50km on the road that passed through Colonia Finlandesa to Yerbal Viejo,

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<sup>62</sup> Enrique Tessieri: *Kaukainen maani: Päätepysäkki Colonia Finlandesa*. WSOY. Juva 1986. p. 100.

<sup>63</sup> Enrique Tessieri: *Lejana tierra mía Conmemorando el centenario de la Colonia Finlandesa (1906-2006)*. Buenos Aires 2006. Chapter 1, p. 13.

<sup>64</sup> Holger M. Meding points out that some German colonists that moved to Misiones could not return to Germany because they lacked money for the return journey. This was one factor at Colonia Finlandesa. See Holger M. eding: *Etnicidad, entidades y migraciones de los colonos de habla alemana en Misiones*. Estudios Migratorios Latinomaericanos. Diciembre 1995. p. 734.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Lars-Erik Häggman, Espoo, November 9, 2007.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Lars-Erik Häggman, Espoo, November 9, 2007.

<sup>67</sup> See Eidt p. 102 & *La Prensa*, page 8 col. 3, November 27, 1906.

<sup>68</sup> *La Prensa*, page 7, col. 1, October 15, 1906.

<sup>69</sup> Lähteenmäki, pp. 205-206.

<sup>70</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 164 & pp. 35-41.

or modern Oberá.<sup>71</sup> At about 1911, Antti Laukkanen established Colonia Finlandesa's first post office and in the same decade its first store. Tobacco farming was the main cash crops of the settlers.

If there were an important decade when the colony saw its greatest growth, it was the 1920s. During that decade, Colonia Finlandesa's population reached its zenith thanks to about 35 people that arrived from Kitee.<sup>72</sup> The first inhabitant from Kitee to live at Colonia Finlandesa was Antti Lemmetyinen Sr. at about 1910. He was responsible for encouraging other families from his home village in eastern Finland to move to Misiones.

If Colonia Finlandesa and the surrounding municipalities of Caa-Yarí, Almafuerte, San Martín and Mártires are included, the number of Finns in the 1920s probably totalled about 400 people. Lunnasvaara estimated in the early 1930s that 300 Finns lived at the colony and surroundings. They were dispersed in the following manner: Colonia Finlandesa with 60 families (150 people), Mártires (40), and in Yermal Viejo (Oberá), with about 80.<sup>73</sup> Paavolainen, who visited the colony in the 1930s, estimated there were 300 Finns living in Misiones.<sup>74</sup> An article published by Erkki Kiviranta in 1939 estimates 50 families, or a total of about 350 people, lived at Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>75</sup> Contrarily, Lähteenmäki believes the colony's population in the 1930s numbered about 500 people.<sup>76</sup>

The biggest challenge in determining what was Colonia Finlandesa's population is the lack of reliable sources. From my own kinship data that I collected during 1977-78, there were from 65-75 families that lived at the colony during 1906 to the early 1930s. We do not know, however, how many of these remained at Colonia Finlandesa and for how long. But if both spouses were Finns, we would have 130-150 adults,<sup>77</sup> with the final tally hinging on the size of the families. If the average size of first-generation family was 1-2 children,<sup>78</sup> that would give us a total population of between 260 and 450 people living at Colonia Finlandesa and surroundings.

While there is evidence to suggest that Colonia Finlandesa's population reached its zenith in the 1920s or in the 1930s, it is debatable which of these decades housed the most settlers. I would argue that it was probably in the 1920s because in the following decade there were already signs that the colony's population was declining. Uno Hinkkala wrote in a short article in *Suomen Viesti*<sup>79</sup> of the 2-3 Finns that had succeeded at Colonia Finlandesa, 200-300 majority lived in "misery and deprivation." The Great Depression, greying of the population, natural deaths, abandonment and few new Finnish settlers were some factors that started to undermine Colonia Finlandesa's population in the 1930s.

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<sup>71</sup> Email from Alicia Valeria Druckmann, Caa-Yarí, Misiones, November 1, 2007. Druckmann's grandparents Aino and Eelis Lahti walked in 1910 with two other couples to Colonia Finlandesa from Puerto Lucena in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Liisa Makkonen, July 5, 2008.

<sup>73</sup> Lunnasvaara, pp. 6-7.

<sup>74</sup> Paavolainen, p. 310.

<sup>75</sup> Erkki Kiviranta: Suomalaisen siirtolaisen elämää Etelä-Amerikassa. (Radio programme presentation on 18.8.38). *Suomi Silta* April-June/1939. p 54.

<sup>76</sup> Olavi Lähteenmäki: Finnish Group Immigration to Latin America – Finnish Diaspora I: Canada, South America, Africa, Australia and Sweden, edited by Michael G. Karni. Canada 1981. p. 291.

<sup>77</sup> Kinship data collected in 1977-1978.

<sup>78</sup> Enrique Tessieri: The second generation Finns of Argentina: A process towards Argentinization. *Siirtolaisuus-Migration* 2/1979. p. 11.

<sup>79</sup> Uno Hintikka: Kokemuksia Argentinasta. *Suomen Viesti* 2/1929. p. 37. The article was reprinted in *Suomen Silta* 5/2002.

Apart from new settlers moving to the colony, two important events took place at Colonia Finlandesa during the 1920s. Its first elementary school (No. 73) opened its doors in 1922. Helga Niskanen was its first pupil and its first teacher was Alfredo Lépori. The overwhelming majority of the children that attended the school during the first year had Finnish surnames (20 pupils). That compared with 8 pupils that had Argentinean and/or Brazilian, 7 German, and 6 Swedish surnames.<sup>80</sup> Probably the most important collective achievement<sup>81</sup> of the Finnish colonists took place in 1924, when the Sociedad Finlandesa, The Finnish Association, inaugurated the opening of the *Seurantalo* hall. All types of important events such as marriages, masses and dances were held at the new hall.

The political situation in Argentina had also changed immensely from 1930. A military coup led by General Félix Uriburu had ousted in September civilian President Hipólito Yrigoyen from power. About 72 years had passed since a government in Argentina had been overthrown by force. This new era ushered in political instability that would characterize the country during the next 53 years.

After mainly growing tobacco during the first two-and-a-half decades after Colonia Finlandesa was founded, the colonists started to plant from about 1930 yerba mate (*Ilex paraguayensis*), which became their second important cash crop. Yerba mate is a tea widely consumed in Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and southern Brazil. While yerba mate may take as many as five years to grow before it can be harvested in places such as Colonia Finlandesa, it had many advantages over tobacco. One of the most important of these was that farmers did not have to deforest land every year.

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<sup>80</sup> Registro de Grado, Resumen General de la escuela infantil Núm. 73 de la Colonia Finlandesa.

<sup>81</sup> Paavolainen, p. 312.



*Picture 2.1. A rare picture taken in the early 1920s when the Seurantalo hall was being built. Material for the building was purchased from money raised at dances at Antti Laukkanen's warehouse, according to Helga Niskanen de Heino. The building was 10 metres x 10 metres in size. Its walls were of corrugated metal and the roof had wooden shingles. (Courtesy of Artturi and Helga Niskanen de Heino)*

Due to the Great Depression, Argentina's protectionist economic policy of the 1930s led the government curtailing manufactured yerba mate imports from Brazil and Paraguay. These imports in 1930 stood at 61.8 million kilograms but fell in 1937 to 40.1 million kilograms. Contrarily, domestic yerba output soared from 9 million kilograms in 1926 to 38.5 million kilograms in 1930, and to as high as 106.3 million kilograms in 1937.<sup>82</sup> Overproduction was one factor that forced manufactured yerba mate prices to plunge in 1937 by 42.2% to 1.82 pesos/10 kilograms compared with 3.15 pesos/10 kilograms in 1930.<sup>83</sup> Lunnasvaara stated that the price of tobacco in the early 1930s had plummeted to 0.15-0.40 pesos/kilogram from 0.30-1.00 pesos/kilogram, when it was profitable to grow.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Boletín informativo, Comisión Reguladora de la Producción y Comercio de la Yerba Mate, agosto de 1938, p. 10.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>84</sup> Lunnasvaara, pp. 14-15.

The price of tobacco and yerba mate were not the only agricultural commodities that were hit hard by the Great Depression. The price of wheat, Argentina's main export commodity, plummeted in 1933 by 56.6% to 5.30 pesos from 12.20 pesos in 1926. The price of flaxseed retreated in 1932 by 41.2% to 9.23 pesos versus 15.70 pesos, while maize had fallen in 1931 by 53.6% to 3.94 pesos from 8.50 pesos in 1929.<sup>85</sup> Julio Mafud claims that during the Great Depression even the richest landowners had accumulated more debt than what their land produced. The price of some of the best land in Argentina had fallen after 1929 to 184 pesos from 374 pesos per hectare.<sup>86</sup> In order to keep prices from tumbling further, crops such as potatoes and cereals were dumped into rivers and maize was substituted for coal to generate electricity. In one evening, three million kilograms of maize were burned at an electricity generating plant.<sup>87</sup>

The best land in Argentina was located in the cereal belt comprising of 160 million acres located in the provinces of Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, Córdoba, Buenos Aires, and the territory of La Pampa.<sup>88</sup> If foreign colonists had access to land ownership in Misiones, the Argentina's cereal belt was mostly under the control of wealthy landowners who rented it to foreign immigrants. In the province of Buenos Aires, 1,041 estates occupied one third of the best farm and grazing land.<sup>89</sup> In the 1933-1934 crop year, 5.6 million out of a total of 8.4 million hectares of land was rented where wheat, flaxseed, oat, barley and maize were planted.<sup>90</sup>

If the homes of some settlers at Colonia Finlandesa were "rudimentary" by Finnish standards, some of them lived in much better conditions than tenant farmers in other parts of the country. A landowner in 1914 wrote that the houses of these farmers looked like "an enlarged sardine tin." Another agronomist wrote that at such homes "hygiene is unknown, even by sight." Rural education was lacking and the children of these farmers usually grew up illiterate.<sup>91</sup> If the Finnish colonists started to pin their hopes on the yerba mate plant, their aspirations were soon dashed by low prices and production curbs imposed by the state-run Comisión Reguladora de la Producción y el Comercio de la Yerba Mate (CRYM), created in 1935 from the Junta Nacional de Yerba Mate founded in 1933.<sup>92</sup> Due to yerba mate overproduction, CRYM placed output ceilings on farmers at Colonia Finlandesa and elsewhere in Misiones. The executive branch of government decreed each year how much manufactured yerba mate would be processed. In 1938, for example, the government reduced yerba mate output by 40%.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Julio Mafud: *Argentina desde adentro*. Editorial Américallee. Buenos Aires, 1971. p. 22. Mafud does not give a unit value for these crops.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>88</sup> Carl Solberg: *Rural Unrest and Agrarian Policy in Argentina, 1912-1930*. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 1. (Jan., 1971), p. 18.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>90</sup> Mafud, p. 21.

<sup>91</sup> Solberg, p. 22.

<sup>92</sup> Alejandro Bunge: *Una Nueva Argentina*. Editorial Guillermo Kraft. Buenos Aires 1940. pp. 271-272.

<sup>93</sup> *Boletín informativo, Comisión Reguladora de la Producción y Comercio de la Yerba Mate*, agosto de 1938, p. 7.





Picture 2.2. A yerba mate plantation in 1984 in Colonia Finlandesa. (Photo by Enrique Tessieri)

If the 1930s were difficult years for tobacco and yerba mate farmers, the 1940s proved just as challenging. Apart from World War 2, which had brought to a near-halt the number of new settlers from Finland to Colonia Finlandesa, the colony was also hit by erratic rainfall that caused dry years during 1942-45 and 1947.<sup>94</sup> While Colonia Finlandesa had suffered from dry years in previous decades, none of them had been for so long. To add to the colonists' problems, locusts in the mid-1940s devastated their crops.

If there was already evidence of environmental destruction and that Colonia Finlandesa's population was dwindling in the 1930s, the following decade exacerbated these shortcomings. So much so, in fact, that it forced the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking Finns of the colony to become a minority. Poles, Germans, Brazilians, Paraguayans, Argentineans and a few Russians now lived at Colonia Finlandesa. The new demographic reality must have accentuated the Finnish settlers' sense of disappointment. For some, it must have also been a clear sign that Colonia Finlandesa was dying. In an article published in 1946, Niilo Orasmaa estimated that there were about 200 Finns living in Misiones. He does not state how many of them lived at Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>95</sup>

The 1940s were also a decade of deep political changes for Argentina, especially after General Juan Domingo Perón was elected president in 1946. Far-reaching structural economic reforms changed the lives of small farmers during Perón's two mandates (1946-1951 and 1951-1955). One important

<sup>94</sup> See section 4.2.4 of the thesis.

<sup>95</sup> Niilo Orasmaa: Argentiinan suomalaiset (exerpts from a radio programme). Suomen Silta 4/1946. p. 82

measure that affected Colonia Finlandesa directly was the lifting of production ceilings on yerba mate. All farmers that had less than five hectares of yerba mate plantations could now harvest as much as they wished.<sup>96</sup> Argentinean women also got the right to vote in 1947, after men had won that right in 1912 thanks to the Saenz Peña Law.<sup>97</sup>

Global agriculture commodity prices started to improve in the 1940s from the Great Depression years. Better economic prospects during President Perón's first mandate were fuelled by war-torn Europe's need for Argentinean cattle and agricultural products. The improved economic situation must have encouraged some second-generation Finns to leave Colonia Finlandesa in search for better opportunities in the cities, or to areas where cropland was more fertile and not destroyed.

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<sup>96</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 164.

<sup>97</sup> José Luis Romero: Breve historia de la Argentina. Editorial Abril S.A. Buenos Aires 1987. p. 154.

### 3. Literature review

Ever since I started doing fieldwork on Colonia Finlandesa, research by Douglas and Heath have helped us gain a better understanding of the roles that alcohol and dirt play in society. When I studied anthropology in the 1970s, assimilation was treated in the social sciences in a linear fashion, or how an outsider acculturated to the majority culture from points A to Z. Some of these studies even looked at factors such as birth rates to measure the level of assimilation.<sup>98</sup>

Apart from Heath and Douglas, we cannot forget classics such as Durkheim and his contribution to our understanding of anomie.

#### 3.1 Historical background

Two specific books on Colonia Finlandesa have been published: Enrique Tessieri's *Kaukainen maani* in 1986, and Lähteenmäki's *Colonia Finlandesa*, published post mortem by historian Reino Kero, in 1989. Other books where Colonia Finlandesa is mentioned include: Paavolainen's *Lähtö ja loitsu*, Koivukangas' *Kaukomaiden kaipuu*, and *Inmigrantes finlandeses en la Argentina 1906-2006/ Suomalaisiirtolaiset Argentiinassa 1906-2006*,<sup>99</sup> authored by Pulmu Heinonen and Marjatta Nieminen.

*Kaukainen maani* (My home faraway) looks at great length the lives of the Niskanen family, which moved to the colony six years after it was founded. While there are some mistakes in the book, such as a few dates and claims that Colonia Finlandesa's previous names was Nueva Germania, the biographies are backed by field notes and recorded interviews done in 1977, 1978, 1983 and 1984. Thanks to the Niskanens' life histories as well as those of others, we are able to construct a general picture through these people to get an image of what kind of a community Colonia Finlandesa was like.

With the knowledge I have gathered since 1984 on Colonia Finlandesa, I am certain that while correcting some of these small factual mistakes, the structure of the book would not differ from the original published over two decades ago. At the time *Kaukainen maani* was written, Lähteenmäki carefully guarded his findings on the colony and did not share them with anyone. This made the task of writing the book ever more challenging.

*Colonia Finlandesa* was published three years after *Kaukainen maani* came into print. It is today the most comprehensive historical work on Colonia Finlandesa to about 1910. Despite the colony's small size, studying its history is no easy task since much of the information has been either lost or is dispersed in a myriad of known and unknown locations. Despite the importance of Lähteenmäki's

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<sup>98</sup> See John J. Macisco Jr: Fertility in Puerto Rico – An ecological study. *Sociological Analysis* 26 (Fall 1965), pp. 157-164, Ira Rosenwaik: Two Generations of Italians in America: Their Fertility Experience. *International Migration Review*, vol. 7, fall 1973, pp. 271-280.

<sup>99</sup> Pulmu Heinonen & Marjatta Nieminen: *Inmigrantes finlandeses en la Argentina 1906- 2006/Suomalaisiirtolaiset Argentiinassa 1906-2006*. Kirjokulttuuri ja Tutkimus. Buenos Aires 2007.

work, it should not be seen as the final word on the history Colonia Finlandesa's early years. I believe there is still a lot of information out there that has not been uncovered never mind analysed.

The first book that brought national attention to Colonia Finlandesa in Finland was *Lähtö ja loitsu* by Paavolainen. While the writer dedicates only 37 out of a total 382 pages of the book to the Finnish colony in Misiones, his observations stand out as short peeks into what kind of a community it was in the 1930s.

Considering that Paavolainen's stay at Colonia Finlandesa was only 10 days, his observations are quite remarkable. The writer observed that there were already some signs that the colony's population was declining.<sup>100</sup> While Paavolainen's contribution to our knowledge of Colonia Finlandesa is priceless, some of his observations are characterised by observer bias due to his short stay there. This is evident when he describes how some of the settlers' houses differed from the ones in Finland. He even mentioned in amazement that some of the colonists' homes did not have outhouses. While this may be the case, there are explanations for these differences. For one, cracks in between the boards of the wall of the homes were probably necessary for ventilation in the kitchen when cooking with wood-burning cooking stoves. The absence of outhouses could be attributable in part to hygienic reasons and because they were not "in fashion" as glass windows were in the early decades.

Two other books published after the 1980s offer a comprehensive overview of Colonia Finlandesa. Koivukangas published in 1998 *Kaukomaiden kaipuu*, a history book on Finnish group settlement to Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Latin America. In the book, he dedicates a whole section not only on Colonia Finlandesa, but also to other Finnish colonies founded in countries such as Paraguay, Brazil, Dominican Republic and Cuba. Koivukangas' book is today the most comprehensive work on Finnish immigration to Latin America.

While there is an attempt to write the history of Finnish group settlement to other parts of Argentina rather than concentrate exclusively on Colonia Finlandesa, Heinonen's and Nieminen's book, *Inmigrantes finlandeses en la Argentina 1906-2006/Suomalaisiirtolaiset Argentiinassa 1906-2006*, provides little new information. There are some factual mistakes in the book. Even so, it is a positive matter that new books are appearing on Finnish immigration to Argentina.

While it is important to document the small and dispersed Finnish communities that sprang up in Argentina such as Zárate, located near Buenos Aires, the history of Finnish group settlement to the country begins in 1906 with Colonia Finlandesa. Thanks to the colony's founding, Argentina started to be recognised, albeit by a small number of Finns, as a possible destination like the United States and Canada. Especially in the 1910s, it is highly probable that most of the 79 Finns that went through the port of Buenos Aires had Colonia Finlandesa as their final destination.

## 3.2 Alcohol in the early history of Colonia Finlandesa

Lähteenmäki's study is important for a number of reasons. It not only gives us a view of the challenges that the colony's founders faced, but also offers us a valuable glimpses at the colony's *raison d'etre*. While there are a lot of tales about the "eccentric" lifestyles of the first group of

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<sup>100</sup> Paavolainen, pp. 312 & 331.

settlers, Colonia Finlandesa's identity must have been complex, manifold and hinged on which group you spoke to during which decade. Thesleff placed two important pillars for Colonia Finlandesa to succeed: It should not be a refuge for settlers with alcohol problems, and it should be a colony made up only of Finns and Swedes.<sup>101</sup> A screening process was even drawn up for choosing the settlers. The potential candidates had to provide a certificate of their good standing in society, and a recommendation from a famous person. Such screening processes were, however, difficult to implement and unsuccessful.<sup>102</sup>

Without showing our Western never mind Nordic bias towards drinking, how do we know that the settlers consumed generous quantities of alcohol at Colonia Finlandesa? Some sources are the historical literature, articles, my fieldwork and the colonists. I have also collected monthly alcohol sales of a store at Colonia Finlandesa and another one at San Martín. I will discuss these more in detail later in the thesis. However, if we only measure grain alcohol sales at these two stores, per capita consumption was many times higher than in Finland.

Svea Gumberg, who was a five-month-old baby when she moved to Colonia Finlandesa in 1906 with her parents, Karl and Ida Melart de Gumberg, told me after 70 years of the colony's founding about the parties the first settlers organised. She did not give any details about what took place at these gatherings, "except that the partygoers had fun." Even so, these parties must have been important to the Swedish speakers since they were still told like folktales seven decades after they took place. Gumberg must have heard about them from her parents, neighbours and friends. She described Colonia Finlandesa at the time of its founding as "a happy village."<sup>103</sup>

Thesleff wrote about the parties in a letter dated October 15, 1908. Even though he claims to not have take part in them, he wrote that some of them ended in orgies. Colonia Finlandesa's founder wrote about a settler from Turku whose short stay in Misiones was a fiasco. He said that to honour his stay, a monument many metres high should be built with empty bottles of whiskey, cognac and genever.<sup>104</sup>

Sulín, who settled Colonia Finlandesa in 1906, wrote about how the first Finns had discovered a strong spirit called *caña*, which is distilled from sugar cane. According to him, the young settlers emptied many glasses of *caña* in honour of Finland and to the success of the newly founded colony.<sup>105</sup>

Lepistö, who settled Colonia Finlandesa in 1914, told me in 1978 that the first group of Finns, or those that remained from 1906, were the black sheep of their families. In this group there were "drunkards, (enthusiastic) partygoers, (settlers with) debts (and) political idealists. Everyone had a reason to leave Finland,"<sup>106</sup> according to her. Some of the settlers received money regularly from their relatives in Finland while they lived at Colonia Finlandesa. Even suits were sent to them by mail. Since there was little use for these types of clothing, they were used for performing plays at the *Seurantalo* hall.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Lähtenmäki, p. 129.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 23.

<sup>104</sup> Letter written by Arthur Thesleff to Rolf Laberborg, October 15, 1908. Kungliga Biblioteket, Sverige

<sup>105</sup> Sulín, p. 11.

<sup>106</sup> Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, May 27 and June 10, 1978.

<sup>107</sup> Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, May 28, 1978. The account of the suits was told by Helga Niskanen de Heino during my visit to Colonia Finlandesa in May-June 1978.

Paavolainen also wrote about the drinking habits of some of the colonists. He mentioned that a favourite drinking place of the Finns was Karl Ehrström's hotel in Bonpland, located next to Colonia Finlandesa. "Heavy drinking occurred during the colony's founding, and fortunately alcohol – luckily mainly cheap wine – has its good traditions (at Colonia Finlandesa)," he wrote.<sup>108</sup>

Peltoniemi, who bases part of his work on Paavolainen, writes that these young Finnish men at Ehrström's hotel had access to a steady supply of women from neighbouring Paraguay since the male population of that country had been nearly decimated in a 19th century war with its neighbours.<sup>109</sup> Lähteenmäki also wrote about excessive alcohol usage at *Colonia Finlandesa*. He stated that the first colonists founded a temperance movement but it did not last too long since it did not have too many followers.<sup>110</sup>

### 3.2.1 The role of alcohol in culture

Heath, who has contributed a great deal of anthropological research on the role of alcohol in society, believes that a lot of the medical and sociological research on drinking exaggerates the problems. By suggesting that somebody, or some group, drinks excessively, he maintains that researchers are showing their strong bias of Western culture.<sup>111</sup> Robin Room states that while anthropologists play down the seriousness of drinking problems, one explanation for this is "simply an appropriate corrective to the overemphasis on the problems associated with drinking in much of the rest of the literature."<sup>112</sup> Heath cites a number of reasons why people drink. Some of these may be taste, celebration, relaxation, mood alteration, hospitality, sociability, food, food enhancement, pastime, religion, medicine as well as other reasons.<sup>113</sup>

Alcohol also plays an important social role. According to Douglas, when men drink together alcohol helps strengthen and constructs the group's identity. Social information is transmitted and boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are marked. The late anthropologist referred to this as "constructive drinking." Douglas also stated that alcohol helps build an ideal world. "There is also a sense in which drinks perform the other task of ritual," she wrote. "They make an intelligible, bearable world which is much more how an ideal world should be than the painful chaos threatening all the time."<sup>114</sup> Researchers such as Peltoniemi et. al. point out that drinking is usually done in groups. Drinking alone is rare in all cultures.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Paavolainen, p. 312.

<sup>109</sup> Peltoniemi, pp. 164-165. See also Paavolainen, p. 304. Peltoniemi refers to the Triple Alliance War (1865-70), in which Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay fought against Paraguay. The war had forced Paraguay to lose an estimated 90% of male population. Some accounts suggest that polygamy was widespread in Paraguay due the lack of males. See Antonio Gutiérrez Escudero: Francisco Solano López, el Napoleón de Paraguay. Ediciones Anaya 1988. p. 124.

<sup>110</sup> Lähteenmäki, pp. 177 & 230.

<sup>111</sup> Mary Douglas (ed): Constructive Drinking – Perspective on Drinking from Anthropology. Redwood Press, Melksham, Wiltshire, 1987. p. 3

<sup>112</sup> Robin Room: Alcohol and Ethnography: A Case of Problem Deflation? Current Anthropology 25, p.170.

<sup>113</sup> Dwight B. Heath: Drinking Occasions – Comparative Perspectives on Alcohol and Culture. Sheridan Books, Ann Arbor, MI 2000. pp. 167-181.

<sup>114</sup> Douglas, p. 11.

<sup>115</sup> Teuvo Peltoniemi: Alkoholi ja yhteiskunta. Editors: Teuvo Peltoniemi & Martti Voipio. Alkoholi ja yhteiskunta. Otava. Keuruu 1983. p. 19.

R. Lemle and M. Mishkind shed light on the role of alcohol among young men.<sup>116</sup> They equate drinking along the same lines as a person's first sexual experience, or a way in which a boy is initiated into manhood. This is an important point because it could reveal why some second- and third-generation Finns at Colonia Finlandesa considered drinking important.

Even tough researchers such as Heath, Douglas and others would be reluctant to classify drinking as "problematic" never mind define "alcoholism," social scientists cannot ignore societal concern over the effects of alcohol. Room attended in the early 1980s a conference on alcohol use and abuse in Papua New Guinea. He said that while anthropologists tended to play down the problems of drinking, alcohol control commissioners mostly emphasized its severity. "Yet, from my perspective as a total outsider, one had only to read the daily paper and to examine the research tallies of the content of newspaper stories – which showed large numbers of stories on alcohol issues – to see that concerns about drinking problems were widespread in the society and that alcohol issues were important at least in the rhetoric of political discussions about nation building. One might well argue about whether the concerns were misplaced or overdrawn, but in my view their existence and strength had to be taken into account."<sup>117</sup>

Even though Durkheim did not see a correlation between alcoholism and higher suicide rates,<sup>118</sup> sociologists such as Thor Norström disagree.<sup>119</sup> While he suggests that alcoholism and abuse lead to the destruction of social ties through "aggressive, reckless behaviour,"<sup>120</sup> we can imply that it has an impact on the social unit or community. In the case of Colonia Finlandesa, excessive drinking can be seen as something marginal that was a direct threat to order.

In the face of these challenging questions about how to tackle the role of alcohol in society, one way of getting an understanding of it at Colonia Finlandesa is acknowledging that there were numerous tales on alcohol abuse and that it was a source of concern for some of the colonists. Even though some claim that 80% of the men and half of the women at the colony were problem drinkers, we can dispute the percentages but not their affirmations since some settlers considered it a major problem at Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>121</sup>

Sometimes a difficult research problem requires a simple obvious question. I asked a non-Finn called Hipólito Rísdén, a resident of Colonia Finlandesa, why he thought people drank a lot at the colony. He gave the following short answer: "You smelled alcohol on their breaths and they walked around drunk."<sup>122</sup> Certainly Rísdén's perception of what he considered excessive drinking is an observation, but it is highly revealing since it exposes more his cultural norms on alcohol than anything else. Hildegard Drukman de Bengelsdorff, who lived in the neighbouring village of Caa-Yarí, claimed that drinking was such a problem at Colonia Finlandesa that the colony had earned a bad reputation because of it.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Lemle, R. & Mishkind, M. (1989). Alcohol and masculinity. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 6, 213-322.

<sup>117</sup> Room, p. 169.

<sup>118</sup> Durkheim, p. 77.

<sup>119</sup> Thor Norström, *The Impact of Alcohol, Divorce, and Unemployment on Suicide: A Multilevel Analysis*. *Social Forces*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (Sep. 1995), pp. 293-314.

<sup>120</sup> Norström, p. 294.

<sup>121</sup> Apart from Helga Niskanen de Heino, Ida Elin Lemmetyinen believed also that the "majority of the men" and "50%" of the women had drinking problems at Colonia Finlandesa.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Interview with Hipólito Rísdén, Colonia Finlandesa, May 24, 1998.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Interview with Hildegard Drukman de Bengelsdorff, Caa-Yarí. July 26, 2007.

Since it is impossible to carry out physical examinations of the late settlers of Colonia Finlandesa to determine how alcohol affected their health, we are only left with a number of first- and second-hand accounts of how the colonists perceived the role of alcohol in their community and what norms some families had concerning the latter.

### 3.2.2 Anomie and Colonia Finlandesa

One of the reasons why Durkheim's anomie or strain theory has created some confusion in the past is because the concept was not really elaborated in his work.<sup>124</sup> When he formulated his theory on anomie, it was originally supposed to apply to investigating deviance in modern society. Robert B. Edgerton states that since men and women are social animals and therefore want to conform, the cause of deviance (or anomie) is found "to lie in some major dislocation of the social fabric, a dislocation by which man is 'frustrated,' 'alienated,' 'deprived,' 'discontented,' or 'anomic.'"<sup>125</sup>

Even though anomie derives from some disturbance that upsets the social order of a group, is its impact greater when foreigners such as Finns live in a far-flung colony thousands of kilometres from their homeland? Possibly an answer to the question is where would the Finnish colonists seek help in their own language and culture if Colonia Finlandesa was geographically, economically and culturally a remote colony faraway from Finland? Some of the first settlers never learned to speak Spanish even though they lived many decades at the colony.

Durkheim's anomie theory in general, and anomic suicide in particular, are of special interest to me in the thesis. Both concepts offer a good opportunity to understand what probably inflicted Colonia Finlandesa socially. While Durkheim's classic study, *Suicide*, distinguishes between egoistic and altruistic suicide, when a person is either inadequately or over-adequately integrated into society, he attributed anomic suicide to the lack of regulation of the individual by society.<sup>126</sup> While a number of the Finnish colonists' lives at Colonia Finlandesa were marred by hardships and disappointments, it should not imply that poverty was the direct cause for anomie. Even Durkheim believed that poverty does not fuel suicides, but disturbances of the collective order do, such as financial disasters.<sup>127</sup>

Robert Merton expanded on Durkheim's anomie theory. In his five modes of adaption, he talks about the relationship of deviants such as vagrants with the outside morally accepted world. Of the five modes Merton states, the last two – retreatism and ritualism – are of special interest.<sup>128</sup> Retreatism happens when people become near-dropouts of society. They acknowledge that attaining success is impractical and irrational. Contrarily in ritualism, a person accepts what little he/she has gained because he/she acknowledges that there are no realistic opportunities to advance in society.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Philippe Besnard: The true nature of anomie. *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 1. (Spring, 1988), pp. 91-92.

<sup>125</sup> Robert B. Edgerton: *Deviance: A cross-cultural perspective*. Cummings Publishing Company. Menlo Park, California. 1976. p. 19.

<sup>126</sup> Durkheim, p. 15 & pp. 241-276.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 243 & 246.

<sup>128</sup> Frank Harary: Merton Revisited: A New Classification for Deviant Behaviour. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 31, No. 5. (Oct., 1966), pp. 693-697.

<sup>129</sup> Harary, pp. 693.



Some that travelled to live in such a faraway community as Colonia Finlandesa must have had expectations of making a better living so faraway from their homeland. But what happens if that community was incapable fulfilling their hopes? Many Finns that moved to Colonia Finlandesa must have been lured by the promises and expectations of a better life. However, some of the disappointments they faced could resemble what some rural Argentinean migrants face when moving from the countryside to cities. “But those who arrive can’t accomplish their dream of finding work after they have spent the little money they bring...” writes Mafud. “Without a cent to return to their former homes and having to maintain a family, two options remain: a shed in a ghetto or continue (to live) like a vagrant.”<sup>130</sup>

Isolation was one way that the Forest Finns of Sweden defended their culture from outside encroachment.<sup>131</sup> In many respects, Finns at Colonia Finlandesa wanted to live as a closed and isolated community. This, however, became a double-edged sword: On the one hand it permitted them to live in a community where they were the majority culture, while on the other it did not encourage them to integrate economically and culturally. Living in a tight-knit community had its problems as well. If Colonia Finlandesa had an outside reputation where alcohol was consumed generously, the stereotype must have hindered their integration with the outside world. Contrary to the Forest Finns, the big difference with Colonia Finlandesa was that Sweden was culturally and geographically closer to Finland than Argentina is.

### 3.3 The role of cleanliness and anomie

Douglas’ classic work, *Purity and Danger*,<sup>132</sup> offers us a cultural perspective of how dirt creates order and disorder in society, and helps us strengthen perceptions of “us” and “them.” The following excerpt from her book summarizes pretty much the role of dirt. “For I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created.”<sup>133</sup>

Dirt, or cleanliness, is a symbolic system that gives moral order to societies. Douglas states that if we set aside pathogenicity and hygiene from our perception of dirt, we are left with a bare tuned-down definition: Dirt is matter out of place,<sup>134</sup> or as Olli Lagerspetz points out, dirt is “a by-product of the creation of order.”<sup>135</sup> To elaborate further on her point about the social order that dirt creates, Douglas gives us her classic definition of how we perceive matter out of place: “Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing; similarly, bathroom

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<sup>130</sup> Mafud, p. 80.

<sup>131</sup> Telephone conversation with Eero Sappinen, special researcher on Forest Finns (Metsäsuomalaiskulttuuri), October 2007.

<sup>132</sup> Mary Douglas: *Purity and Danger – an Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Ark Paperbacks. London and New York 1984. p. 35.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>135</sup> *Kirsti Suolinna, Elizabeth Ettorre, Eero Lahelma (eds.): Society, the Body and Well-Being – Essays in Honour of Elianne Riska*. Åbo Akademis tryckeri. Åbo 1996. See Olli Lagerspetz, p 170.

equipment in the drawing room; clothing lying on chairs; out-door things in-doors; upstairs things downstairs; and so on...”<sup>136</sup>

Apart from these above-mentioned facts, cleaning one’s home was also done for hygienic reasons. “When speaking of housecleaning, which was done daily, there was general cleaning done on weekend to halt to spread of insects (*piques*, fleas, cockroaches, bedbugs, etc.).”<sup>137</sup>

Even though we can argue that weekly housecleaning strengthened the family unit at Colonia Finlandesa, or created a unity of experience as Douglas points out,<sup>138</sup> and helped some families place themselves a cut above some members of the community, the interesting question to ask is why it was not taken so seriously at other homes? If we look at different types of houses that existed at Colonia Finlandesa, the colonists talk about two types: the “house” and “barn,” or *galpón*.<sup>139</sup> The house was better built than a so-called barn because it had a wooden floor and its walls were usually painted from inside. While it did not always have glass windows, a “barn” had earth floors and was built more economically with, for example, with palm board that curled and had cracks in between them when they dried. Both types of houses had wooden shingle roofs.<sup>140</sup> What do these different house types reveal about the inhabitants that lived in them? Was housecleaning less important in the latter than the former? If so, does it suggest that the anomics were more prone to live in barns than, say, non-anomics in houses?

Lähteenmäki gives a description of the homes of the first settlers that founded Colonia Finlandesa. Even though they were modest in appearance and had little resemblance to those in Finland, they were different from the ones where European lived because these homes had “lots of books.”<sup>141</sup> While Paavolainen writes that the Laasonen’s home had a book of short stories and a Spanish dictionary, they do not compare with the book collections that existed in some of the first settlers’ homes. Contrarily V. Lunnasvaara does not make any mention of these book collections. Even though the homes at Colonia Finlandesa were different in appearance from the ones found in Finland, Lunnasvaara states that some did keep their front courtyard tidy and even had glass windows with curtains, which were rare at the time.<sup>142</sup> He claimed that most of the houses had two storeys, while Paavolainen does not make any mention of them in his book.<sup>143</sup>

Lahja Malinen, who lived as a child in Colonia Finlandesa during 1924-1930, described their second home was “more modern” than their first one since it had a wooden floor and glass windows. Malinen said that her mother did not clean her home every weekend but “whenever she could.”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Douglas (b), pp. 35-36.

<sup>137</sup> Letter (December 10, 2007) from Kalevi Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones.

<sup>138</sup> Douglas (b), p 2.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Kalevi Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, October 4, 2008.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Kalevi Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, October 4, 2008.

<sup>141</sup> Lähteenmäki, p. 234.

<sup>142</sup> Lunnasvaara, pp. 7-8.

<sup>143</sup> Reino Laasonen said (Dec. 13, 2007) that the only house in Colonia Finlandesa that was two storeys was that of the Westerlunds. Eevi Heino stated that Nils Nyberg’s former home had two storeys (Tessieri [b], p. 218). Antti Lemmetyinen’s home had two floors.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Lahja Malinen, Kitee, October 24, 2007. See also Lahja Malinen: Kuusi vuotta Argentiinassa. Kiteen Paino. Kitee 1994. pp. 33-34.

There is an interesting paper published in 2007 by the English department of Oulu University<sup>145</sup> that shows how Finnish-American writers described the importance of cleanliness. The mother in Mary Caraker's *Growing Up Soggy* scolds her children for soiling their feet in cow pies on a warm day. "Do you know what they say about us sometimes? 'Dirty Finns,' that's what they call us. Dirty Finlanders. Dirty Finns. Dumb Finns. They called us that when I was in school." The writer points out that while calling Finns "dirty" was an injustice, it could not have been further from the truth. Since many Finns worked as miners and lumberjacks, it was their jobs that made them look dirty.<sup>146</sup>

Cleanliness not only plays an important role in Finnish culture, but in other ones as well. In Suellen Hoy's *Chasing Dirt – the American Pursuit of Cleanliness*, he writes about how new immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th century were indoctrinated to the American way of life. "Cleanliness for health's sake impelled reformers to teach immigrants certain basic facts about American life. Their beginning lessons on how to find work, become citizens, and learn English frequently included advice on how to keep clean in an urban environment. Although hardly dirtier than poor whites fresh from the countryside, most immigrants soon caught on that prosperous Americans cared about cleanliness."<sup>147</sup>

### 3.3.1 Cleanliness: Finns and Outsiders

While personal hygiene, cleanliness and tidiness were important at some Finnish homes at Colonia Finlandesa to reorder their environment and to create a sense of order, some colonists used it as well as a barometer to compare themselves and with other national and ethnic groups at the colony.

By the 1930s, Misiones' native-to-foreign ratio was still higher than the national average. In 1936, 33% of Misiones' total population of 168,831 were foreigners (55,780) compared with 113,051 natives.<sup>148</sup> The corresponding figure for Argentina in 1938 was be 19.9% foreigners (2.534 million) versus 10.223 million natives.<sup>149</sup> It was a big drop from 1914, when 30.3% of the population was foreign-born. It was nothing rare in many colonies in Misiones such as Colonia Finlandesa where foreigners clearly outnumbered the natives.

Argentine-born Finn Aune Saarinen told me in 2007 that she learned about other ethnic and national groups when she started attending elementary school in the 1940s. According to her, Finnish children were different from other dark-skinned children because their clothes were "always clean and their hair combed." The group that was considered the dirtiest by some Finns were the Paraguayans and *Criollos*, or landless mestizo peasants that worked as farmhands on Finnish farms.<sup>150</sup> The Finns had invented a special name for this group, whom they called *bambujeesi*.<sup>151</sup>

In 1983, I asked Niskanen de Heino if she felt there were big differences in the way a child is brought up in a Finnish and Argentinean home. She said that one of the big differences was that at

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<sup>145</sup> See Raija Taramaa: *Stubborn and Silent Finns with 'Sisu' in Finnish-American Literature – An Imagological Study of Finnishness in the Literary Production of Finnish-American Authors*. Faculty of Humanities, Department of English, University of Oulu, Oulu 2007 B 76.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.113-116.

<sup>147</sup> Suellen Hoy: *Chasing Dirt – the American Pursuit of Cleanliness*. Oxford Univ. Press, New York 1995, p. 88.

<sup>148</sup> Bunge, p. 137.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Kalevi Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Kalevi Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007.

Finnish homes there was order (*järjestys*). She said that even in old age, her father worked and washed clothes.<sup>152</sup>

### 3.4 Types of racism

While a lot of attention has been given in recent years to different types of racism,<sup>153</sup> like the distinction between old-fashioned and new racism,<sup>154</sup> these studies basically show what we have always known about such a social ill: exclusion of a person from society on the basis of their skin colour, religion and/or national background. According to Simo V. Virtanen and Leonie Huddy “symbolic,” “modern,” or “new” racism has overtaken the role played by old-fashioned racism, which was nothing more than overt racial discrimination and political force used in the United States against minorities such as the blacks. While this type of racism has been on the decline since the 1950s, new forms of prejudice have surfaced. Some of these are fuelled by resentment by the majority culture on minorities receiving social welfare.<sup>155</sup>

The oral histories and fieldwork I have collected from Colonia Finlandesa show that some settlers had very strong racial stereotypes against groups such as the Paraguayans, Brazilians, *Criollos* never mind blacks. Even two Finns from Lapland were ridiculed by some members of the community for being “Lapps.”<sup>156</sup> Apart from old-fashioned racism of dark-skinned groups, a common source of in-group friction at Colonia Finlandesa was between the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking Finns. Some of the Finnish-speakers considered the Swedish-speakers as “educated bums that drank and never saw a day of work.” These examples, however, which I will discuss more in detail later on in the thesis, are good examples of how Douglas saw the marginal strengthening the group’s view of “us” and “them.”

Other national groups that colonised Misiones had strong racial attitudes as well. According to Holger M. Meding of Köln University, who has studied German colonisation to Misiones,<sup>157</sup> states that those Germans that stayed on as farmers in Misiones were more conservative than those that left for the cities. The racial views of the former group were thus influenced by their conservatism.<sup>158</sup>

Racism, or old-fashioned racism in particular, appears to have been quite prevalent among some families at Colonia Finlandesa. Taking into account that some families used cleanliness to classify other groups, possibly the best-suited model apart from Douglas’ view of what was perceived as a threat to order is W. G. Sumner’s definition of ethnocentrism.<sup>159</sup> According to Sumner,

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<sup>152</sup> Interview with Helga Niskanen de Heino, Zárate, Argentina, tape 2/1983.

<sup>153</sup> Gerard Kleinpenning and Louk Hagendoorn: Forms of Racism and Cumulative Dimension of Ethnic Attitudes. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 1993, Vol. 56, No. 1, pp 21-36.

<sup>154</sup> Simo V. Virtanen and Leonie Huddy: Old-Fashioned Racism and New Forms of Racial Prejudice. *The Journal of Politics*. Vol. 60. No. 2 1998, pp. 311-332.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Ida Maire Elin Lemmetyinen Zárate, Buenos Aires, December 28, 2007. She said that contrary to the friction between the Finnish- and Swedish speakers, there was discrimination against Lapps such as Aarmas Heikkilä. They would call them “damn Lapps,” or “*perkele lappalainen*.”

<sup>157</sup> Meding, pp. 727-745.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Holger M. Meding, Köln, Germany, Oct. 22, 2007.

<sup>159</sup> Gerard Kleinpenning and Louk Hagendoorn, p. 23.

ethnocentrism is nothing more than placing one's group at the top or centre from where other groups are classified. T.W. Adorno et. al. expanded on this in 1950 by pointing out that the basis of ethnocentrism is not only a way of differentiating those that are outside or part of the group, its aim is the social submission of the out groups.<sup>160</sup>

### 3.4.1 Racist attitudes in Finland and Argentina

If one reads some of Zilliacus' articles published by Gummerus' *Konni Zilliacus- Suomen itsenäisyyden estaisteliija*, his views would not only be seen as insulting but racist by today's standards. In one of the passages in the book, Gummerus tells about what Zilliacus encountered on a ship journey to Costa Rica. "The farther south he travelled the hotter the heat got. Seasick in a Caribbean storm, at every corner (of the deck) there were Negroes emitting an indescribable stench."<sup>161</sup> There are other passages in the book that are equally surprising due to their racial content. In one of these, Zilliacus writes about how a Finn at a railroad camp in Costa Rica stepped in to prevent a fight on payday, when the workers were partying and getting drunk. He wrote that a Finn called Taivalmaa waved a machete at the black person's shinbone but did not dare throw a punch at his skull since it was supposedly harder than normal.<sup>162</sup>

Zilliacus as well as other Finns of the late-19th century offer a glimpse of their racial attitudes. These are important to understand since they shed light on how some settlers at Colonia Finlandesa may have seen other ethnic and national groups. Even in the mid-1960s, sociologist Heikki Waris writes that one of the traits that characterised Finnish society at the time was its high degree of ethnic homogeneity. He states that while Finland had practically no ethnic minorities since the largest of these comprised of 3,000 Saami, "racial prejudice and discrimination are nonexistent."<sup>163</sup> Certainly that type of a statement could sound similar to a Southern farmer in 19<sup>th</sup> century United States affirming: We had no racism in the South until blacks moved here.

There is a passage in Lähteenmäki's book that reveals the racial attitudes of a settler called Edvard Skogman. In a letter to his relatives in Finland, he wrote in 1906 about how relieved Thesleff's group was because some of them had gotten second-class tickets from Norddeutscher Lloyd line. "In this respect the Finns did not have any bigger reason to complain. ...anyway, and thank God, we were separated from the Gypsies, Jews, cruel Russians and Tartars."<sup>164</sup>

Alberdi had a romantic view of the impact that European immigration would have on Argentina. "How, in which form will the future invigorating spirit of European civilisation plant itself in our soil? As in all other times: Europe will bring its new spirit, their industrial practices, civilised ways in the immigrants they send to us. Every European that comes to our shores brings more civilisation and their customs are later passed on to our inhabitants, than many books on philosophy... Do we want to plant and accommodate in America English liberty, French culture, the industrious men of Europe and the United States? Let's bring live examples of the customs of their inhabitants and

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>161</sup> Gummerus, p. 22.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>163</sup> Heikki Waris: An Introduction to Finnish Society. Reprint from Pekka Kuusi: Social Policy for the Sixties - A plan for Finland. Helsinki 1965. p. 2.

<sup>164</sup> Lähteenmäki p. 168.

bring them here.”<sup>165</sup> A letter to Thesleff in February 1906 from the Agriculture Ministry referred to the Finns as one of the best “races” that could settle Argentina.<sup>166</sup>

Even though Alberdi sought “civilised” and “learned” European immigrants to move to Argentina, most of the foreigners that came to the country in the late-19th century were illiterate working-class labourers from Spain and Italy. Even illiteracy rates in the early 1930s continued to be high in Spain and Italy. In 1930, the illiteracy rate for Spain was 43% compared with 21% for Italy in 1931. Argentina’s illiteracy rate in 1936 had fallen to 6.64% from 17.82% in 1914.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Alberdi, p. 89.

<sup>166</sup> Letter from the Ministry of Agriculture to Arthur Thesleff (21.2.1906/No. 123).

<sup>167</sup> Bunge, pp. 418-419.

## 4. The Rise and Demise of Colonia Finlandesa

With the help of new empirical data collected from CEMLA, the first part of this part of the thesis will show with greater accuracy the amount, composition and dates of arrivals of the first group of Finns that founded Colonia Finlandesa in 1906.

CEMLA is an electronic databank based on passenger lists given to immigration officials in Buenos Aires during 1882-1930. The CEMLA lists are an excellent source for research on Finnish immigration to Argentina and provide the following information: surname and first name, age, marital status, profession, religion, name of the ship, port of departure, destination and date of arrival. Birthplaces of immigrants on these lists were added from 1923.

When I got access in August 2007 to the CEMLA database of the Finns that arrived with Thesleff in Buenos Aires in June 1906, there was an instant surprise: the majority of the group had arrived on the hitherto-unknown Cap Verde as opposed to the Frankfurt.

One of the biggest challenges using the CEMLA database is dealing with spelling mistakes and other inaccuracies. Many names on the lists are misspelled: Hugo Bengelsdor versus Hugo Bengelsdorff, Karl Kockstrim versus Karl Kockström (umlauts are not used on the list), Hjalmar Lindfors versus Hjalmar Lindfors, Bernardt Orfords versus Bernardt Nordfors as well as others. There is one age inconsistency: Edd. Bengelsdorff is listed as a businessman but his age is listed as "0."<sup>168</sup> Despite these shortcomings, and with the help of other sources, it is not impossible to figure out most of the correct names of the passengers.

### 4.1 Two ships instead of one

Before analysing what is on the CEMLA lists, one wonders why the Cap Verde was so widely unknown before? Why did 88 men of Thesleff's group sail on the unknown ship? A partial explanation can be traced to events in Bremen after the group arrived by train from Lybeck after their journey on the Linnea from Helsinki. The group had been informed by a Norddeutscher Lloyd official that Frankfurt's departure would be delayed by a week. The news had upset the group considerably.<sup>169</sup> The disappointment felt by the Finns who were eager to travel to Argentina is understandable. Waiting a week for a ship to leave is just as bad as waiting in foreign city for a plane that has been delayed for days.

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<sup>168</sup> It has been difficult to determine the identity of "Edd." Bengelsdorff since there are two Bengelsdorffs with the same first name in the 1906 passport lists found in the Provincial Archives of Vaasa (Vaasan maakunta-arkisto). One of these is Edward Wilhem Bengelsdorff, born in 1885, and Edward Bengelsdorff, born in 1853.

<sup>169</sup> Lähteenmäki, p. 166.

Noddeutscher Lloyd did everything to appease the disappointed Finns, who would be treated by the shipping company as special passengers and not as immigrants. As a gesture of their good will, the women, Thesleff, Bengelsdorff and his mother were given second-class tickets on the Frankfurt.<sup>170</sup>

What types ships were the Cap Verde and Frankfurt? According to one source, the Frankfurt had 50 cabins and room for 1,600 steerage or immigrant-class passengers. Contrarily, the Cap Verde had 87 cabins and room for 500 immigrant-class passengers. It should be noted, however, that travelling on immigrant class, which was located directly below the main deck, was the cheapest way of travel by ship. Contrary to the first-, second- and third-class, immigrant-class passengers did not have individual cabins. They slept on wooden bunk beds and had little privacy.<sup>171</sup>

Certainly a valid question to ask is if the 88 Finnish men in Thesleff's group that sailed on the Cap Verde could have been mistakenly registered in Buenos Aires as travelling on a different ship. Could they have switched ship at another port? These two scenarios are improbable. Firstly, the Cap Verde and Frankfurt came on separate dates; secondly, the speed of both vessels was 12.5-14 knots, with Cap Verde having over a week head start on the Frankfurt.<sup>172</sup>

Why did Thesleff's group travel on two separate ships and why did we discover this fact over 102 years later in 2009? One important reason is because nobody has cared to investigate the CEMLA files. One probable answer why the group took the Cap Verde was because it was probably the first ship that left Bremen for Buenos Aires. Another answer could be that the Finns did not want to travel together with "Gypsies, Jews, Cruel Russians and Tartars" but "in better company" as Skogman wrote in a letter to his relatives. Investigating the exact reasons would be an interesting topic for future research.

#### **4.1.1 How many came according to Lähteenmäki?**

Lähteenmäki did a great deal of work putting together the many scattered and lost pieces of information on the first group that founded Colonia Finlandesa. Contrary to the new empirical data used in this thesis, Lähteenmäki did not have access to passenger lists of the Frankfurt because they were destroyed in World War 2. Like many, he believed that only one ship had taken Thesleff's group to Argentina. Before discussing the information on the CEMLA lists, let's take a look at Lähteenmäki's findings.

The historian claimed that there were a total of five expeditions ("*I-V Ekspedition*") that brought Finnish and Swedish settlers to Colonia Finlandesa in 1906-07. The *I Ekspedition* brought 112 Finns on May 12, 1906 from Helsinki to Bremen. Joining the Finns at Bremen were 8 Swedes that travelled to Misiones, or a total of 120 people.<sup>173</sup> In the summer of 1906, two other expeditions – *II Ekspedition* and *III Ekspedition* – brought to Colonia Finlandesa 8 Finns/1 Swede and 7 Finns, respectively, or a total of 13 Finns and 1 Swede. The final two expeditions took place in autumn (*IV Ekspedition*) and in 1907 (*V Ekspedition*), when 2 Swedes and 7 Finns arrived, respectively. If we

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., pp. 166 & 168.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p 168.

<sup>172</sup> For information on the Cap Verde see <http://www.schiffe-maxim.de/CapVerde.htm> and for the Frankfurt see [http://www.norwayheritage.com/p\\_ship.asp?sh=fran3](http://www.norwayheritage.com/p_ship.asp?sh=fran3)

<sup>173</sup> Lähteenmäki, pp. 140-141.





Picture 4.1. The first Finns that founded Colonia Finlandesa travelled to Argentina on two ships as opposed to one. The *Cap Verde* was operated by Hamburg Süd. It shipped 88 of the 112 passengers that arrived in Buenos Aires on June 17, 1906. The *Frankfurt* arrived 9 days later, on June 26, 1906.

add all the Finns and Swedes that Lähtenmäki claimed settled Colonia Finlandesa on these five expeditions, the initial size of the colony was 134 Finns and 11 Swedes, or a total of 145 settlers.<sup>174</sup>

Lähtenmäki does not stop here, however. He did not elaborate, but claimed that a more precise figure for the *V Expedition* was 16 versus 7 Finns. With the total now rising to 143 from 134 Finns, he adds 11 more Finns to Colonia Finlandesa's initial population in 1906-07. He raises the grand total to 165 settlers, comprising of 154 Finns and 11 Swedes.<sup>175</sup>

#### 4.1.2 How many according to CEMLA?

Even though Hamburg Süd does not have in their possession the original passenger lists for the *Cap Verde*, the CEMLA database is based on the lists handed by the crew to Buenos Aires immigration officials. Proof of the authenticity of the *Cap Verde* and *Frankfurt* passenger lists is that both match exactly CEMLA's and the widely acknowledged figure of 112 Finns that travelled to Argentina with Thesleff in May-June 1906.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

How do Lähteenmäki's findings differ from CEMLA's? In general terms, they are roughly in the same ballpark, though there are a number of contradictions. The most notable of these is Lähteenmäki's claim that there were 5 expeditions in 1906-07. CEMLA, however, cites five ships that brought Finns to Buenos Aires in 1906. There are no port entries of Finns to Buenos Aires in 1907.

While it is clear that the final destination of the Finnish passengers on the Cap Verde and Frankfurt was Colonia Finlandesa, with what certainty can we claim that the same was true for those Finns that travelled on the Helgoland, Ortega and Weimar? Excluding the Ortega, which brought only three Finnish men, many of the names of the passengers on the Helgoland and Weimar can be found in my field notes as well as in other sources.

One reason we can claim that all of the Finns that sailed to Argentina in 1906 were travelling to Colonia Finlandesa was because there were so few port arrivals before that historic year. During 1886-1905, for example, only three Finns were registered to have arrived in Buenos Aires compared with a sharp rise in 1906 of 139 arrivals. As one can see from table 4.2 below, port entries of Finnish nationals to Buenos Aires started to pick up from 1906 thanks to Colonia Finlandesa. Of the total 228 Finns that travelled to Buenos Aires during 1882-1919, 61% came in 1906.<sup>176</sup> During 1920-30, there were 583 Finns that entered the country through the port of Buenos Aires, bringing the total for 1882-1930 at 811 Finns.<sup>177</sup>

Thanks to CEMLA's database, we also have the opportunity to check how many Swedish passenger sailed to Argentina with the Finns in 1906. A total of six Swedes were listed to have travelled on the Frankfurt, while one came on the Weimar and another one on the Helgoland. No Swedish nationals sailed on the Cap Verde. While Lähteenmäki cites eight Swedes sailed on the Frankfurt, CEMLA shows that there were only eight that came on three ships in 1906. During that year, a total of 31 Swedes had arrived at the port of Buenos Aires.<sup>178</sup>

One important matter to keep in mind is that during the 1910s, and probably to a lesser degree in the 1920s, many of the Finnish passengers on the CEMLA lists are immigrants whose final destination was Colonia Finlandesa. The colony received a lot of visitors, especially young men, who visited Colonia Finlandesa briefly during the first three decades after it was founded. Niskanen de Heino remembered that some of these single men would appear at the colony, work and leave after a short stay because they "did not find women to wash their clothes and cook food."<sup>179</sup>

Thanks to my field notes of 1977-78, when I actively collected kinship data of the Finnish settlers of Colonia Finlandesa and surroundings, I noticed that some names on the CEMLA lists are missing. Two of these are Johan Edward Jansson and his wife Fanny Virtanen, who travelled with

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<sup>176</sup> CEMLA

<sup>177</sup> Even if prior to 1906 a miniscule amount of Finns had travelled through Buenos Aires, why was not Arthur Thesleff, who travelled to Argentina in 1904 on a fact-finding mission with three Swedes and a representative of the government, not listed by CEMLA? This may have been because he had entered the country as a special guest of the Argentinean government and not as an immigrant. See Lähteenmäki, p. 86.

<sup>178</sup> CEMLA list of Swedish passengers that arrived to Buenos Aires in 1906. The 6 Swedish nationals that arrive on the Frankfurt are: Ellen Dahlbäck, her three children and Ivar and Henriette Carlén. Two males each arrived on the Helgoland and Weimar.

<sup>179</sup> Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, June 5, 1978. Helga Niskanen de Heino's father Janne got a lot of visitors of "young rich Finns" that visited commonly Colonia Finlandesa. One of these once appeared in a white suit if he could get work at Janne Niskanen's farm.

Thesleff.<sup>180</sup> Such an inaccuracy on the lists suggests that there were probably more than 112 Finns that sailed to Argentina in May-June 1906. Other Finns that are not found on the lists are: Olof Appelgren, Magnus Sand, a post official from Haukipudas called Nordling and Nyberg, who was probably a Finn.<sup>181</sup>

So whose figures are correct: Lähteenmäki's 154 or CEMLA's 139 Finns? If we stick to Lähteenmäki's original estimate for the *V Ekspedition*, or 7 Finns, and do not add 11 Finns as he does, we end up with 134 Finnish settlers, which is close to the 139 shown by CEMLA.

While the empirical data collected from the CEMLA lists bring a wealth of hitherto-unknown information about the first settlers of Colonia Finlandesa, they do not give a final convincing figure on how many came in 1906. At the most we can say with some certainty that it was higher than 139 Finns. Similarly, the CEMLA lists do not confirm Lähteenmäki's claim of 154 Finnish settlers.

#### 4.1.3 Passengers by marital status, age and sex

The five ships that Finns sailed on to Colonia Finlandesa in 1906 can be placed in two groups: a) two that brought predominately single men, like the *Cap Verde* and *Ortega*; b) and three that brought married women, children and men, like the *Frankfurt*, *Helgoland* and *Weimar*.

Excluding 15 children (see table 4.1), the CEMLA lists show that 88% of the passengers on the five ships were adult males compared with 12% women. While there are some discrepancies on marital status, it is safe to estimate that about 75% (92) were single men versus 13% (16) who were married (see table 4.4); all of the 15 women, or 12% of the total passengers, were listed as married. If we look at all the age groups, including children, 83% (115) were males versus 17% (23) females.

Ship Date of arrival	Men	Women	Boys	Girls	Total
Cap Verde June 17, 1906	88	0	0	0	88
Frankfurt June 26, 1906	5	11	4	4	24
Helgoland Aug. 7, 1906	9	2	0	1	12
Ortega Aug. 13, 1906	3	0	0	0	3*
Weimar Nov. 14, 1906	4	2	3	3	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>139</b>

Source: CEMLA  
 All children are under 14 years.  
 \* Of all the above-mentioned ships that brought Finns to Buenos Aires in 1906, only the *Ortega* sailed from Liverpool compared with four others that sailed from Bremen. Norddeutscher Lloyd operated the *Helgoland* and *Weimar*. The *Ortega* was owned by Pacific Steam Navigation Company of England.

<sup>180</sup> Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, June 5, 1978.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Lars-Erik Häggman, Johan Edward Jansson's and Fanny Virtanen's grandson. He states that his grandparents travelled on the same ship as the Bengeldorffs, who are listed came on the *Cap Verde* and *Frankfurt*.

<b>Table 4.2: Finnish passenger arrivals at the port of Buenos Aires during 1882-1930</b>			
Period	Males	Females	Total
1882-1899	3	0	3
1900-1909	123	25	148 <sup>1</sup>
1910-1919	71	8	79
1920-1930	-	-	583
<b>Total</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>813</b>

Source: CEMLA

1) In 1906 there were 139 Finns; 116 males and 23 females. Of the total 230 Finns that were registered at the port of Buenos Aires during 1882-1919, 60.4% (139 Finns) came in 1906.

NOTE: The first Finn that arrived in Buenos Aires is a day labourer called George D'Ofthan, age 30, married. He arrived on November 27, 1886.

NOTE 2: Apart from June 1906, CEMLA lists reveal that Thesleff entered the port of Buenos Aires a second time on March 8, 1907 from Bremen on the Karlsruhe operated by Norddeutscher Lloyd. What is surprising is that his listed as a German national (sic). According to Lähteenmäki, Arthur Thesleff had arrived in Finland in November and returned in February to Argentina with his wife Bertha Järnefelt.

<b>Table 4.3: Age groups of under-14-year-old minors that travelled to Argentina in 1906</b>			
Age	Boys	Girls	Total
0-4	3	4	7
5-9	3	3	6
10-14	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>

Source: CEMLA

The CEMLA lists also show that there were a total of 8 families with children and 3 couples without children that travelled to Argentina. Of the 9 families with children, only two (the Ehrströms and Westerlunds) travelled on the same ship. The majority (4 males) that came on the Cap Verde had their wives and children follow on the Frankfurt. Two married men on the Cap Verde had their wives arrive to Argentina on the Weimar five months later.

Of the 3 couples that travelled to Argentina without children, two came on separate ships (Cap Verde and Frankfurt) and only one travelled on the same one (Helgoland). Relatives that travelled together on the same ship were 4 Bengelsdorffs (Frankfurt), and possibly 3 Mattsons (Cap Verde). The family sizes were the following: 5 couples had 1 child; 3 had 2 children; and 1 had 3 children.

Table 4.5 gives us a picture of the age structure of the group in 10-year intervals. If we look at Lähteenmäki's findings, which are in 5-year age groups, the only one that matches with CEMLA's is the 20-24-age group. Lähteenmäki claimed that that the biggest age group was 25-29 years (39) followed by 20-24 years (35). CEMLA shows the opposite: the biggest was the 20-24-year (35) followed by the 30-34-age group (31). Lähteenmäki's cited 19 Finns for the latter age group.

Since 63% (88) of all the passengers on the five ships travelled on the Cap Verde, the age structure of the settlers on this ship does not vary considerably from table 4.6. On the Helgoland and Weimar they were somewhat similar to the Frankfurt. On the Frankfurt and Helgoland, there were married and single men including under-14-year-old children.

<b>Table 4.4: Marital status and age groups of the Finnish colonists that arrived in 1906.</b>				
Age	Males		Females	
	Married	Single	Married	Single
10-19	0	10	2	1
20-29	1	59	3	0
30-39	12	18	7	0
40-49	1	6	2	0
50-59	2	0	1	0
60-	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1</b>

Source: CEMLA  
 Note: Edd. Bengelsdorff has been omitted from the table because his age was listed as "0." Seven men were listed as single but they were most likely married; there is one man listed as marital status unknown, who was married. Those that I have changed from single to married are: Johann Ahlnäs, Alexis Holmberg, Karl Gumberg, Karl Lind, Lennart Hermansson and And(ers) Skogman. From marital status unknown to married: Artur Böök.  
 Note 2: There is only one married woman called Elsa Purhonen that travelled with her son Harald Purhonen, 4, on the Frankfurt. Her husband is not on the list. There is also a question mark over Alina Sulim (Sulín?), who could have been Zacharis Sulín's wife. The latter person is tabulated in the above-mentioned table as married but the former as single.  
 Some waited even longer like Erik Öhberg, who sailed on the Cap Verde but brought his wife Esther to Argentina on November 22, 1908. He is listed as "single" by CEMLA.

<b>Table 4.5: Age groups of Finnish passengers in 1906</b>			
Age	Males	Females	Total
0-9	6	7	13
10-19	10	3	13
20-29	60	3	63
30-39	30	7	37
40-49	7	2	9
50-59	2	1	3
60-	0	0	0
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>115<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>23</b>	<b>138</b>

Source: CEMLA  
 1) 'There should be a total of 139 but one name as been omitted because "Edd." Bengelsdorff's age on the CEMLA list is stated as "0." See footnote 2.  
 Contrarily, the passengers on the Frankfurt comprise of married men (3), women (11) and children (8). Only two men are listed as single.

Age	CAP VERDE		FRANKFURT		HELGOLAND		ORTEGA		WEIMAR	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
0-9	0	0	4	3	0	1	0	0	2	3
10-19	9	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	0
20-29	53	0	1	3	3	0	1	0	2	0
30-39	20	0	2	4	5	1	2	0	1	2
40-49	4	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	0
50-59	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
60-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>88<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5<sup>4</sup></b>

Source: CEMLA

1) Included in the total is a male called Edd. Bengelsdorff whose age is stated incorrectly as "0."

2) Thekela" Rentzel, 46, is listed as a woman. There is no Rentzel male on the Cap Verde, which raises doubts about her sex or that her husband has been omitted from the list.

Note: All of the women aged above the 15-19-year group are listed as married. Of the males, 3 are married and 2 are single. Eight Swedes sailed on these ships with Finns to Argentina: 6 on the Frankfurt, 1 on the Helgoland and 1 on the Weimar.

3) Two women and 4 males were listed as married, with 5 males being listed as single.

4) Two of the women passengers are listed as married, while all males are listed as single.

#### **4.1.4 Passengers by profession and religion**

Of all the information that the CEMLA database offers us, profession is the least reliable. It may, for example, list a passenger's profession as "businessman" but does not specify any further. Moreover, Thesleff is incorrectly listed as an engineer. Despite their shortcomings, they do reveal some unknown professions of the settlers such as mayor, politician and electrician. CEMLA shows that most of the passengers were businessmen, while Lähtenmäki claims that agricultural professions were the biggest group.<sup>182</sup>

A rapid glance of the professions of the Finns on the CEMLA list brings to mind a phonebook of a small village. There are businessmen, farmers, engineers, builders, pharmacists, carpenters, teachers, even an actor and policeman. With respect to the religion of the group, 136 of the 139 passengers were listed as Protestants, two as Lutherans and one as Catholic.

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<sup>182</sup> Lähtenmäki, p. 150.

<b>Table 4.7: Professional background of passengers</b>	
Profession	Quantity
1. Merchant-businessman	27
2. Agricultural sector total	26
Farmer (21) Farmer-peasant (2) Gardner (2) Forest inspector (1)	
3. Technical profession	9
Engineer (6) Mechanic (2) Typographer (1)	
4. Student	7
5. Construction & handicraft	6
Builder (4) Carpenter (2)	
6. Day labourer/employee	6
7. Artist	6
Painter (3) Sculptor (2) Actor (1)	
8. Pharmacist & chemist	4
9. Teacher	2
10. Illegible	2
11. Other	6 <sup>1</sup>
11. No profession	19 <sup>2</sup>
12. Profession unknown	14 <sup>3</sup>
Source: CEMLA. 1) Other professions included but with only with one representative were: mayor, pastor, policeman, politician, sailor and telegraphist. 2) All women were listed without profession. There are, however, 2 men and a male child who are listed without profession. 3) All children except for one were listed as "profession unknown."	

#### **4.1.5 "Colonia Finlandesa list" versus CEMLA**

How many of the original group that had placed their names on a list in Finland to travel to Colonia Finlandesa had not made the journey to Argentina due to the improved political climate in Finland at the end of 1905?

Gumberg, whose parents sailed on the Frankfurt, told me in December 1977 that "300 people" had "either come or planned to settle" the colony. At first I thought her estimate was on the high side since it was known back then that 112 Finns had settled the colony in July 1906. But using hindsight, Gumberg was referring to about 370 people who had placed their names on a list to settle Colonia Finlandesa.

The so-called Colonia Finlandesa list<sup>183</sup> offers an excellent source to compare names with CEMLA's databank to see how many had abandoned the idea of going to Argentina. When comparing both lists, about three quarter of the 139 that sailed to Argentina can be found on the Colonia Finlandesa list.

#### 4.1.6 How many abandoned the colony?

There are numerous sources that give us an idea of the hardships and challenges that Thesleff's group encountered during the first year when Colonia Finlandesa was founded. Buenos Aires daily *La Prensa* reports on August 5, after the group arrived on July 8 to Misiones and that 12 out of the 117 colonists had returned to Europe.<sup>184</sup> Misiones Governor Manuel Bermúdez denied in the October 15 edition of the daily that the colony had disbanded. About a month-and-a-half later, on November 27, *La Prensa* reports that Congress will receive a request from the executive branch of government to help bail out the beleaguered Finnish colonists, who had lost all of their crops due to "droughts, frosts and locusts."<sup>185</sup>

Robert C. Eidt also writes about the hardships that the first Finns encountered in *Pioneer Settlement in Northeast Argentina*. "A rare invasion of locusts attacked plants, and fires created widespread damage and fear. Soon afterward the price of tobacco on which pioneers had pinned their hopes began to drop rapidly."<sup>186</sup>

An article in the Swedish-language daily *Hufvudstadsbladet* signed by an engineer called Rehunen, who worked for the railways and had lived in Argentina for decades, claims that the settlers not only suffered from a locust attack and forest fires, but from outright hunger.<sup>187</sup> It should be noted, however, that Rehunen was highly critical of Thesleff's plan to colonise Misiones.<sup>188</sup>

Helga Niskanen de Heino was one important source I used to gather data on the years of arrivals of the settlers at Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>189</sup> Niskanen de Heino was born in Colonia Finlandesa in 1914 and had lived most of her life at the colony. By comparing names on the CEMLA list with my field notes from 1977, 1978, 1983 and 1984, there are about 47 people that Niskanen de Heino and others remembered that came in 1906 and had not abandoned Colonia Finlandesa. If there were about 145 that arrived and 47 remained, it shows that about two thirds of the original group disbanded. Lähteenmäki states as well that two thirds of the first colonists abandoned the colony during its early years.<sup>190</sup>

Taking into account that Colonia Finlandesa ended with 50-60 settlers by 1909, it is interesting to note that most of them were married and had children as opposed to being single men. According to Eidt, young single men do not make good pioneers because they are usually the first ones to throw in the towel when matters get difficult. "Adverse factors have been responsible for a real exodus at some early stage of almost every colony in Misiones. The exodus appears to have been started most

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>184</sup> Kungliga Biblioteket, Sverige/Rolf Lagerborgille tulleita kirjeitä.

<sup>185</sup> *La Prensa*, July 9, 1906, p. 6 col. 2, and *La Prensa*, Aug. 5, 1906, p 6 col. 6.

<sup>186</sup> *La Prensa*, Nov. 27, 1906, p. 8 col. 3. Lähteenmäki states that the locust attack was the first in 12 years, pp. 215-216.

<sup>187</sup> Eidt, p. 102.

<sup>188</sup> Lähteenmäki, p. 183.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., pp. 183-186

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 20.



frequently by young single men.”<sup>191</sup> Eidt says that for a small colony to survive with modest outside assistance, its pioneer members not only had to have excellent health, they should have agricultural experience and be heads of families.<sup>192</sup>

Owing to the few Finns and Swedes that remained at the colony, why didn't Colonia Finlandesa vanish altogether? How could such a small group be capable of keeping the colony alive and lure new settlers? Part of the answer to this question probably lies with the Finns who had migrated to Brazil. As mentioned earlier, Janne and Hedvig Töllinoja de Niskanen came in 1912 to Colonia Finlandesa from Brazil. Apart from seeking better living conditions in Argentina, they were lured to Misiones by the simple fact that Finns lived there. There were other families such as the Rampas, couples like the Laukkanens and single men like Johann Gren who travelled from Finland to Colonia Finlandesa through Buenos Aires. Only eight Finns are registered to have arrived at the port of Buenos Aires in 1908-1909, compared with 79 in 1910-1919.<sup>193</sup>

Despite the bad press that Colonia Finlandesa got in Finland due to the difficulties that the first settlers encountered and to the slow pace at which the government had partitioned plots, they were not a death knell to the colony.<sup>194</sup> On the contrary, from 1910 the colony started to grow albeit at much smaller numbers than Thesleff had initially envisioned.

## 4.2 Factors that led to the colony's demise

This section will look at the environmental, economic and social factors that led to Colonia Finlandesa's demise and how anomie spread at the colony.

### 4.2.1 Environmental degradation

If there were two factors that undermined Colonia Finlandesa's economic and social foundations, it would be self-inflicted environmental destruction and volatile tobacco prices. Even if Thesleff had succeeded at luring hundreds, even thousands, of Finns to Misiones, the colonists would have faced the same problem of environmental degradation.<sup>195</sup> The environmental abuse that took place at Colonia Finlandesa was mainly exacerbated by two factors: a) tobacco farming; and b) the lack of environmental management. Fertilizers were apparently non-existent at the colony.<sup>196</sup> Moreover, the

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<sup>191</sup> Eidt, p. 210

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 209

<sup>193</sup> See CEMLA lists for 1910-1919. In an interview with Ida Maire Elin Lemmetyinen Zárata, Dec. 28, 2007, she states that the Rampas had come to Argentina in 1910 because of propaganda in Finland by the Argentinean government

<sup>194</sup> While lots were eventually partitioned, it is another question if the settlers ever got property titles. From my field notes it is clear that these were either rare or non-existent during the early decades of Colonia Finlandesa. See Tessieri (b), p. 107.

<sup>195</sup> During Thesleff's fact-finding mission, he had convinced the Argentinean authorities to set aside 125,000 hectares for the new colony. See Lähteenmäki, p. 106.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Helga Niskanen de Heino, Colonia Finlandesa, May-June 1978. She said that fertilizers like compost were not used at the colony. Graciela Niskanen said (January 5, 2008) that people did not use fertilisers when she lived at Colonia Finlandesa because “the land was already fertilised” when it was deforested.

form of environmental degradation that took place was not unique but common in regions such as southern Brazil.<sup>197</sup>

While Finnish colonists commonly blamed poor soil for their economic hardships, there is no empirical study that proves that this may have been the case. Eidt points out that while most of the colonists that settled Misiones lacked knowledge of tropical farming, they cleared land without taking steps for soil improvement.<sup>198</sup> Poor land was not only a problem at Colonia Finlandesa, but a third of the holdings in areas such as Apóstoles, Corpus and Cerro Corrá lacked level land, good soils and water and therefore land use was severely restricted.<sup>199</sup> “The initial colonisation set a pattern which was later officially declared an emergency ‘Poor Zone’ and was permanently ruined for all normal farming,”<sup>200</sup> according to Eidt.

The alarming degree of erosion found in northeast Argentina was attributable to the soil type of the area. The orange-red coloured *tierra colorada* covers 80% of the province and can vary in depth from a few centimetres to over 30 metres.<sup>201</sup> There are two basic types of soils: Those comprising of unstratified deposits of lava, which are eroding and chemically weathered, known as “lateritic,” and those formed on site called “basic effusives.” Colonia Finlandesa’s soil is of the latter type.<sup>202</sup> Eidt points out how vulnerable these types of soils are to weathering. “The thin layer of humus is easily removed by rain splash on sloping land. The rest of the soil tends to dry rapidly and hardens in the process once organic surface material has been removed. When this happens, the land becomes more difficult to work and agriculture losses occur from gulying, wind erosion and fertility decline.”<sup>203</sup>

In an article published in 2000, Larry Sawers states that about 1.1 million hectares of land in Misiones has been deforested and cultivated. This has led to 72% of the land, or 27% of the province’s total, to be abandoned due to the loss of fertility.<sup>204</sup>

Niskanen de Heino, who commonly complained about Colonia Finlandesa’s “poor and unproductive land,” described its topsoil layer as “a (thin) layer on a table.”<sup>205</sup> Some claimed that in a 25-50-hectare plot, one could find 10 different types of soils.<sup>206</sup> Others, like Eino Parkkulainen, claimed that not all of the land at Colonia Finlandesa was poor. “Some was good and some was poor land,” according to him.<sup>207</sup>

Good orchard cash crops such as yerba mate require deep *tierra colorada* soil, or a minimum of three metres at Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>208</sup> Since yerba mate was grown and harvested at the Finnish

<sup>197</sup> Interview with Roberto Smeraldi of the Amigos da Terra, São Paulo, Brazil, May 20, 2008. He stated that although land degradation did not occur with tobacco farming, other types of crops and lack of environmental management were the root causes of environmental damage in southern Brazil. The pattern of land degradation at Colonia Finlandesa was not unique but common in Misiones and southern Brazil.

<sup>198</sup> Eidt, p. 94.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. p. 94.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., pp. 18 & 28.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>202</sup> See soils map on Eidt. p. 18.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>204</sup> Larry Sawers: Income Distribution and Environmental Degradation in the Argentine Interior. Latin American Research Review, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2000), p. 22.

<sup>205</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 107.

<sup>206</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, November 25, 2007.

<sup>207</sup> Interview with Eino Parkkulainen, Campana, August 1984.

<sup>208</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, November 25, 2007.

colony, it suggests that not all of the land may have been unsuitable for farming. Niskanen de Heino said, however, that it took five years to grow yerba mate on her farm compared with three years on more fertile land.<sup>209</sup>

Of the five natural regions of Misiones, Colonia Finlandesa is located in the most extensive area called the Sierra Central, which is characterised by elevations of over 200 meters above sea level.<sup>210</sup> This region is covered by dense fragile subtropical vegetation where the amount of average tree species may vary between 69 and 150 per hectare.<sup>211</sup> It is hugged from the south and north by two 20-kilometre swathes called the Uruguay and Alto Paraná Valley strips. In the port of Santa Ana, located about 40 kilometres east of Colonia Finlandesa, Rafael Hernandez wrote in 1883 that the height of the trees spanned 10-18 metres with their thickness was 1-3 metres. He had reported 69 different tree species per hectare.<sup>212</sup>

Misiones' two other regions are the Bajas Misiones and Yrigoyen Highland. The rolling topography of the former area is below 200 metres while in the latter it rises above 500 metres above sea level (see map 4.1).

Another problem that settlers encountered at Colonia Finlandesa was that it was location in a valley 60 metres above sea level. Frost data collected in the first half of last century from 7 meteorological stations during 1907-48, show that the colony had the least amount of frost-free days (281) and the coldest minimum average (-4.8C). The average frost-free days recorded at the other meteorological stations totalled 321 days, with an average minimum temperature of -2.2C.<sup>213</sup> Being in a frost-prone area meant that certain plants such as bananas and citrus fruits had to be grown on slopes to avoid damage from frost.

How did environmental degradation occur at Colonia Finlandesa?

The first step in the destruction of the colony's environment took place when the first Finnish settlers cleared land to plant crops. For this small group of colonists, the virgin jungle must have appeared like an impenetrable wall. In a letter to Lagerborg dated in 1908, Thesleff described the jungle as "a worse place than prison for man."<sup>214</sup> For some of these first settlers that came in 1906, the journey to their new plots had to be done with the help of an ox to bring their belongings. A 15-kilometre journey on the *picada*, or jungle path, could last in the worst of cases over a week.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Interview with Helga Niskanen de Heino, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, May-June 1978.

<sup>210</sup> Eidt, p. 94.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., pp. 26 & 33. Misiones is a part of the Atlantic Forest extending from northeast Brazil south to eastern Paraguay. It is one of the most endangered tropical rainforests in the world. The degradation of the forest is closely associated with the growth of human populations. Only 7.4% of the Atlantic Forest's original 1,713,535 square kilometres of native forest cover remains. Despite its degradation, it continues to be one of the Earth's most biologically diverse ecosystems. It contains about 7% of the world's species. See María José Pacha et. al.: Understanding Biodiversity Loss. An overview of Forest Fragmentation. IALE Landscape Research and Management papers. pp. 144-145. In an interview in March 2006, Sofía Ferrari of the NGO Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina/Programa Selva Paranaense, estimated that 60% of the Atlantic Rainforest in Misiones has been destroyed.

<sup>212</sup> Rafael Hernandez: Cartas misioneras – reseña histórica, científica y descriptiva de las Misiones Argentinas. Luz del Alma, Buenos Aires. 1887. pp. III-IV.

<sup>213</sup> Eidt, p. 16.

<sup>214</sup> Kungliga Biblioteket, Sverige/Rolf Lagerborgille tulleita kirjeitä.

<sup>215</sup> Lähteenmäki, p. 209.

As many of the Finnish and Swedish settlers rapidly learned, clear-cutting the jungle was very labour-intensive and strenuous work and outside help was sometimes needed.<sup>216</sup> A large tree could take an hour to fell.<sup>217</sup> Eino Kylönen wrote in his diary that three weeks had passed when he was able to slash-and-burn a two-hectare opening. The amount of clear-cutting in the first year varied between 1.5 and 3 hectares per farm.<sup>218</sup> Apart from tobacco,<sup>219</sup> their main cash crop, subsistence crops such as maize, manioc, yams, beans, peas, peanuts and citrus fruits, especially pineapples and bananas, were planted. Orange groves did not need to be planted since they grew wild.<sup>220</sup>

Gumberg told me how difficult life was during the first years at Colonia Finlandesa's. "It was horrible in the first years because there were many wild animals. The tiger (most likely the jaguar or yaguarete) ate the cats and dogs and wild pigs (in groups) ate our corn. I remember how father killed many animals at night, but it was difficult since there was no light."<sup>221</sup>

If Thesleff and the first group of Finns had the opportunity to peek 102 years in the future, they would certainly be shocked by the environmental destruction, abandonment and desolation of Colonia Finlandesa (see pictures 4.2-4.5).

#### **4.2.2 Cash crops and environmental degradation**

As mentioned previously, tobacco and later yerba mate were the main cash crops at Colonia Finlandesa. Due to a chronic shortage of money and a semi-barter system that existed in rural Misiones to around 1950, tobacco was the fastest way for a farmer to secure cash. Selling subsistence crops was difficult since most farmers grew them.

The main subsistence crops grown at Colonia Finlandesa were: maize, which was widely planted and very important, manioc, sweet potato, sugar cane, wheat, rice, barley, rye (only in the early years), oat, alfalfa, peas, beans, peanuts, potatoes (with poor results), and some citrus fruits such as bananas, oranges, tangerines and pineapples. Spices like anis, ginger, mustard, thyme, marjoram and dill were planted but they were rare.<sup>222</sup> Grapes were grown and used to make a popular homemade wine called *vino colono*.<sup>223</sup>

In the face of planting tobacco and yerba mate,<sup>224</sup> settlers had to struggle with unpredictable commodity prices that made it difficult for them to plan ahead. Niskanen de Heino said that there were years when tobacco prices were good, but periods when they were very poor due to oversupply.<sup>225</sup> She said that once her husband did not get enough money from the harvest to buy a pair of pants. The same applied to yerba mate. When settlers saw that a new crop grew well and offered a good harvest and price, many started planting crops such as yerba mate, pineapples, tung

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>220</sup> Eidt, p. 102 & Lähtenmäki, pp. 213-214.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with Svea Gumberg, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, December 18, 1977

<sup>222</sup> Lunnasvaara, pp.17-18 and Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa. June 1, 1978.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., pp.17-18 and Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa. June 1, 1978.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>225</sup> Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, June 1, 1978.

and others. According to Niskanen de Heino, one of the biggest challenges that farmers faced was overproduction and subsequent low market prices. Apart from low yerba mate prices in the 1930s due to oversupply, the government even placed production ceilings on individual farms. For some settlers, this reality forced them to return to planting tobacco to compensate for the loss of revenues from yerba mate.<sup>226</sup>

Contrary to *Virginia* tobacco, which is flu-cured by wood, all other types grown at Colonia Finlandesa, such as *Cubana*, *Criollo Misionero*, *Maryland*, were mainly cured in open sheds by air. If *Virginia* tobacco farming would have been widespread at Colonia Finlandesa, the extent of environmental damage would have been greater since trees are needed to fuel the furnace. Furthermore, if the soil was poor at the colony as some settlers claim, the impact of environmental destruction at Colonia Finlandesa was probably greater than what table 4.9 suggests.

Tobacco was normally planted at Colonia Finlandesa in Southern Hemisphere spring (August-November) and harvested about four months later, in January or February.<sup>227</sup> Since the tobacco plant requires a lot of soil nutrients (see Fig.4.8), this meant that it could not be planted every year on the same field.<sup>228</sup> The size of the tobacco plantations at Colonia Finlandesa varied from 1-2 hectares.<sup>229</sup> Since tobacco planting and harvesting was done by the family, the size of the plantations depended on how many able hands there were.

Growing tobacco is very labour-intensive work. Apart from constantly clearing the field of weeds, tobacco leaves shed tar when they are harvested in summer, when temperatures can rise above 30C. I asked Reino Laasonen, who had lived as a child and adolescent at Colonia Finlandesa during 1925-46, why some Finnish settlers stopped planting tobacco and switched to yerba mate. "It (tobacco) was such dirty work and nobody liked it. You don't have to clear land every year with yerba mate. The same plant gives you a harvest every year,"<sup>230</sup> he said. Growing tobacco is very labour-intensive work. Apart from constantly clearing the field of weeds, tobacco leaves shed tar when they are harvested in summer, when temperatures can rise above 30C. I asked Reino Laasonen had lived as a child and adolescent at Colonia Finlandesa during 1925-46.

Niskanen de Heino stated that a big English company approached them in the 1930s to plant a special type of tobacco called *Tabaco marina*. "Representatives of the company sold us a white canvass that protected the tobacco from insects. The canvass was very thin. Strands of canvass had to be sewn together and tens of meters to cover (the tobacco plants). The representatives of the company handed the canvass on credit to the farmers and promised to discount it from the money we got from the harvest."<sup>231</sup>

Apart from deforestation and depletion of soil nutrients, which accelerated environmental degradation, some Finnish settlers spoke angrily of the tobacco buyers, who had a bad reputation among the farmers.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 139.

<sup>227</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, November 22, 2007 and others.

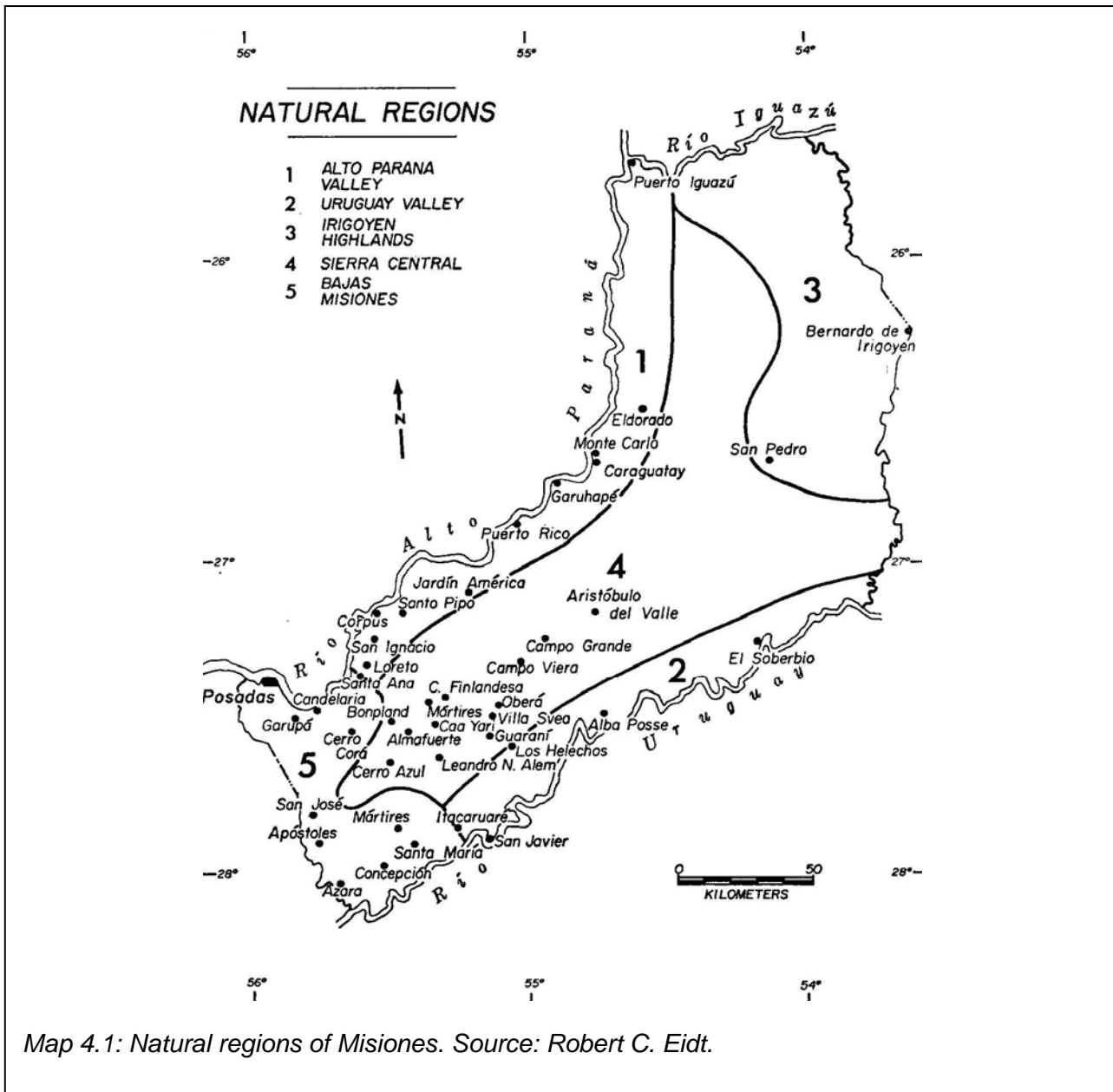
<sup>228</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, November 22, 2007 and others.

<sup>229</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, November 22, 2007.

<sup>230</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, November 22, 2007.

<sup>231</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, Nov. 20, 2007.

<sup>232</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 172 & pp. 191-192.



In order to understand how tobacco fuelled environmental destruction at Colonia Finlandesa, one must look at the growth cycle for a hectare of land, which lasted 6.5-8.5 years/hectare. If a farmer planted tobacco for 4-5 months after new land had been deforested, slashed and burned, he proceeded after the tobacco harvest to grow subsistence crops for 3-4 years on the same land. Afterwards the land was left to fallow for 3-4 years until it became a *capuerón*, or second-growth forest and brush. A new cycle began: the land would be cleared, slashed and burned, and followed by a second plantation of tobacco and subsistence crops. Planting tobacco more than once or twice on the same field was risky since the crop's growth can be undermined by soil depletion.

If a farmer wanted to plant one hectare of tobacco every year, he would have to clear 7-9 hectares of forest to reach the end of the 6.5-8.5-year growth cycle, when he could plant tobacco for a second time on the same land. While table 4.9 shows how much land was degraded due to tobacco farming, it does not take into account deforestation caused by yerba mate.



4.2: A clear-cut pine field in 2007 in Colonia Finlandesa. (Photo by Enrique Tessieri)



Picture 4.3: Artturi Heino on the Mártires River. Note the deforestation in the background. (Courtesy of Institute of Migration)



Picture 4.4: A group picture taken about 1930. Note the low forest canopy density in the background. (Courtesy of Artturi and Helga Niskanen de Heino)



Picture 4.5: The Vuoris at their store near Colonia Finlandesa. The background is a good example of deforestation. (Courtesy of Lahja Malinen)





Picture 4.6: Tobacco farming in the 1920s at Colonia Finlandesa. Posing are Reino Laasonen (on horseback) and his parents Kalle and Elisa Putkuri de Laasonen. (Courtesy of Lahja Malinen)

<b>Table 4.8: Depletion of soil nutrients by tobacco and other crops (loss in kg/ha)</b>			
1 tonne per hectare	Nitrogen	Phosphorus	Potassium
Tobacco	24.4	14.4	46.4
Coffee	15.0	2.5	19.5
Maize	9.8	1.9	6.7
Cassava*2.2	0.4	1.9	

Source: France Van Wambeke, quoted in Robert Goodland, Catherine Watson and George Ledec, Environmental Management in Tropical Agriculture

\* Manioc has a number of names. Some of these are cassava and yucca.

Size of farm	Size of plantation	6.5-8.5 years	13-17 years	19.5-25.5 years
25 hectares	1	7-9ha/25-36%	2 <sup>nd</sup> growth	14-18ha/56-72%
	2	14-18ha/56-72%	2 <sup>nd</sup> growth	21-27ha/84-100%
50 hectares	1	7-9ha/14-18%	2 <sup>nd</sup> growth	14-18ha/28-36%
	2	14-18ha/28-36%	2 <sup>nd</sup> growth	28-36ha/56-72%

Note: The majority of plots at Colonia Finlandesa were on average between 25ha and 50ha.

Since environmental degradation was one factor that undermined Colonia Finlandesa's ability to maintain settlers and offer them a future and livelihood, it provides an explanation behind the sharp decline in the number of Finns that settled the colony during the 1930s.<sup>233</sup> Apart from volatile tobacco prices, which were especially low during the Great Depression era, Colonia Finlandesa's population was starting to show signs of greying. By the mid-1930s, about 30 years had passed since Thesleff had settled the colony. Even though some 35 Finns from Kitee had moved to Colonia Finlandesa up to the end-1920s, 20 years had elapsed since their arrival by the mid-1940s.

Since Colonia Finlandesa was not economically prosperous due to environmental degradation and volatile tobacco and yerba mate prices, some of the children of the original settlers started to move out of the colony when they became adults, fuelling even more the greying process. By the 1940s, the rapid demographic challenges forced the Finns of Colonia Finlandesa to become a minority for the first time at the colony. Former colonists blamed this on two factors: a) natural death of the first settlers; and b) abandonment of the colony by the first and second generation.<sup>234</sup>

Another factor that must have limited the population of the colony was its geographic size and the availability of good land. The majority of the Finns in the region lived by the Picada Finlandesa road, which originally extended 43 kilometres to Oberá from Bonpland.<sup>235</sup> By the 1940s, however, the Finnish colony comprised of an area roughly 5 kilometres by 12 kilometres, or 8,400 hectares. If we divide the latter figure by 50 hectares we arrive at 164 plots. Finns were also scattered in adjacent municipalities that bordered Colonia Finlandesa such as Caa-Yarí (973 total population in 2001), San Martín (734), Bonpland (2,173), Mártires, formerly Bonpland Norte (1,135), and Almafuerite (1,022), which became a municipality in 1932.<sup>236</sup>

<sup>233</sup> While I have tabulated from my field notes over 20 surnames that settled the colony in the 1920s, in the following decade I only have recorded six surnames: Väinö Lepistö, Eino Saarinen, Pekka Putkuri, Artturi Heino, Väinö Juntunen and a Salmi. In the 1940s I have not recorded any surnames. See also Tessieri (b), p. 143, pp. 145-146.

<sup>234</sup> About two thirds of them married outside their group. See Tessieri, p. 88 and Tessieri (b), pp. 10-12.

<sup>235</sup> See official municipality of Oberá website ([www.obera.gov.ar](http://www.obera.gov.ar)) under "history" and Oberá industrial association CRIPCO website (<http://contenidos.arnet.com.ar/comunidades/historia.asp>)

<sup>236</sup> Official website of Almafuerite no longer exists. Subsequently, Colonia Finlandesa shrunk in size. In 1932 Almafuerite became a municipality as did Caa-Yarí in 1948. Colonia Finlandesa officially belongs to the latter municipality. Bonpland, which was an important hub, started to shrink in size due to the growth of Oberá.

As stated earlier, different sources estimate the population of Colonia Finlandesa in the 1930s to be between 300 and 500 inhabitants, which must have included the above-mentioned municipalities as well.

### **4.2.3 The Great Depression, tobacco and yerba mate prices**

The stock market crash of October 1929 caused a global economic depression that affected Latin American countries such as Argentina in the following manner: a) it forced exports and commodity prices to plunge due to protectionism; b) and changed the structure of world trade.<sup>237</sup>

Alejandro Bunge writes in *Una nueva Argentina* how Argentinean export revenues had plummeted. In 1930-1934 these revenues totalled 1.376 billion pesos and in 1936-1938 they had grown to 1.907 billion pesos. Compared with 1910-1914, revenues grew from 980 million pesos but from 1920-1924, when they stood at 1.896 billion pesos. Argentina compensated for the loss in export revenues by boosting domestic production and consumption. By 1920-1924, domestic consumption stood at 2.808 billion pesos but had risen to 3.334 billion pesos in 1930-34, and to 4.057 billion pesos in 1936-1938.<sup>238</sup>

While the government's protectionist economic policies of the 1930s had led to import substitution and the creation of a new domestic industrial base, the government started to regulate agricultural policy through commissions such as the Comisión Nacional del Azúcar (sugar market), Junta Nacional de Carnes (cattle market), and even monetary policy through the creation of the Central Bank in 1935.<sup>239</sup> Of interest to us is decree number 31,864 of November 8, 1933, which was promulgated on October 4, 1935 into law (number 12,236) the led to the creation of the yerba mate commission Junta Nacional de Yerba Mate. As mentioned earlier, CRYM regulated yerba mate production in Argentina from 1935.

Contrarily, no regulatory commission existed for the tobacco industry. Tobacco markets in Argentina were well developed before the 1930s. In 1937, the tobacco industry generated 190 million pesos in revenues, which was the third-biggest industrial sector after oil refineries (237 million pesos) and the textile industry (218 million pesos).<sup>240</sup>

Restricting imports and creating a domestic industrial base in the 1930s depressed prices. As Lunnsaavaara stated, tobacco prices paid to Finnish settlers had fallen in the early 1930s by 50%-60% to 0.15-0.40 pesos. Niskanen de Heino said that when she was 14-15 years old in 1928 or 1929, her father had planted only tobacco. They worked hard all summer clearing the field of weeds and watered the plant. Tobacco prices, however, plummeted that year due to oversupply, according to Niskanen de Heino. Tobacco buyers threw out all the *pito*-type and part of *doble* (best leaf) became *bueno*- (intermediate) and (lowest-value) *pito*-type tobacco. Her father told the tobacco buyers that he was not selling. He turned to Laukkanen who paid him little for the tobacco.

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<sup>237</sup> Celso Furtado: *Economic Development of Latin America – Historical Background & Contemporary Problems*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, Cambridge, 1978 (second edition reprinted), pp. 54-57.

<sup>238</sup> Bunge, pp.186-187. The official exchange rate in 1934 was about 20 pesos to a pound sterling. See “Historia General de las Relaciones Exteriores de la República Argentina” under “Inversiones británicas en la Argentina ([www.cema.edu.ar/ceieg/arg-rree/10/10-012.htm](http://www.cema.edu.ar/ceieg/arg-rree/10/10-012.htm))

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

Laukkanen sold the tobacco later for a poor price since it had become too dry and light. Niskanen decided that he would never grow tobacco even if it meant suffering from hunger.<sup>241</sup>

Some settlers such as Niskanen de Heino claimed that the worst tobacco-price years were 1934-1936. Lunnasvaara does not specify whether the price he cites is for *bueno*, *doble* or *pito* tobacco leaf. *Bueno* was the best tobacco leaf, while *pito* had the least value since it grew at the bottom of the plant. Laasonen said that 30%-40% of the tobacco harvest could comprise of *bueno*-type tobacco.<sup>242</sup> As stated in section 2.4, the price of Nacional-type manufactured yerba mate had plunged by 42.2% in 1937 from 1930.

Restrictions on yerba mate were even reported by Ilkka Pärssinen as late as in 1967 and 1968. The pastor of the Finnish Seamen's Church of Buenos Aires during 1968-1974 said that these ceilings brought some families at Colonia Finlandesa to the brink of "near-economic collapse."<sup>243</sup> While the extent of environmental degradation at Colonia Finlandesa must have been more extensive in the 1960s than in the 1930s, Pärssinen states that one of the main problems of the colony was selling its agricultural products to the market.<sup>244</sup>

Even though Misiones' first cooperative, Cooperativa Tabacalera y Yerbatera Rincón de Bonpland (CTYRB), was founded in Almafuerde in 1926, Finns were not its most active members. Laasonen said that Almafuerde was not only a long distance from some Finnish farmers, but that Germans ran the co-operative.<sup>245</sup> "The farmer at the colony had to fight by himself for his daily bread. There was no security in the 1930s, not even in the 1920s," said Niskanen de Heino.<sup>246</sup> She said that the *Seuratalo* hall allowed CTYRB to organise dances. The money raised from these events was donated to the local elementary school.

Another factor that discouraged Finnish colonists from making a living at Colonia Finlandesa was the chronic shortage of cash and the semi-barter system that ended during President Perón's second term (1951-1955).<sup>247</sup> Even when a colonist took corn to be milled, payment was made with part of the crop that was milled.<sup>248</sup> The shortage of cash forced some settlers to work outside of the colony. While strenuous clear-cutting work paid a peso a day, when a kilogram of meat cost 50 cents, work such as building bridges was better paid. Such labourers could expect to make 8 pesos a day.<sup>249</sup>

#### **4.2.4 The drought-stricken 1940s**

If the 1930s had undermined the ability of the Finnish colonists to make a living due to low tobacco, yerba mate prices, production curbs and land degradation, the 1940s were also characterised by droughts that lasted as long as 3 years. These dry years had affected Argentina as

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<sup>241</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 137.

<sup>242</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, December 29, 2007.

<sup>243</sup> Ilkka Pärssinen: Argentiinan ja Paraguayn suomalaissiirtokunnat. Siirtolaisuus-Migration 1/1974. p. 30.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30. The problem of getting products to market by tenant farmers in the cereal belt has been cited by Solger, pp. 21-23.

<sup>245</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, December 29, 2007.

<sup>246</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 114.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>248</sup> Interview with Kalevi and Aune Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007. Tessieri's field notes, June 9, 1978.

<sup>249</sup> Interview with Helga Niskanen de Heino, 1978 or 1983, 1984.

well, forcing it to suffer from an economic crisis.<sup>250</sup> Thanks to the end of World War 2, however, demand for Argentinean agricultural products started to pick up. Argentina's currency reserves rose in 1945 to 5.640 billion pesos from 1.300 billion pesos in 1940.<sup>251</sup>

While skimpy opportunities to survive at the colony was one important reason why some families and second-generation colonists chose to move out of Colonia Finlandesa,<sup>252</sup> the improved economic situation in Argentina from the mid-1940s must have been another factor that encouraged settlers to leave for other parts of Misiones and Argentina such as Zárate.

There are some accounts by Niskanen de Heino of how life got especially hard for old people at the colony, who did not or could not follow their children to the cities or to areas where there was better land. As these settlers become too old to toil the land, some ended up living in chronic poverty and abandonment. Some were even reported to have suffered from hunger. Niskanen de Heino remembered the Westerlunds, who settled the colony in 1906. "Kalle and Maria ate only dried manioc powder and drank (alcohol),"<sup>253</sup> according to her.

Thanks to precipitation data from the Argentine weather bureau, *Servicio Meteorológico Nacional*, on Colonia Finlandesa and neighbouring Bonpland, we can get a rough picture of when the colony suffered from dry and wet years.<sup>254</sup>

A rapid analysis of the precipitation data for 1910-1949 by the Finnish Meteorological Institute (*Ilmatieteenlaitos*), shows that there were 10 dry (1917, 1924, 1927, 1933, 1939, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945 and 1947) and 9 wet calendar years (1911, 1914, 1922, 1923, 1928, 1932, 1940, 1941 and 1948).<sup>255</sup> The total amount of dry and wet years during the period under review accounted for 47.5% (19 years). When studying precipitation data by decades, the following picture emerges: in the 1910s there were 1 dry and 2 wet years (30% of total); in the 1920s, 2 dry and 3 wet years (50%); in the 1930s, 2 dry and 1 wet year (30%); but in the 1940s there were 5 dry and 3 wet years (80%).

Liisa Makkonen, who lived at Almafuerte during 1951-1960, said that one of the biggest discussion topics among farmers in the 1950s were the droughts of the previous decade. The Finns called the drought years of the 1940s the *suurkuivuuden vuodet*, or the years of the great drought. Little rainfall during 1942-1945 and 1947 caused some wells to dry up, forcing farmers to fetch water from the Mártires river. The drought years of the 1940s had caused forest fires as well. Liisa Makkonen remembered that these fires had consumed 20 hectares of her parents' farm.<sup>256</sup> If the drought years of the 1940s did not bring hardships for the settlers and was a blow to their confidence, Colonia Finlandesa suffered in the mid-1940s from a locust attack as well.<sup>257</sup>

<sup>250</sup> Eduardo Crawley: *Una casa dividida: Argentina 1880-1980*. Alianza Editorial. Buenos Aires 1987, p. 140.

<sup>251</sup> Romero, p.195.

<sup>252</sup> Tessieri's field notes and recent conversations with Reino Laasonen and Liisa Makkonen.

<sup>253</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 196.

<sup>254</sup> Rainfall levels from Colonia Finlandesa 1910-49 documented by the national weather bureau, Servicio Meteorológico Nacional. The report is for Caa-Yarí, located next to Colonia Finlandesa because it forms part of the municipality of the former hamlet. Rainfall levels for Bonpland were used for the 1940s because the data from Caa-Yarí is incomplete for that decade.

<sup>255</sup> Based on a quick analysis by Ari Venäläinen, senior researcher at the Finnish Meteorological Institute.

<sup>256</sup> Interview with Liisa Makkonen, Gran Buenos Aires, November 13, 2007.

<sup>257</sup> Interview with Aune Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007.

While higher- or lower-than-average rainfall levels do not affect the yerba mate crop as much as the tobacco plant, too little rainfall in the first 2 months can affect the growth of the latter crop. Similarly, the leaves of the tobacco plant can be ruined if there is too much rainfall during last month when it is going to be harvested.<sup>258</sup>

If we specifically look at rainfall levels during the tobacco-growing season, which began at Colonia Finlandesa as early as August and ended as late as February, precipitation data levels during this period reveal the following: 6 dry (1910-11, 1917-18, 1936-37, 1938-39, 1942-43 and 1944-45) and 7 wet years (1911-12, 1914-15, 1919-20, 1928-29, 1929-30, 1937-38 and 1945-46). During the August-February period, the 1910s were the most erratic (2 dry and 3 wet years) followed by the 1920s (2 wet years), 1930s (2 dry and 1 wet) and 1940s (2 dry and 1 wet).

Tobacco output in Misiones had grown five-fold during 1910-1950, rising from an average of 1.247 million kilograms in the 1910s to 6.773 million kilograms in the 1940s, according to Argentinean Agriculture Ministry figures.<sup>259</sup> From the 1910s to the 1920s, tobacco output grew on average by 131.9% to 2.892 million kilograms, and in the 1930s by 81.5% to 5.250 million kilograms versus the previous decade. In the 1940s, however, tobacco production slows on average by 29.0% to 6.774 million kilograms, and contracts in the 1950s by 16.6% to 5.655 million kilograms. Subsequently lower output in the 1950s forced tobacco companies to offer better prices.<sup>260</sup>

While rainfall data gives us a general picture of how tobacco output may have been affected by higher- or lower-than-average rainfall, the data shows that erratic precipitation at Colonia Finlandesa could have been another source of uncertainty for the settlers as table 4.10 suggests.

**Table 4.10: Biggest falls in tobacco output in Misiones to 1949 during August-February versus the previous tobacco-growing period and rainfall at Colonia Finlandesa.**<sup>261</sup>

Years	Output	Aug.–Feb. rainfall
1917–1918	–67.9% to 594,817 kg.	–259.6mm
1910–1911	–65.7% to 293,432 kg.	–390.6mm
1921–1922	–61% to 992,259 kg.	26.9mm
1913–1914	–46.9% to 639,542 kg.	–141.4mm
1941–1942	–41.6% to 4.222 million kg.	–165.2mm
1924–1925	–38.3% to 2.848 million kg.	–172.00mm
1933–1934	–36.9% to 3.207 million kg.	52.8mm
1937–1938	–36.8% to 3.689 million kg.	–238.1mm
1947–1948	–33.5% to 5.064 million kg.	–85.30mm
1927–1928	–29.1% to 1,809 million kg.	113.1mm
1926–1927	–28.2% to 2.553 million kg.	–139.7mm

Source: Dirección Nacional de Producción y Economía Agropecuaria y Forestal – Area Tabaco.

<sup>258</sup> Interviews with Liisa Makkonen, Viljo Niskanen and others.

<sup>259</sup> While there is no data that offers tobacco output levels at Colonia Finlandesa, the table is an attempt to show a possible relationship between lower-than-average rainfall and output.

<sup>260</sup> Dirección Nacional de Producción y Economía Agropecuaria y Forestal – Area Tabaco.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

### 4.3 The social impact of Colonia Finlandesa's demise

*If before many young men could not turn Colonia Finlandesa into a success, then nobody can today.*  
Graciela Niskanen, June 6, 1978

Albeit a much smaller population than in the 1940s, the Colonia Finlandesa I saw for the first time in 1977 and 1978 must have been a faint image of what it probably was like in the 1950s: A slowly dying community.

When Makkonen lived in Almafuerite in the 1950s, she remembered Colonia Finlandesa as a community where its settlers planted mainly subsistence crops. "In the 1950s nobody had big plantations. The yerba mate plantations were 2-3 hectares," she said. "People grew subsistence crops, only a little yerba mate and tobacco."<sup>262</sup> According to her, lots of Finns left the colony in 1947-49 for the cities. In the 1950s, she said there were 8 Finns living in Almafuerite and 20 at Colonia Finlandesa. Viljo Niskanen claimed that in the early 1950s there were 25 Finnish families still living at Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>263</sup> Makkonen said that there were so few Finns living so dispersed from each other that there was no longer a feeling of living in a Finnish community. At the time, the *Seurantalo* hall held 3-4 masses and 5-6 dances a year.<sup>264</sup>

By 1977-78, however, the symbols of collective achievement such as the *Seurantalo* hall, though humble in appearance and which must have fuelled a sense of pride among the Finnish colonists, were gone. If the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking population of Colonia Finlandesa had become a minority in the 1940s, by the time I visited it in the 1970s there were even fewer settlers. The 80-odd-strong community was made up mostly of young or very old colonists that lived long distances from each other. Of these, at least six of them were native Finns: Fanny Lepistö, Töllinoja de Niskanen, Heino in Colonia Finlandesa; Reino Putkuri in Almafuerite; Pentti Sormunen and Alexandra Putkuri in San Martín.

During those three visits in the late-1970s, there was nothing spectacular to write about Colonia Finlandesa except for the peculiarity that a few Finns and their descendants lived in such a far-flung colony. For some that lived there, it was evident that their only aim was surviving from day to day. Some older native-born Finns survived thanks to a monthly pension they received from Finland, while the rest did so by farming mostly subsistence crops.

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<sup>262</sup> Ida Elin Gumberg (December 14, 2007) said that the majority of the Finns at Colonia Finlandesa in the 1930s lived off subsistence crops. Liisa Makkonen (December 14, 2007) said that in the 1950s there were no longer at Colonia Finlandesa large tobacco plantations as prior to the 1930s. She said that the small yerba plantations were 2-3 hectares in size. Graciela Niskanen, who lived at Colonia Finlandesa during 1950-1964-65, remembered that colonist kept on growing 2-3 hectares of tobacco. They could grow more tobacco since they had farmhands working at the farm. She states, however, that there was a lot of *capuera*, second-growth forest and brush. She couldn't say if the tobacco grown was of good quality but noted that it was a constant fight with the buyers. They always paid low prices. A sign that environmental degradation was pronounced in the 1960s were that some colonists started to plant pines.

<sup>263</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, October 13, 2007.

<sup>264</sup> Interview with Liisa Makkonen, Gran Buenos Aires, October 28, 2007.



*Picture 4.7: A group picture taken in the 1930s in front of the Seurantalo hall. (Courtesy of Artturi and Helga Niskanen de Heino)*

Those who lived at the colony, whether on their own will or because they were too poor to leave, are those that a television documentary and Finnish magazines brought to national attention in the early 1970s.<sup>265</sup> As a result of these documentaries and news stories, a special fund was created by the Red Cross help the Finns of Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>266</sup>

Pastors Ilkka Pärssinen and Jaakko Kuusinen, who was the head of the Finnish Seamen's Church of Buenos Aires during 1974-76, paid a number of visits to the colony. Pastor Kuusinen said that some 50-60 Finns and their descendants gathered for mass at Heino's home at Colonia Finlandesa. He described the colony as in a "state of stagnation," where people only lived to get by.<sup>267</sup> Likewise, Kuusinen's predecessor, Ilkka Pärssinen, gave the following description of the state of the colony. He said that apart from being poorly integrated and a very Finnish colony, the aspirations of the colony were undermined by their hard lives. "In some cases it had lead them to hopelessness, or (to be in a) 'let-go state.'"<sup>268</sup>

Erkki Kiviranta, a pastor who visited Colonia Finlandesa, expressed concern already in 1939 about the colonists' lives. "These days the Finns have adapted to the normal vagaries of nature, which in the beginning surprised them, and destructive insects no longer are common as before. But there are still other difficulties. The children's schooling is one of them. Work by the (Lutheran) church is almost non-existent. Children are not christened and couples are not wed. A Finn told me how he

<sup>265</sup> TV documentary by Kerstin Hanf, *Pettymysten paratiisi*, 1973.

<sup>266</sup> Interview with Jaakko Kuusisto, Fuengirola, Spain, December 5, 2007.

<sup>267</sup> Interview with Jaakko Kuusisto, Fuengirola, Spain, December 5, 2007.

<sup>268</sup> Interview with Ilkka Pärssinen, Rymättylä, Finland, December 6, 2007.



had to go to the local police station to get married because there wasn't a pastor or justice of the peace nearby. A Swedish seamen's pastor visited the colony about 10 years ago. He wed Swedish and Finnish couples and christened children. The dead are blessed by a Catholic priest. Spiritual services are only offered to those who want them by the alien Catholic Church, and only in the local language."<sup>269</sup>

About 3-4 years before my arrival, the *Seurantalo* had ceased to exist around 1973-74.<sup>270</sup> The loss of such an important icon of the community must have fuelled a sense of great loss. E. Heino said that there was no interest in taking care of the *Seurantalo* or money to refurbish it. She stated that the building was in such a state of decay that one could not stomp too hard on the floor since the roof could collapse.<sup>271</sup>



Picture 4.8: A group picture taken in the 1920s of mostly Karelians from Kitee. The colony received an important injection of settlers from eastern Finland during this decade. ( Courtesy of Lahja Malinen)

<sup>269</sup> Kiviranta, p. 55.

<sup>270</sup> Interview (December 6, 2007) with Ilkka Pärssinen, who was the Finnish Seamen Church pastor in Buenos Aires during 1968-1974. He said that even if the *Seurantalo* hall was still standing in the early 1970s, its use was abandoned in the late-1960s. There were plans to build from the *Seurantalo* a small church. Even some money had been collected for such a project. However, the project never materialised. The last president of the Sociedad Finlandesa that ran hall was Väinö Lepistö (Tessieri's field notes, May 27, 1978).

<sup>271</sup> Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, May 27, 1978.

In the late-1970s, the only government institutions at Colonia Finlandesa continued to be the post office and elementary school No. 73. A non-Finn now ran the post office since 1941, after Laukkanen had retired after 30 years of service.<sup>272</sup> While nearly half of the 41 students that attended the elementary school during its first year in 1922 were Finns, in 1978, Argentine-born third-generation Finnish children such as Mirta and her sister Carmen Niskanen were a minority at the school.

Two matters that impressed me the most about the colony during those first visits were tales on alcohol abuse and their impoverished lives. Some of the tales on drinking were not only candid, but grotesque as well.<sup>273</sup> Due to my rudimentary knowledge of Finnish mainland culture at the time, I did not comprehend fully the role that alcohol played in Finnish culture nor at Colonia Finlandesa. Thus alcohol, which appeared to be a popular topic of the folklore of the colony, was for me what Douglas pointed out so eloquently as “a felicitous by-product of field research.”<sup>274</sup> I not only heard tales about how some colonists had drunk themselves to their graves, but also got a first-hand view of it.

One of these was a man I met by chance in November 1977. Eero Granlund, a second-generation Finn born in Argentina, was off to the country store with a bicycle after toiling in the field all day. Granlund’s clothes were raggedy, dusty and he wore a straw hat. After we exchanged a few words in Finnish, we switched to Spanish. I scented alcohol on his breath.

He told me that he wanted to leave Colonia Finlandesa and move to the Iguazú region of northern Misiones, where the land was better for growing crops. Granlund admitted, however, that he could not leave Colonia Finlandesa until his two children became adults. “I got into some bad business deals and they brought me down,” he said. “Here one does not progress. One only lives to survive.”<sup>275</sup> About a month and a half later when I returned to the colony for a short visit in December 1977, I heard Granlund had died at a Posadas hospital after slipping into a coma, presumably due to his drinking. He was 41 years old.

A Polish descendant called Marzek ran a humble country store at Antti Lemmetyinen’s former home. I asked him in 1977 what he saw as the biggest challenges facing Colonia Finlandesa. According to him, the biggest problem was not alcohol but teaching people to eat nutritious diets. He said the only food they consumed at the colony were black beans, manioc and wine.<sup>276</sup>

Another colonist I remember is Gumberg, the 71-year-old woman who never married and lived in a humble one-room “barn.” Some claimed that she was an undocumented person in Argentina. When I met her the last time, Gumberg said that she was thankful that it had been the second Sunday in a row she had paid neighbours visits. Like attempting to break a personal record of three Sundays in a row, she wondered who she would visit the following weekend. Gumberg never found out because

<sup>272</sup> Elena Laukkanen, Antti Laukkanen’s daughter, said that her father never got paid for the work he did as postmaster. When he retired he was eligible for an Argentinean pension. However, he had to change citizenship to receive the pension. He refused to change citizenship. Interview done in San Martín, Misiones, July 29, 2007.

<sup>273</sup> The first person how revealed how some drank at Colonia Finlandesa was Helga Niskanen de Heino. In my field notes taken December 11-19, 1977, she claimed that alcohol was Colonia Finlandesa’s number one problem. She stated that almost all of the first Finnish colonists died directly of alcohol or alcohol-related causes. Her husband, whom she accused of drinking, almost committed suicide in the late 1930s and her son Jussi, died when he was stabbed 18 times by a jealous husband. Helga Niskanen de Heino blames alcohol for the death of her son.

<sup>274</sup> Douglas, p. 3.

<sup>275</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, November 2, 1977.

<sup>276</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, December 19, 1977.

she died the following dawn, on December 19, 1977, when a snake bit her as she reached for firewood from under the cooking stove. Granlund's and Gumberg's deaths were dramatic to say the least and highlighted what Colonia Finlandesa was in the late-1970s – a marginal place where people died presumably from alcohol abuse and rare snakebites.

Colonia Finlandesa's isolation is only grasped when one visits the colony. No major highway goes through it except for a gravel road, which, paradoxically, as it became wider, housed fewer Finns. In 1977-78, the road was wide enough for two cars to pass. That is a sharp contrast from the early years of the colony's founding, when the road was only a metre-wide path.<sup>277</sup>

Töllinoja de Niskanen was sitting in winter 1978 on the porch that overlooked the road that connects Colonia Finlandesa with the outside world. We noticed a car drive by and commented on the incident as if it was big news. We asked each other who the driver might have been and where he was heading. That is how rare car traffic was at Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>278</sup>

### 4.3.1 Non-anomic tales and aspirations

Despite some debate over Durkheim's classic work on anomie,<sup>279</sup> or in particular anomic suicide, it offers a good opportunity to analyse and understand what could have inflicted Colonia Finlandesa. While in Durkheim's classic study *Suicide* makes the distinction between egoistic and altruistic suicide, when a person is either too integrated or too little integrated into society, anomic suicide, on the other hand, is attributable to a lack of regulation of the individual by society.<sup>280</sup> If anomie existed at Colonia Finlandesa, two factors that exacerbated the lack of societal regulation were its far-flung geographic location in Misiones and its distance from Finland.

Little outside regulation by the government was even apparent in the early decades after the colony's founding. The first government institution was the post office founded in 1911, and 11 years later the elementary school opened its doors in 1922. Beside these two institutions, there was also the Seurantalo hall, built in 1924. Heino's daughter Eevi mentioned that in the 1950s there was also a humble small Baptist wooden chapel at Colonia Finlandesa that looked more like a shed<sup>281</sup> that offered church services sporadically.

If the colony was geographically and culturally remote, it would be incorrect to conclude that it was a community where there was no regulation and where everyone behaved anyway they pleased. Contrary to the Finnish utopian colony of Sointula in British Columbia, Canada, free love was not apparently practiced at Colonia Finlandesa. Aune Saarinen said that during the 1940s, girls were rarely allowed to walk alone outside of the farm. If a person was interested in a girl, A. Saarinen, who was born in Colonia Finlandesa in 1937, said that on Sunday's boys would drop by at the farm where they would drink mate and be closely watched by their parents.<sup>282</sup> Even so, there are some

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<sup>277</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 23.

<sup>278</sup> Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, June 9, 1978.

<sup>279</sup> Philippe Besnard stated about Emil Durkheim's anomie: "This surprising conceptual confusion and this semantic metamorphosis can be partly explained by the relative obscurity of the word anomie from the beginning, that is in Durkheim's work itself. The notion of anomie is not really elaborated in his work. See: Philippe Besnard: The true nature of anomie. *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 1. (Spring, 1988), pp. 91-92.

<sup>280</sup> Durkheim, p. 145-277.

<sup>281</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 218.

<sup>282</sup> Interview with Aune Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, June 28, 2007.

accounts of women who sold themselves as prostitutes.<sup>283</sup> Some of these women were widows of men who had apparently died because of alcohol, or had alcohol problems themselves.

Even though there were strict rules regulating behaviour between both members of the opposite sex, there appears to have been different norms between white Finns and *Criollas*. Niskanen de Heino mentioned that every time a single *Criolla* woman got pregnant, one of the first questions that was asked was who had gotten her pregnant. “By the (skin) colour of the child we would tell whether it was a Finnish settler or not,” she said.<sup>284</sup> Another factor that must have played the role of regulating social norms was widespread gossip.<sup>285</sup> Even though it is questionable what kind of impact it had on the colonists, it reveals that some people watched over closely and commented on each other’s behaviour. However, since there was no church, police station or other visible moral watchdogs that put the colonists under close scrutiny, it suggests that the settlers played a key role in regulating norms and mores, which they had learned in Finland.

One of the institutions that challenged the role of Finnish culture at Colonia Finlandesa was the elementary school. For some of the Finnish pupils, the school was the first place where they learned to speak the Spanish language and when they came into contact with children of other national and ethnic backgrounds.<sup>286</sup> A. Saarinen said that she had learned Spanish from the *Criollos* mestizo peasants at her farm before attending school, but her sister Elba, born in 1932, spoke only Finnish on her first day in class. When a Finnish child learned to speak Spanish at school, it was usually transmitted at home to their younger brothers and sisters.

Niskanen de Heino remembered some of the cultural conflicts that the elementary school caused at home. “At school we learned the customs of this country and it caused a lot of confusion at home,” she said. “At home we were taught that girls curtsy and boys bow when greeting a visitor. At school the teacher prohibited (her brother) Jalmari from bowing. We told mother that bowing and curtsying were not Argentinean customs. This made mother totally hapless and she said: ‘Do as you please. I no longer know how (to educate you).’”<sup>287</sup>

Contrary to the late-1970s, at some point in Colonia Finlandesa’s history there must have existed a sense of collective aim that was reinforced by customs such as dividing meat between neighbours and friends when an animal was slaughtered. Since one pig offered too much meat for a family to eat at once, the meat was “lent” to other colonists. When the person who had “lent” the meat slaughtered an animal on his farm, he would “lend” it back to the original person.<sup>288</sup> This practice was not always the rule, however. Exceptions were if the meat was going to be sold, the animal was slaughtered because it was ill, or if the family was poor.<sup>289</sup>

Another expression of communal solidarity at Colonia Finlandesa was the *talkoo*, a Finnish practice whereby neighbours and friends volunteer to help another member of the community. If you took part in a *talkoo*, you were entitled to ask the person whom you helped to work on your farm without

<sup>283</sup> Interview with Ida Maire Elin Lemmetyinen, Zárate, Buenos Aires province, October 25, 2008.

<sup>284</sup> Interview with Helga Niskanen de Heino, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, June, 1978.

<sup>285</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 118, and Interview with Helga Niskanen de Heino, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, June, 1978.

<sup>286</sup> Interview with Kalevi and Aune Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, June 28, 2007.

<sup>287</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 44. Helga Niskanen de Heino’s mother had tried to teach her children to read in Spanish without any luck. After this and that her son Jalmari was not allowed to bow at school, she felt impotent to with Spanish and different cultural values that her children learned at the school.

<sup>288</sup> Tessieri’s Field notes, June 1, 1978. Graciela Niskanen (Dec. 15, 2007) said that the meat was lent and not given as a present.

<sup>289</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, June 1, 1978.

pay.<sup>290</sup> This type of cooperation ended in the 1950s.<sup>291</sup> Another example of a communal bond was the sauna. While not all the Finns had saunas as the colony got older, it was a customary at some farms to invite neighbours regularly to bathe on Fridays or Saturdays.<sup>292</sup> “For the Finns, the sauna was not a status symbol. It was something traditional; it was and still is a way he can relive his love for the country (of his parents). Saunas were always built near a stream or a place where there was water; at some families the sauna was used to wash clothes as well as to cleanse themselves without heating it.”<sup>293</sup>

Despite these customs, there are contradictory accounts in the oral histories that show diehard conflicts between the colonists. One of the biggest sources of ingroup friction was between the Swedish- and Finnish-speaking Finns as well as the Karelians and non-Karelians. One of the biggest issues at the *Seurantalo* hall was whether the association should subscribe to *Karjalan Maa* or *Helsingin Sanomat*.<sup>294</sup> Niskanen de Heino told me that there were three distinct groups at Colonia Finlandesa: Swedish-speaking Finns, Karelians and non-Karelians, which must have splintered into many subgroups.<sup>295</sup> These types of in-group conflicts reveal that Colonia Finlandesa was not a united community.

Even though Colonia Finlandesa must have been a home away from home for some since Finns lived in a colony faraway from their homeland, there are very few accounts of “successful settlers.” According to Niskanen de Heino, “only 1%” of the settlers had ambitions of making money. Her affirmation is quite interesting. In the Durkheimian sense, it gives the impression that since so few had any ambitions of making money and thereby improve their lives, “each would instinctively feel that things are as they should be.”<sup>296</sup> If they did not have any ambitions of making money, what was their aim? While some of the answers may revolve around a vague notion of Finns living together in quasi-harmonious relationships, I believe it shows that the community was far from being a place where ideal equality existed. The great amount of conflicts and hardships point to the fact that the small community and its members did feel frustrated alienated, deprived, discontented – or anomic, as Edgerton pointed out earlier. If you ask the settlers what challenges they faced, they blame alcohol, low tobacco prices and poor land for their failures. With respect to the last factor, rarely do they admit that they were directly responsible for the extensive environmental destruction that took place at Colonia Finlandesa due to tobacco farming and a total lack of environmental management.

Even though the statement by Niskanen de Heino may suggest anomia, it should be stressed that it does not mean that the whole community just accepted their hardships and embraced a world where there was no collective aim and where hopelessness was the rule. Since Colonia Finlandesa lost its ability to guide its settlers towards a collective goal, the job of regulation was left to the family through activities such as housecleaning once week, and adhering to norms on what they considered responsible and irresponsible drinking, which I will discuss in more detail later in the thesis.

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<sup>290</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, June 9, 1978.

<sup>291</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 196. Helga Niskanen de Heino said that there were so few Finns in the 1950s that you “could count them with your fingers.” While this may be a slight exaggeration, it shows how much of a minority the Finns had become at Colonia Finlandesa. Her daughter Eevi Heino gives an account of the colony in the 1950s and 1960s. See Tessieri (b), pp. 219-220.

<sup>292</sup> Interview with Kalevi and Aune Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007.

<sup>293</sup> Letter (December 10, 2007) from Kalevi Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones.

<sup>294</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, June 12, 1978.

<sup>295</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, June 12, 1978.

<sup>296</sup> Durkheim, pp. 251-252.

One of the observations I made on Colonia Finlandesa is that it existed on great doses of hope, even naivety, which reveals that at least some of the colonists did not accept things as they were. E. Heino, who is a third-generation Finnish Argentinean born in 1949, still had hope in the mid-1960s when she was 15 years old that the colony would become a big village. She said that that a forest company called Nosiglia had bought a lot of land at Colonia Finlandesa. Trucks drove daily to fetch logged wood and there were a lot of workers, which helped boost sales at her parents' store. Nosiglia widened the jungle road of the colony. Two cars could now pass each other on both side of the road. "Everyone thought (at the time) that after the logging work ended they would start building houses and we'd become a big village," she said. "People spoke about a bus line that would start to operate from Oberá to Colonia Finlandesa. Everyone was happy since the colony had a future. When the work ended, the trucks and workers left and nobody ever returned."<sup>297</sup>

Niskanen de Heino claimed that the majority of the people that lived at Colonia Finlandesa were people who liked it. "My father always said that it was destiny that brought him here and it is what he really wanted. Even though there was freedom, things were not always that easy," she admitted.<sup>298</sup> When I asked her why her family had not progressed at Colonia Finlandesa, she said it was because everything they built was "temporary." She said that because they lived in a state of "non-permanency," they never expanded nor cared for the condition of their home. She blamed their situation for living in two cultures simultaneously. "We had one foot in Argentina and another one in Finland, and in the end we did not know where our home was," she said.<sup>299</sup>

Considering that Artturi Heino was the patriarch of the community, ran a country store and where Finnish pastors from Buenos Aires held mass at their home, one wonders what the worse-off farmers thought how successful their lives were.

If only very few of the inhabitants of the colony had aspirations of making money, one of the factors that affected everyone was the chronic shortage of money before the 1950s due to barter scheme and buying on credit. In the 1930s, when Niskanen de Heino's husband had been hospitalised in Buenos Aires for 9 months after a failed suicide attempt, A. Heino sent money to her from an insurance policy he had in Finland. Parkkulainen had heard from someone about the cheques and offered to cash them for a 40% commission. "I went to pay (Parkkulainen) with the check and I'm sure he was really upset when he saw how much money it was. With that money I bought clothes, food, everything. Even people and relatives asked me if I could lend them money," she said.<sup>300</sup>

Laukkanen was considered a successful colonist but lost everything in the late-1920s. He had moved with his wife Ida Eklund de Laukkanen to Argentina in 1909,<sup>301</sup> when Thesleff abandoned the colony in December of that year.<sup>302</sup> After Thesleff, Laukkanen became the patriarch of Colonia Finlandesa. According to his daughter Elena Laukkanen, who was born in 1920, her father was not only Colonia Finlandesa's first postmaster, but opened its first store, did veterinary work, drew maps of farm plots, and owned the colony's first motor vehicle, a Ford Model T.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Tessieri (b), pp. 223-224.

<sup>298</sup> Tessieri's field notes, June 9, 1978.

<sup>299</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 120.

<sup>300</sup> Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, June 9 1978.

<sup>301</sup> Lähteenmäki collection. Turun yliopiston historianlaitos.

<sup>302</sup> Koivukangas, p. 259 & Peltoniemi, p. 167.

<sup>303</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, Dec. 29, 2007. He said that it was a 1926-1927 Ford T.

Around 1927, the Laukkanens faced financial ruin. Laukkanen's daughter said that Erkki Perilä had demanded her father pay him back the tobacco and yerba mate he had sold on credit. Because he never got paid, Perilä organised an auction with people from Almafuerte, Mártires, Bonpland and Caa-Yarí. "All of the animals were auctioned and mother cried in the kitchen together with a cow from which we children got milk. The cow was bought by a Salmi who later gave it back to mother," said E. Laukkanen. "My father was too nice to people and always sold everything on credit. That's why he went bankrupt."

It is pretty incredible that a man such as Laukkanen, who brought "progress" to the colony, ended up losing everything. There are some accounts<sup>304</sup> that claim that Laukkanen started to drink at old age. His daughter considered only Antti Lemmetyinen Jr. and Perilä to be the only successful Finns at Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>305</sup>

Perilä, who planted in the beginning a small amount of crops, deforested few tens of hectares to grow yerba mate.<sup>306</sup> He also had a reputation for being stingy and a workaholic. Niskanen de Heino remembered that he had a cow he milked. He used to mix the milk with maize porridge. When the colonists heard that his only cow stopped giving milk, they offered to sell some to the then poor family. "Ha!" said Perilä. "But I won't buy any milk. I am not going to buy anything until I have made back what I had spent."

While Perilä represented the Protestant work ethic, or the "1%" that had ambitions of making money, many mocked at his avaricious lifestyle. So much so, in fact, that the colonists made a saying at Colonia Finlandesa: "Very hard work and a greedy life is how Perilä did things."<sup>307</sup>

Lemmetyinen Jr, who opened a store after Laukkanen's bankruptcy, lent money to the colonists with dismal results. His brother Pekka Lemmetyinen ran a small store and a bar at the colony as well.<sup>308</sup> Ida Maire Elin Lemmetyinen, Lemmetyinen Jr.'s granddaughter, said that her grandfather lent money to the colonists but only one person ever paid him back.<sup>309</sup>

#### **4.3.2 Non-anomic tales and cleanliness**

As mentioned in the literature survey, Douglas associated dirt and cleanliness as a means whereby a person ordered his environment. "If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as simply matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations, and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system."<sup>310</sup> Furthermore, and apart from creating a sense of order, Douglas' theories permit us to see what some members of the community defined as disorder, or what threatened their order.

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<sup>304</sup> Interviews with settlers that knew Antti Laukkanen.

<sup>305</sup> Interview with Elena Laukkanen, San Martín, Misiones, June 30, 2007. Ida Elin Lemmetyinen said that the only men that were well off at Colonia Finlandesa were Antti Lemmetyinen and Erkki Perilä. Even if we can add a few others like Herman Lemmetyinen and his wife and the Tihveräs (field notes, June 9, 1978), it shows that that a very small amount of colonists that were seen by others as well off.

<sup>306</sup> Tessieri (b), pp. 79-80.

<sup>307</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 80. "Hirvittävästi työtä ja saita elämä merkitsi Perilän meinikiä."

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., pp. 78-79.

<sup>309</sup> Interview with Ida Maire Elin Lemmetyinen Zárate, Argentina, Dec. 14, 2007.

<sup>310</sup> Douglas (b), p. 35.

When I began doing fieldwork on Colonia Finlandesa, some of the sources spoke more of the disorder that threatened them than what created order. Two marginal matters that created a strong sense of “us” and “them” were alcohol abuse and suspicion of dark-skinned people such as *Criollos*, Brazilians, and especially Paraguayans and blacks. Few mentioned directly how chasing dirt was important. One of the reasons why they did not start the interview with “how we systematically kept our homes clean” was because it was a self-evident fact for some of them. It was not an issue that needed pondering.

About thirty years after my first visits to Colonia Finlandesa, I started asking some of the former colonists about the role dirt played at their home. At first they did connect dirt with hygiene but understood it as “something out of place.” G. Niskanen, who grew up at her grandparents’ home, stated that the worst thing that one could do was to not put items such as a comb, scissors and sewing needle back in their right places.<sup>311</sup> Even her grandfather Janne demanded that all the tools must be put in their correct places in the shed. “The saw, hammer, machete had to be in its right place,” she said. “If they weren’t, he would get cross and claim that ‘darkies are at work again.’” The role of keeping the house clean and tidy was done at her home systematically every week on Fridays. At some homes, every member of the family had a role when it came to tidying the home. Some washed the clothes; others swept and scrubbed the floor, while some brought water to the sauna. At the Niskanens’ home, housecleaning started in the morning or in the afternoon.<sup>312</sup> G. Niskanen said that one had to even take off their shoes when entering their home.<sup>313</sup>

Even though some homes were cleaned at least once a week, the interesting question that arises is that it was not done in such a rigorous fashion at other homes. Malinen, whose second house had a wooden floor and glass windows, and which she described as “more modern” than their first because of these above-mentioned “luxuries,” said that they did not clean the house on a set day. Since dirt was also used at Colonia Finlandesa to identify other groups, some of the oral histories state that Finns that married *Criollos* ended living in poverty and dirt. In the same as dirt is something out of place at some homes, in others it could be “something in place.” L. Makkonen did not consider Jalmari Niskanen’s Brazilian wife Mabelía a very tidy person. She once told her that she did not like to clean the glass windows of their home because people would think she was poor. Homes with glass windows were considered better off than those that used wooden boards.<sup>314</sup>

Others, such as Laasonen, claimed that more housecleaning was done at “proper” houses versus those that had earth floors since all they had to do was “sweep the floor.”<sup>315</sup> Just as there were many norms on what was considered appropriate and inappropriate drinking at Colonia Finlandesa, it is likely that the frequency at which one did housecleaning also varied from family to family. What is important to keep in mind, however, is that there were differences.

Just like Douglas mentions that dirt avoidance creates a unity of experience,<sup>316</sup> other factors at Colonia Finlandesa that played similar roles were the *talkoo*, “lending” meat to neighbours and friends, and cleansing one’s body in a sauna with neighbours. Not all farms had saunas. Some that

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<sup>311</sup> Interview with Graciela Niskanen, Oberá, Misiones, October 23, 2007.

<sup>312</sup> Interview with Graciela Niskanen, Oberá, Misiones, October 23, 2007 and Aune Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, June 28, 2007. Liisa Makkonen told me (October 10, 2007) that they cleaned their house systematically but this hinged on how much work they had to do at the farm.

<sup>313</sup> Interview with Graciela Niskanen, Oberá, Misiones, October 23, 2007.

<sup>314</sup> Interview with Liisa Makkonen, Gran Buenos Aires, October 28, 2007.

<sup>315</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, October 2, 2008.

<sup>316</sup> Douglas (b), p. 2.



did regularly invited their neighbours to bathe with them once a week. Socialising after the sauna included “drinking a glass of *caña*” but “not getting drunk,” according to V. Niskanen.<sup>317</sup> If Fridays or Saturdays were days when some families cleaned their homes and bathed in saunas, Sundays were for paying visits to friends and relaxing.

If cleanliness played a role in maintaining order at some homes, what kinds of homes existed at Colonia Finlandesa? As mentioned previously, the colonists classified two types at the colony: proper houses, which were better built and had wooden floors, and the so-called “barns,” which were built more economically and had earth floors.

Paavolainen expressed surprise in the 1930s by how many colonists had forgotten their Finnish customs when it came to their homes. “The floor is treaded soil, the walls are made of curled up palm boards with finger-wide cracks, beds have not been made for weeks, there appears to be a shortage of the most essential cooking utensils. Many homes did not have outhouses.”<sup>318</sup> Niskanen de Heino, however, claims that Paavolainen exaggerated. Even though she does not say if the majority of the homes had wooden floors, Niskanen de Heino claimed that many did.<sup>319</sup>

Since Paavolainen’s stay at Colonia Finlandesa was a short, he did not understand the role of the “finger-wide cracks” on the walls nor why some homes did not have outhouses. As mentioned earlier, the former was most probably due to ventilation since the settlers used wood-burning cooking stoves, and the latter most likely to hygiene and because it was not a custom. Taking into account how rapidly organic matter decomposes in Misiones especially in summer, it was probably advisable to urinate and defecate a clear distance from the home since an outhouse attracts pests and smelled.<sup>320</sup> Some claimed that outhouses were not built because they had to be emptied.<sup>321</sup> Laasonen said that even though the law required the colonists to build outhouses at their farms, smell and insects were no excuses since they could be built a clear distance from their homes.<sup>322</sup> Laasonen also blamed “untidiness” for the lack of outhouses and because it was “probably not such an important custom in Finland (sic).” What Laasonen wanted to state is that it was not that important at Colonia Finlandesa. He said that in the 1930s, when farmers constructed new houses, they also built outhouses. As more land was deforested, it implied that a person had to walk longer distances to defecate and therefore an easier solution was the outhouse.<sup>323</sup>

When I asked Laasonen why writers such as Paavolainen had described the houses at Colonia Finlandesa as “plain and stark,” he blamed some of the colonists directly for being untidy or disorderly (*dejado*) and because they had no ambitions. At these homes, alcohol supposedly played a role.<sup>324</sup> In his opinion, “the majority” of the Finnish homes were tidy and systematically cleaned. Paavolainen wrote the following about the Laasonen’s home: “...located on one of the colony’s highest hills, it is very small. But it is painted white, also – it is incredible to say – but there is a real wooden floor that has rugs (*räsymatto*); in front of the small windows are curtains; the bed is made and it has a bedcover.” He said that on top of a tablecloth there was a book of short stories written

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<sup>317</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, October 13, 2007.

<sup>318</sup> Paavolainen, p. 312

<sup>319</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 117.

<sup>320</sup> Interview with Liisa Makkonen, Gran Buenos Aires, October 28, 2007.

<sup>321</sup> Interview with Ida Maire Elin Lemmetyinen Zárate, December. 28, 2007.

<sup>322</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, October 4, 2008.

<sup>323</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, October 19, 2008.

<sup>324</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, November 30, 2007.

by Joel Lehtonen, a one-year-old subscription of piled *Karjalan Maa* newspapers, *La Chacra* magazine as well as a thick Spanish dictionary published by Campano.<sup>325</sup>

While Laasonen said that “ambitionless” people lived in “untidy” homes, his observations also reveal that at some homes housecleaning was not taken as seriously as in others. Laasonen said that his home had two bedrooms and a living room-kitchen. His parents Kalle and Elisa Putkuri de Laasonen cleaned their home on Saturdays. “The rugs were cleaned, the floor washed, curtains, windows and everything. Then the sauna was warmed (for two hours).”<sup>326</sup>

While having glass windows with curtains and a wooden floor were an indication of one’s economic standing at Colonia Finlandesa, some like Jansson had a wooden floor but did not have glass windows but wooden boards instead. Laasonen said that while glass windows were costly, everyone could afford them.<sup>327</sup>

Paavolainen also claimed in *Lähto ja loitsu* that the Swedes had progressed more than the Finns in Misiones. He wrote that Oberá, where Swedes lived, had become an “Argentinean city” with a photography shop, special stores – and even had a bordello. Nothing of the sort existed at Colonia Finlandesa, according to him. “...at the Finnish colony one sees right away the difference between the Finnish homes and plantations and their Danish and German neighbours...” In his opinion, the majority of the houses that Finns lived in had not changed at all since Thesleff abandoned the colony in 1909. “Only time has peacefully carried out its demolition work (on such buildings).”<sup>328</sup>

The first houses that Finns lived in shortly after 1906 did not appear Finnish at all.<sup>329</sup> One matter that made them stand out from where European settlers lived were the great amounts of books and decoration objects. Axel Paul, an employee of the Swedish embassy, visited some of the homes of the Finnish settlers in 1911. “A certain wistfulness hits you when you walk inside their simple homes, which remind you of a student’s shack ...the shelves were arranged (with books by) Runeberg, Topelius and other works of Finnish writers made prettier by gold-coloured sheets in red bindings that were worn out to pieces.”<sup>330</sup> Thesleff had brought an extensive book collection to Misiones. Some of these were on tropical farming.<sup>331</sup>

Neither Paavolainen nor Lunnasvaara make any mention of these books in their writings over twenty years later. Lunnasvaara, for example, states that the houses at Colonia Finlandesa had normally two storeys and were “plain and stark” in appearance.<sup>332</sup> In Paavolainen’s book there is no mention of these two-storey houses. “Some old colonists have decorated their *casa*’s (house) yard, *patio*, with small garden-like plants where a few fruits grow together with *paraíso* and yerba mate trees, about 10 banana plants, grape orchards as well as a few ornament bushes. This is in the best of cases, but some Finnish families still live in shacks built 30 years ago (sic) that are not very different from the ones that natives inhabit.”<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Paavolainen, p. 314. When I asked Reino Laasonen (December 29, 2007) why his mother had rugs, he said it was because she had made them herself. A “räsymatto” is made by pieces of rags and cloth.

<sup>326</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, November 1, 2007.

<sup>327</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, December 13, 2007.

<sup>328</sup> Paavolainen, p. 312.

<sup>329</sup> Lähteenmäki, p. 224.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>332</sup> Lunnasvaara, p. 7.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., pp. 7.

Lunnasvaara makes a clear difference between the first and second floors of the home that he described and which was probably where the Westerlunds lived. While on the first floor there were cracks between the palm boards, which curled up when dry, it was for keeping the kitchen ventilated when cooking food, according to him. During the rainy season water would seep in the first floor. Typical furniture included a few footstools, a couple of chairs, a plain table as well as a shelf.<sup>334</sup> “On the second floor, where there was a bedroom and possibly some type of ‘guest room,’ was more comfortable. It has a wooden floor and there aren’t any cracks on the walls, which is necessary because of the mosquitoes. In the best of cases (at Colonia Finlandesa), there is a rug on the floor, walls are covered with paper and what is still rarer – glass windows with curtains.”<sup>335</sup> Lunnasvaara described the furniture on the second floor as “more complete” than what he observed on the first floor. Some pieces of furniture included chairs, tables, bed and usually a large ironclad chest as well as other objects such as a couple of framed portraits, a few souvenirs and decorations.<sup>336</sup>

Malinen remembered Perilä’s first home in the 1920s, before he became “well off” by Colonia Finlandesa standards. “Their house looked more like a shed than a home. The kitchen floor was of earth and their bedroom (with a wooden floor) about a metre higher. I remember the house was always dark. At its end there was possibly a wooden hatch.”<sup>337</sup> She also described the homes at the colony as “modest-looking” when compared with those in Finland. Her first home was acquired from Antti Pirhonen, who had returned to Finland. “Our (first) home was spacious, apart from a room that had a wooden floor, there was also the kitchen, where the floor was hardened soil... The outside boards of the house were not painted and made of cut bamboo (boards). The cracks in between the boards played the same role as the window. We shut our board windows at night.”<sup>338</sup>

She wrote highly about her parents’ friends, Frans and Hulda Kanerva, whom she considered examples of “cleanliness and methodicalness.” She remembered their sauna was “super clean.” The dressing room had curtains on the window and a rug on the floor, which was a luxury during those days.<sup>339</sup>

Another interesting role that cleanliness played at Colonia Finlandesa was that it served as a barometer to classify other national and ethnic groups. I once asked the Heinos in 1983 what differences there were between what Argentinean and Finnish parents taught their children. “We had to take everything seriously. We never had things out of order, it never happened... At least for as long as there were children at home... Mother was in pain (in old age) and even when father was old he still worked and washed his clothes,” she said.<sup>340</sup>

According to Kalevi and Aune Saarinen, who were born in Colonia Finlandesa in 1932 and 1937, respectively, Finnish children as themselves always attended school with clean clothes while others, such as the *Criollos*, dressed in dirty clothes and had lice. Even though this may have been the case, both mentioned that being clean was what distinguished them from other national and ethnic groups. Kalevi Saarinen believed that keeping a home clean and tidy gave one “a small sense of pride.”<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-8.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Malinen, p. 33.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>340</sup> Interview with Artturi and Helga Niskanen de Heino, Zárate, tape 2/1983.

<sup>341</sup> Interview with Kalevi Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007.



Picture 4.9: Note the curtains used in the window of the kitchen. “Better-off” homes had glass windows with curtains. Some of the improvements that Janne Niskanen made on the home were installing glass windows and building a new kitchen. The picture was taken in the early 1920s. Note the thickness of the forest in the background and compare it with the picture below taken about 10 years later. The owner purposefully severed the cut out part of the picture. (Courtesy of Hanna Niskanen de Haupt)

If there was a system to classify other groups by how they kept themselves and their homes clean and tidy, certainly the Finns considered themselves the cleanest, probably followed by Swedes, Germans and Poles. The dirtiest group for some were the *Criollos* and Paraguayans, whom the Finns mistrusted.<sup>342</sup>

One of the most incredulous accounts I have heard on the role of cleanliness at Colonia Finlandesa was that it was directly responsible for the death of a mother. I. M. E. Lemmetyinen, an Argentinean-born Finn, said that her mother had died 30 days after she was born, on August 30, 1935, because she was so methodical about cleanliness. “It was cold and humid outside and my mother did not want the helpers to wash the diapers. She instead went to wash the diapers by the stream. She kept everything immaculate clean and opened the windows of the house whenever

<sup>342</sup> Interview with Kalevi Saarinen, Oberá, July 28, 2007 and Hanna Niskanen, Oberá, Aug. 10, 2007.

visitors dropped by so it would not smell. These things forced her to catch pneumonia, from which she died.”<sup>343</sup>

Niskanen de Heino once said that Tuomas Sjöblom, who settled Colonia Finlandesa in 1906, lived with a *Criolla* woman who had given him a daughter. The man had worked for the Heinos and she knew Sjöblom well. Niskanen de Heino blamed his drinking for their poverty. If there were anomic tales, it would probably sound as the following: “Sjöblom came from a good family and had gone to high school. But he had not seen a day of work, like other (Swedish-speaking) Finns that came in 1906... His woman was good looking although in my opinion she did not look like an Indian. Possibly Sjöblom had made that story up as well. ...The family lived in a small wooden-board hut. The luckless man did not know how to do anything else but drink obediently while that woman fetched food for him...”<sup>344</sup>

Compared with the late-1970s, finding two-storey houses with curtain windows and saunas with rugs would have been a remarkable discovery. Lemmetyinen Jr.’s two-storey home was the only one I saw back then that could have resembled the house that Lunnasvaara wrote about 45 years ago.



*Picture 4.10: The house had three bedrooms and a wooden floor. The Niskanens cleaned and tidied once a week. They are an example of a non-anomic family. Note the glass window and curtains and the severely felled forest in the background. The picture was taken in 1932-1933. (Courtesy of Artturi and Helga Niskanen de Heino)*

<sup>343</sup> Interview with Ida Maire Elin Lemmetyinen Zárata, Dec. 14, 2007.

<sup>344</sup> Tessieri, p. 119.

Some former settlers such as Laasonen blame the colonists for not leaving Colonia Finlandesa and improving their lives. He said that some did not leave because they were either too poor or lacked professional skills. “All they had to do was move to Mártires (next door to Colonia Finlandesa) where the land was much better.”<sup>345</sup>

Moving out of Colonia Finlandesa was easier said than done. Niskanen de Heino remembered how her parents Janne and Hedvig Töllinoja de Niskanen and her husband Artturi planned to move back to Finland but two World Wars had ruined both of their chances. When the wars ended, both families had too many children and too little money to move back to Finland.<sup>346</sup> “I suggested (to Artturi Heino) moving to the city or San Martín, next to the main highway. Moving there would have been easier than travelling to the other side of the Earth. Oberá and San Martín were so near but still so faraway that we didn’t know how to make up our minds over the matter. They were so far away and the years went by rapidly. Artturi and I were too hopeful and foolish,”<sup>347</sup> said Niskanen de Heino.

While the houses at Colonia Finlandesa give us a peek into the colonists’ view of how they perceived order as well as their norms on cleanliness, they were probably pretty well adapted for the region and to their economic means. At some of these “plain-and-stark”-looking homes, systematic cleanliness played an important role. Since Paavolainen and Lunnasvaara were not social scientists, there is a lot of cultural data that they did not observe of the Finns at Colonia Finlandesa. Even so, they did give good descriptions of some of their homes, where windows with curtains, rugs, wooden floors were seen as luxuries. The roles of these objects were most likely used to differentiate “us” and “them,” or most likely those that lived in non-anomic and anomic homes.

### **4.3.3 Anomic tales and setbacks**

In Durkheim’s thinking, it is not poverty that is directly related to anomie, but a crisis that forces a person to lose wealth, aspirations and their standing in society. “Wealth, on the other hand, by the power it bestows, deceives us into believing that we depend on ourselves only... The less limited one feels, the more intolerable all limitation appears. Not without reason, therefore, have so many religions dwelt on the advantages and moral value of poverty. It is actually the best school for teaching self-restraint. Forcing us to constant self-discipline, it prepares us to accept collective discipline with equanimity, while wealth, exalting the individual, may always arouse the spirit of rebellion which is the very source of immorality.”<sup>348</sup>

While there are examples in my field notes and oral histories of how the Finns of Colonia Finlandesa cooperated and had a collective purpose and aim, there is also a darker side that has always perplexed me. In this cheerless side we find, among other tragic histories, accounts of sheer suffering, personal disasters, losses of crops, bouts of excessive drinking, Finns being swindled by greedy businessmen to sell their farms for a pittance,<sup>349</sup> and being hit by overproduction and rock-bottom crop prices.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, November 1, 2007.

<sup>346</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 120.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Durkheim, p. 254.

<sup>349</sup> Tessieri (b), pp. 206-216.

<sup>350</sup> Tessieri (b), pp. 198-199

As the Finnish settlers of the colony started to dwindle in size from the 1930s through natural death, abandonment, and as the community's economic vitality started to be undermined, it is plausible to argue that anomie must have also started to spread with greater momentum. Who, then, were the anomics of Colonia Finlandesa?

One good example of the anomic group is what Pastor Pärssinen called "Hillbilly Finns," *metsittyneet suomalaiset*.<sup>351</sup> These were single or separated men that lived near-secluded from the outside world and who had a drinking problem. Another example we can cite are the Westerlunds, who lived in one of the colony's most impressive homes that Lunnasvaara described earlier, but when they reached old age were too weak to toil the land and fell into abject poverty. There was also Granlund, who said that one only lives to survive at Colonia Finlandesa and died of a coma at the young age of 41, presumably due to excessive drinking.

The types of "barns" that Niskanen de Heino used to describe Sjöblom's home were probably more common in the 1970s than in the first decades after Colonia Finlandesa's founding. I visited Granlund's former "barn" in 1998, which was about 4 meters by 8-10 meters (32-40 square metres) in size. Four infants and three adults inhabited it. Their home was far from illustrious. In the middle of the wet and dry black earth floor were ashes scattered about and two long logs, one of which was still lit to warm water or food. Light permeated from outside in an irregular fashion on the floor due to the jagged-size cracks between the wooden raw-dark boards. Two shelves and a rudimentary homemade low table held plastic bottles and containers of different sizes and shapes. Two of the larger ones were for storing water. There was also a cassette player and a dislocated door that had rags or clothes hanging from its top. In 1984, when I visited the same home, there were thin metal sheets that covered the cracks of the wall. These were now gone. I wondered how cold it must be to live inside the "barn's" humble walls and roof that that gave little protection from the wind. Rusted corrugated metal covered the roof and must have leaked whenever it rained.

If colonists such as Niskanen de Heino and others saw alcohol and marrying dark-skinned Criollos as a threat to order, what did the family that lived in the humble home, which was inhabited by third- and fourth generation Argentineans with Finnish ancestry, consider marginal? I assume that when a group of people consider something marginal or a threat to their order, they speak about it openly. When I interviewed Agda Anderson de Brochetti, a third-generation Finnish Swedish Argentinean who lived in the home I described, the conversation centred on how difficult life was. She appeared to accept poverty without blaming anyone or any reason. I got the impression that it was more important for her to adapt and accept her situation rather than finding a way to escape her poverty.<sup>352</sup> It resembled how Merton describes anomie, or specifically retreatism, when people become near-dropouts of society and accept that success is impractical.

Eelis Heikkilä, a third-generation Finnish Argentinean, was an example of a so-called "Hillbilly Finn." His home was a tiny warehouse where bananas were stored. It had a wooden board for a window and earth floor. Heikkilä worked as a banana picker at the farm that used to belong to his father, Armas. Some claim that an Oberá businessman had got Eelis' father Armas drunk and swindled him to sign a deed for the sale of the farm for a pittance.<sup>353</sup> E. Heikkilä, who some claimed had a drinking problem, lived, worked and died in 1997 on the same farm where he had grown up from childhood.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Interview with pastor Ilkka Pärssinen, December 5, 2008.

<sup>352</sup> Interview with Agda Andersson de Brochetti, Colonia Finlandesa, May 25, 1998.

<sup>353</sup> Tessieri (b), p. 212.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.



*Picture 4.11: Heikki Nevanperä, who was about 50 years old, being watched somberly by his wife Ruusa, mother-in-law Josefina Saisa de Vatanen and seven children. The picture was taken in the early 1930s. (Courtesy of Artturi and Helga Niskanen de Heino)*

He spoke with a slight hint of bitterness but did not reveal any aim or plan to move out of Colonia Finlandesa never mind improve his life. “I can take a day off whenever I want but the owners would get angry with me if I moved away. I’m a bit like a child to the owners. They come, I work and get things ready for them and they have always trusted me. They pay me a few pesos for the work. Sometimes 200 or 300 pesos (15-20 1984 Finnish markkas), sometimes they don’t remember to pay me anything. Nobody does any work in these parts for less than 400 pesos a day. Carrying bananas is hard work.”<sup>355</sup>

Other examples of anomie at Colonia Finlandesa are the Nevanperäs and Haksluotos.

Niskanen de Heino remembered the Nevanperäs because they were their neighbours. “Heikki and Ruusa had 13 children. In their new farm there was only one room in their wooden shingle roofed (*pärekatto*) open barn. They didn’t have a sauna. Heikki didn’t consider himself a farmer and sought employment elsewhere. But Heikki liked to drink and his family suffered from hunger. Ruusa baked flat corn bread, salted pork and hung the pieces from the ceiling. For the hungry children she crumbed the corn bread and cut pieces of pork that hung from the ceiling, which she placed on the bread. But the children got sick and in the end there were only six of them that survived: Siiri, Edith, Harri, Huuko, Kerttu and Selma. The children were pale as wax, skinny and none of them had any energy to work. They complained of pains when they breathed. Ruusa’s brother Kalle returned from whaling near South Georgia Island (*Kalasaari*) and told her that the

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., p. 17.



children should be sent to a hospital. They had gotten sick from trichinosis from the poorly salted meat. Ruusa had not boiled the meat and since there was little food and they got even sicker.”<sup>356</sup>

Helena Haksluoto de Putkuri, an Argentinean-born second-generation Finn, described her childhood in the 1920s. “When I was a small girl, we lived deep inside Colonia Finlandesa. There was only one barn. I had a younger brother, Ragnar, whom we called Poika. We slept together upstairs. I would have had more brothers if all of them had survived. They did not die at birth. My cousin Siiri told me that they died when they were big. If I remember correctly, there was a sister among the four brothers. My brothers and sister died of anaemia. We did not have a lot of food. We ate corn bread, sweet potatoes and beans. We always walked barefoot. I don’t remember a lot about my mother Eeva because I was 8 years old when she died. She was pregnant with her seventh child when she fell off a horse. The beast pulled her a long way before it stopped. Mother was taken to a hospital but she died there.”<sup>357</sup>

Another example of an anomic was Nils Nyberg, who was so dirty that flies followed him wherever he went. As mentioned earlier, anomic tales at Colonia Finlandesa usually included a person or family where alcohol was blamed for their poverty. Even though some claim that housecleaning was done systematically at the majority of homes, Paavolainen’s and Lunnasvaara’s state that most of the houses that the Finnish settlers lived in did not differ from those of the natives. It suggests that probably rigorous weekly housecleaning like at the Niskanen’s home was probably more an exception as opposed to the general rule. Since many of the first colonists started to die due to age and many abandoned Colonia Finlandesa especially from the 1940s, those that remained must have also had fewer aspirations to improve their lives. It was similar to what happened after Colonia Finlandesa’s founding in 1906: many who remained did so because they could not return to Finland for financial or other reasons.

#### **4.3.4 Alcohol consumption, self-regulation and blame**

*They would feed the pigs with the (stomped) grapes  
used to make vino colono (homemade wine).  
The pigs would get drunk. It was a funny sight.  
They’d even walk backwards and fall over.  
Aune Saarinen, July 28, 2007*

Artturi and Helga Heino de Niskanen ran a country store at Colonia Finlandesa during 1952-1973. I once asked A. Heino in May 1978 how much alcohol he sold monthly at the store. Apart from other spirits such as *caña*, vermouth, wine, beer, he claimed he sold 480 litres of grain alcohol in less than a month.<sup>358</sup> Apart from the alcohol sales at Heino’s store, some farmers made homemade wine (*vino colono*) and distilled spirits.

While there are not any reliable official statistics on what the population of Colonia Finlandesa was in the 1950s, let’s estimate a round figure of 500 people. This figure, however, comprises of Finns, as well as Paraguayans, Brazilians, Argentinean mestizos and other European nationals that lived at the colony during that decade. According to the latest figures by provincial statistical agency IPEC,

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., pp. 151-152.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., pp.153-159.

<sup>358</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, May 26, 1978.

the population of the municipality of Caa-Yarí, which Colonia Finlandesa is a part of, rose in 2001 to 973 from 932 in 1991.<sup>359</sup>

From a strictly per capita consumption point of view, researcher Esa Österberg of the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (Stakes),<sup>360</sup> analysed the monthly grain alcohol sales at Heino's store. According to him, monthly consumption of *only* 480 litres of grain alcohol in the 1950s put Colonia Finlandesa at the same consumption level as Finland in the early 2000s. If, however, we compared it with alcohol consumption in Finland during the 1950s, consumption was 4-5 times higher. Strong spirits consumption in Finland during the 1950s was 0.3 litres/month. The researcher compared alcohol consumption at Colonia Finlandesa with that of Russia, where 12-13 litres of pure alcohol are consumed per capita annually. Russia has one of the highest alcohol consumption rates in the world.

Similarly, Argentinean-born second-generation Finn Olavi Putkuri ran a country store in San Martín from 1939-80. He reported the following monthly alcohol sales in the 1940s: 240 litres of grain alcohol, 1,200 litres of wine and 360 litres of *caña*.<sup>361</sup> If we estimate the population of San Martín to be twice as high as Colonia Finlandesa's, or at about 1,000 inhabitants, alcohol consumption appears to be at the same level as in Finland in 2005, but about four-times higher than in the 1950s. Finns were also a minority at San Martín.

The information on how much grain alcohol was sold by Artturi Heino's and Olavi Putkuri's store suggest that alcohol was, from a per-capita-consumption point of view, high among the Finns and other national groups that lived in these two communities. I. M. E. Lemmetyinen said that her grandfather, Lemmetyinen Jr., who ran a store at Colonia Finlandesa until the end of the 1940s, did not sell grain alcohol. One of the items her grandfather sold were 200-240 litre wooden barrels of wine. When I asked I. M. E. Lemmetyinen how she thought alcohol was a problem at Colonia Finlandesa, she stated that it was because "people stayed at her grandfather's store and drank all day."<sup>362</sup> Considering that drinking is done cross-culturally more by men than women,<sup>363</sup> alcohol was also consumed by some women at the colony.<sup>364</sup>

In 1984 I asked Juan Palo, a second-generation native Finns that moved to Colonia Finlandesa in 1923, who regulated the settlers' drinking? My question took him aback since he wondered why I had asked him such an obvious question. "The only person that imposed drinking limits (at Colonia Finlandesa) was you,"<sup>365</sup> he responded. K. and A. Saarinen and others admitted that nobody directly regulated drinking at Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> IPEC

<sup>360</sup> Interview with Esa Österberg of Stakes, December 2007 and email (Dec. 12, 2007).

<sup>361</sup> Email (September 13, 2008) from Kurt Meier, Oberá, Misiones, on the basis of his father-in-law Olavi Putkuri, an Argentine-born Finn. He used to operate the store from 1939-1980.

<sup>362</sup> Interview with Ida Elin Lemmetyinen, Zárate, December 19, 2007.

<sup>363</sup> While Helga Niskanen de Heino never gave a list of names of women whom she considered had an alcohol "problem," but suggested that one of these women was Maria Westerlund. She often said that if the man and woman drank, the family was doomed. Ida Elin Lemmetyinen named in an interview on December 28, 2007 at least 5 women who she considered had drinking "problems" at the colony.

<sup>364</sup> David G. Mandelbaum: Alcohol and Culture. *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 6, No. 3. (Jun., 1965), pp.286 & 288.

<sup>365</sup> Interview with Juan Palo, Oberá, Misiones, August 30, 1984.

<sup>366</sup> Interview with Aune Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007. Some police that patrolled Colonia Finlandesa were easily corruptible and there are some indication that they were involved in selling illicit alcohol at the colony. In my field notes of June 1, 1978 written in Colonia Finlandesa, it was the Poles that specialised in making *caña*.

Some former inhabitants of Colonia Finlandesa like G. Niskanen, claimed that some drank excessively to forget their poverty and misery stricken lives. Arrturi Heino gave the same explanation to me in 1978.<sup>367</sup> While these are simple explanations to a complex issue, K. Saarinen mentioned that drinking on weekends was a prize. “There weren’t any cinemas, no theatres and there were very few dances organised at the *Seurantalo* hall, where friends used to meet and drink,” he said. “So what else is there to do but drink (alone at home)?”<sup>368</sup>

Malinen, on the other hand, blamed Argentina’s liberal alcohol laws for her father Emil’s drinking. She said that drinking wine at lunch was the key factor that turned her father into a drinker. Malinen said that after the family moved back to Finland in 1930, her father’s drinking problem ended.<sup>369</sup> The Malinens left back to Kitee in Finland because they saw no future at Colonia Finlandesa.

But just like systematic housecleaning helped upkeep a perception of order at some Finnish families’ homes, there were also norms on what was considered appropriate or inappropriate drinking. According to K. and A. Saarinen, a so-called responsible drinker was a person who could get drunk over the weekends but worked and was sober on weekdays. G. Niskanen, who said that a “respectable” person at Colonia Finlandesa drank rarely, confirmed this.<sup>370</sup> Laasonen, however, said that at some families like his did not drink even on weekends.<sup>371</sup> A heavy drinker at Colonia Finlandesa was called, among other names, a *rattijuoppo*. According to K. Saarinen, the etymology of the word *rattijuoppo* derives from “funnel drinker.” Such a person could not wait to pour a drink in a glass so he gushed it down with the help of a funnel.<sup>372</sup>

Aune Saarinen said that her father-in-law Väinö Lepistö’s drinking habits were acceptable, but she considered her husband, Kauko Lepistö, to be problematic because he would “die if he did not have a drink everyday.”<sup>373</sup> “My father-in-law drank only on weekends,” she said. “He was a hard worker. I moved to his home when I married my husband. He said that he’s going to plough and do all kinds of work but on the weekends he wanted his bottle of *caña*. He’d wash himself (on Saturdays), put on clean clothes and go to the store. When he’d come back he’d change back to working clothes and go to the stream to fish and drink *caña*. He’d always leave a little *caña* for Monday (morning) for the hangover. He wasn’t a (heavy) drinker.”<sup>374</sup>

While some drank on Saturday nights after a sauna bath, V. Niskanen, who had a reputation for being a heavy drinker at the colony, admitted, “drinking happened everywhere and at any time.”<sup>375</sup> He said that the worst types of drinkers at Colonia Finlandesa were those who “drank and lied in bed all day.” These types of persons were such “alcoholics” that they did not do anything else but drink.<sup>376</sup> V. Niskanen said that drinking alone was not well seen at Colonia Finlandesa.<sup>377</sup> I asked him in 2007 why he drank. His first response was an honest, “I don’t know.” When I insisted, he

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<sup>367</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, June 12, 1978.

<sup>368</sup> Interview with Kalevi Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007.

<sup>369</sup> Interview with Lahja Malinen, Kitee, October 24, 2007.

<sup>370</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, November 30, 2007.

<sup>371</sup> Interview with Reino Laasonen, Capioví, Misiones, October 2, 2008.

<sup>372</sup> Interview with Kalevi and Aune Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007.

<sup>373</sup> Interview with Aune Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007.

<sup>374</sup> Interview with Aune Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007.

<sup>375</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, December 17, 2007.

<sup>376</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Finlandesa, May-June 1978.

<sup>377</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, October 13, 2007.

gave the following response: “It’s an old custom.”<sup>378</sup> He did not believe that his drinking had anything to do with strengthening Finnish identity.

Contrary to the claim that one had to be sober on weekdays in order to be considered a responsible drinker, V. Niskanen said his parents drank a shot of pure alcohol daily mixed with coffee (*plöröt*) in the mornings and evenings. This disproves K. and A. Saarinen’s claim that one had to be sober on weekdays to be considered a “responsible” drinker. V. Niskanen said that his father, whom he only saw once in an inebriated state, drank wine or milk at lunch. He considered his parents responsible drinkers.

Some children even imitated how their parents drank. One of these was J. Niskanen, born in 1916, who admitted getting drunk for the first time when he was 10-12 years old. Jalmari’s father had some syrup that had gone old. He was about to throw it away but his neighbours, Tihverä and Juntunen, told him that it could be made into good moonshine. His neighbours distilled the syrup and gave half back to him, or 5 litres. “We were supposed to take care of the house (alone) and decided with my sister to make a few drinks like father does,” said J. Niskanen. “We mixed water and sugar to the moonshine, served each other a drink, drank it down and grimaced acknowledging how bad it tasted. We drank over a cupful. Around noon a shadow had formed in the courtyard in front of the barn. We decided to walk on the shadowy side. I looked how my sister swayed and I could not even walk straight. After that my mind went blank.” J. Niskanen said that while their parents had not punished them for what they did, they believed that their hangovers had taught them a good lesson.<sup>379</sup>

About 30 years later, E. Heino, J. Niskanen’s niece, remembered imitating how her father drank. When she was 4 years old she filled cups with alcohol and drank them one by one yelling: “Cheers!”<sup>380</sup>

Different norms on housecleaning and drinking reveal that Colonia Finlandesa was a disorganised community. Since Niskanen de Heino considered drinking a major problem that caused downfall of the colony, she classified the community by using such a standard. According to her, there were three types of families: a) both parents did not drink, which was rare; b) only the father drank but the mother did not, probably more common; and c) both parents drank, most likely less common.<sup>381</sup> In her first group we could group single men and women who drank.

Niskanen de Heino claimed there were differences between the drinking habits of the first- and second-generation Finns. In her opinion, the first-generation settlers were more “resistant” to alcohol than their adult children because, even though they drank heavily, they lived long lives. This wasn’t the case with some second-generation Finns such as Granlund and others. V. Niskanen named in 1978 17 first- and second-generation Finns where alcohol played a role in their deaths.<sup>382</sup> Niskanen de Heino’s observation could suggest that alcohol consumption may have been more prevalent among second-generation Finns, or they could have been more ignorant about its dangers.

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<sup>378</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, December 17, 2007.

<sup>379</sup> Tessieri (b), pp. 180-181.

<sup>380</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, May 26, 1978.

<sup>381</sup> The first person how revealed how some drank at Colonia Finlandesa was Helga Niskanen de Heino. In my field notes taken December 11-19, 1977, she claimed that alcohol was Colonia Finlandesa’s number one problem. She stated that almost all of the first Finnish colonists died directly of alcohol or alcohol-related causes. Her husband, whom she accused of drinking, almost committed suicide in the late 1930s and her son Jussi, died when he was stabbed 17 times by a jealous husband. Helga Niskanen de Heino blames alcohol for the death of her son.

<sup>382</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, June 8, 1978.

The Finns at Colonia Finlandesa were not the only ones that had a reputation for drinking generously. There are at least four accounts in the oral histories of a Russian and three Poles who committed suicide due to their drinking problems. One of these was a Russian called VK, who in his drunken state threatened to kill his wife with a shotgun. His wife was able to run out of the house with their child to safety in the forest. He then laid himself on the bed, pointed a shotgun at his face, and pulled the trigger with a toe. Another Pole hanged himself with barbwire. In order that the barbwire would not cut him as he hanged, he placed pieces of handkerchief around the sharp pointed edges of the wire.<sup>383</sup> A. Saarinen said that these suicides shocked the small community immensely.<sup>384</sup>

#### **4.3.5 Anomie and alcohol**

One common view challenged by anthropologists is whether alcohol leads to anomie.<sup>385</sup> Even though Durkheim did not see a correlation between alcoholism and increased suicide rates,<sup>386</sup> sociologists such as Thor Norström disagree.<sup>387</sup> While he suggests that alcoholism and abuse leads to the destruction of social ties through “aggressive, reckless behaviour,”<sup>388</sup> it does have an impact on the community.

While we should be careful not to allow our Western bias on drinking as Heath points out, we cannot similarly rule out the adverse impacts of alcohol on a small community such as Colonia Finlandesa, even if it played an important social role. Norström points out that there is a theoretical link between alcohol abuse and suicide, which is consistent with Durkheim’s claim that suicide hinges on how well integrated the person is in society.<sup>389</sup> If alcohol played a role in the spread of anomie at Colonia Finlandesa, how do we know it was a “problem” and how was it manifested?

In some interviews, the Finns and their descendants gave two main causes for the downfall of Colonia Finlandesa: alcohol and/or poor land. Blaming the downfall of the colony on oblivious drinking is farfetched. Even though Finland had a prohibition law in force during 1919-1931, and stricter alcohol laws than Argentina never mind Colonia Finlandesa, it is highly improbable that Finns migrated to the colony for the sole purpose of satisfying their thirst for alcohol. However, since there were different norms on alcohol usage, one could find the drinking partners that best fitted their consumption habits. One factor why alcohol regulation was up to the family or the individual was because there were no churches at Colonia Finlandesa, police station nor temperance movement that aimed to discourage alcohol usage. Even so, alcohol usage at Colonia Finlandesa was, like anywhere else, done socially. It was consumed in groups, most likely to create different boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, as Douglas pointed out.

A good example of an anomic at Colonia Finlandesa with a drinking problem was EH One of the grotesque tales I have heard of drinking at Colonia Finlandesa was what happened to KW. After drinking for days with his friends he passed out a fly had entered his nose and laid larvae. A week

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<sup>383</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, May 29, 1978.

<sup>384</sup> Interview with Aune Saarinen, Oberá, Misiones, July 28, 2007.

<sup>385</sup> Douglas, pp. 3-4.

<sup>386</sup> Durkheim, p. 77.

<sup>387</sup> Norström, pp. 293-314.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 293-294..

later he noticed that the pain in his nose got stronger until it started to rot. He succeeded at killing the larvae with insecticide but had for the rest of his life a visible scar on his nose.<sup>390</sup>

For some who had a drinking problem, Colonia Finlandesa must have been a refuge, like a subtropical Skid Row, which was not an economically prosperous place but where one's home and drinking partners lived.

#### 4.3.6 Psychotropic mushrooms

*Psilocebe cubensis* is a common psychotropic mushroom found in Misiones and the Americas.<sup>391</sup> The mushroom grows on cow dung and in groups. In cow fields the mushroom grows in groups and is quite visible. From the oral histories there is some indication that some Finns may have consumed the mushroom. Its popular name in Misiones is *Cucumelo*.

One former *Criollo* farmhand called Timoteo Duarte, who had grown up at Colonia Finlandesa and knew many of the settlers, claimed that *Psilocebe cubensis* was widely consumed by the Finns. A Finn called Juan N. had told Duarte about the psychotropic mushroom. He told Duarte that if you consume the mushroom, "a dark-skinned person will start looking white." Duarte claimed that the settlers consumed alcohol and mushrooms simultaneously.<sup>392</sup>

My field notes and oral histories have not confirmed such claims. When I asked some former settlers if they knew of the existence of hallucinogenic mushrooms at Colonia Finlandesa, many claimed they had never heard of such a fungi. Contrary to numerous tales on alcohol abuse and usage, accounts of settlers using psychotropic mushrooms were almost non-existent. If *Psilocebe cubensis* was consumed by some of the settlers, it was on a very small scale.

#### 4.3.7 The role of racial stereotypes

The final matter that I will discuss is the role of racial stereotypes at Colonia Finlandesa. For some of the settlers who came from rural backgrounds in Finland, seeing people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds must have been quite a surprise, even a shock, since foreigners were rare in rural communities such as Kitee. But like alcohol, dark-skinned *Criollos* and Paraguayans were also seen as something marginal and a threat to the order of some of the families. As mentioned previously, some Finnish families used cleanliness-tidiness as a classificatory system to distinguish themselves from other groups at the colony.

The groups that were at the bottom of the settlers' ethnocentric totem pole were the mestizo *Criollos*, Paraguayans and blacks. In the early decades, the settlers even had a special name for the *mustat* or *mustalaisia*, which they called *bambujeesi*. Even though *mustalainen* is a demeaning term today in Finland to classify the Roma, some used it at Colonia Finlandesa to label all people that had dark skin. The Roma were a rare site at the colony. I once asked V. Niskanen how races existed. According to him, there were three: *valkoiset* (whites), *mustat* (dark-skinned) and

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<sup>390</sup> Tessieri (b), pp. 141-142.

<sup>391</sup> Gastón Guzmán, John W. Allen & Jochen Gartz: A worldwide geographic distribution of the neurotropic fungi, an analysis and discussion. *Annali di Museo Civico de Rovereto*. Vol. 14 (1998), pp. 189-280, 2000.

<sup>392</sup> Interview with Timoteo Duarte, July 29, 2007, San Martín, Misiones.

*patamustat* (coal-black). The reason why the term *bambujeesi* fell from disuse at the colony was probably because in the 1940s and 1950s the Finns had become a minority.<sup>393</sup>

One factor that fuelled mistrust of Paraguayans was the criminal bands that raided and pillaged colonists' farmers. Niskanen de Heino remembered one case involving the Pedersens of Denmark. "Three or four Paraguayans came to Pedersen's home and demanded money from his wife. Then they turned to her husband (in the field). Pedersen said he didn't have any money. The intruders got angry and they hit Pedersen's head with a machete. Pedersen died on the spot. Then the men went back to the house to demand money from the wife. She said that they didn't have any money. The men were going to beat her to death but she covered her head with her hand, which the machete severed. Then the men left."<sup>394</sup> Pedersen's wife was found dead the following day. Her son was lying under the bed hiding and still trembling with fear.

When Nordfors' daughter, a Finnish Swede, was raped, Paraguayans were immediately blamed. After both crimes, the closest a Paraguayan could get to a Finnish settler's home was from behind the fence gate.<sup>395</sup> These persons had to clap a few times to notify their presence.

Some racial attitudes of the settlers were even constant sources of friction within the family. One example is Haksluoto de Putkuri, whose brother Ragnar married a black Brazilian woman called Juana. She not only blamed the woman for using a love potion to force her brother to fall in love with her, but also blamed her seven--year-old son's death on the woman.<sup>396</sup>

In my field research I have noticed changes in racial attitudes from the first and second generation. This is nothing strange considering that most of the children were born in Argentina and about two thirds of them married outside their group. The shortage of Finnish women was due to the high (73%) amount of males that immigrated to Latin America from Finland during 1923-1941.<sup>397</sup>

Much to the dislike of some of the colonists, there were marriages between Finns and dark-skinned Argentineans and Brazilians. Some Finns such as Niskanen de Heino, believed that if a Finn got married with a *Criolla* or *Criollo*, the family would end up living in poverty and dirt. She used her brothers Jalmari and Viljo as examples.<sup>398</sup> Both had drinking problems and their lives had not amounted to much since they wed *Criolla* wives, according to her. J. Niskanen told me in 1978 that he preferred to marry a dark-skinned woman because he wanted to see what the children would look like.<sup>399</sup>

If the elementary school had caused cultural conflicts at the Niskanens' home in the early 1920s, these problems persisted at Heinos' home in the 1950s. E. Heino stated that the schoolteacher had asked the Argentinean pupils to raise their hands. Apart from a few fair-skinned children, everybody raised their hands, including E. Heino. The teacher told the children that they were all Argentineans even if their parents were foreigners. She approached her father Artturi about the matter at home: "You've lied to me," she said. "I'm not Finnish but Argentinean because I was born

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<sup>393</sup> Interview with Viljo Niskanen, Colonia Guaraní, Misiones, October 13, 2007. Niskanen said that the 1940s and 1950s the majority of the farmers were Paraguayans and Brazilians. He admitted that for some Finns it was difficult to accept that they had become a minority. "It was like seeing your village being taken over by outsiders," he said.

<sup>394</sup> Tessieri (b), pp. 82-83.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., pp. 82-83.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., pp. 157-158.

<sup>397</sup> Siirtolaisuustilasto, 1923-1942.

<sup>398</sup> Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, June 13, 1978.

<sup>399</sup> Tessieri's field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, June 10, 1978.

in this country. The teacher said so.” The comment hurt E. Heino’s father deeply. “All my children are Finnish,” he responded. “You are what your parents are.”

E. Heino suffered discrimination at Colonia Finlandesa in the 1950s probably because her parents were “well-off” colonists and were not card-carrying Peronists. It was customary during Perón’s government to hand out presents during Epiphany to low-income families. At one such occasion, dolls were being handed to the girls at the elementary school. E. Heino remembered that she was given the last doll, which was black. The person who gave her the doll said that she did not need one since her family was “rich.” E. Heino hated the black doll. When it started to rain, she placed it outside and that was the last she ever saw of it.<sup>400</sup>

Even today there are strong well-defined racial attitudes in Misiones between the *Gringos*, Argentinean fair-skinned northern European descendants, and dark-skinned low-income Argentineans.<sup>401</sup>

Did the role of racial stereotypes at Colonia Finlandesa rise among the Finnish settlers from the 1940s, when the Finns became a minority, or did they become more relaxed and were less important? Since Colonia Finlandesa was an economic failure, it suggests that while there was still a strong sense of “us” and “them” among some colonists, these types of borders or threats must have been redefined when they moved to other parts of Misiones and Argentina.

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<sup>400</sup> Tessieri’s field notes, Colonia Finlandesa, Misiones, May 28, 1978.

<sup>401</sup> Interview with Graciela Niskanen, Oberá, Misiones, Nov. 1, 2007.



## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Summary

One of the biggest findings of the thesis is that the first group of Finnish settlers that founded Colonia Finlandesa in July 1906 came on two ships instead of one. Furthermore, the first group that sailed in May from Bremen to Buenos Aires on the Cap Verde and Frankfurt numbered over 112 Finns. A more precise figure would be “about 116 Finns.”

Lähteenmäki claims that a total of 154 Finns and 11 Swedes founded Colonia Finlandesa during 1906-1907 in five expeditions. New empirical data, however, from CEMLA puts such findings into doubt. For one, there were no entries of Finnish passengers at the port of Buenos Aires in 1907. CEMLA and my fieldwork show that a more comprehensive global figure for the number of settlers that founded Colonia Finlandesa in 1906 is about 145 Finns compared with 154 Finns claimed by Lähteenmäki.

Even though many settlers blamed poor land for Colonia Finlandesa’s failure, it is only a partial explanation. One main factor that undermined the Finnish colony were self-inflicted environmental degradation, due mainly to tobacco farming and lack of environmental management. If the land was poor to begin with, the impact of environmental damage was even greater.

Other factors alongside untenable farming were volatile and low tobacco and yerba mate prices, which plummeted during the Great Depression years. In the 1930s we also see for the first time a sharp drop in new settlers from Finland to the colony. This caused the population of Colonia Finlandesa to decline. In the 1940s, due to natural death and simple abandonment by the first and especially the second-generation settlers, the Finns became a minority at the colony. Natural disasters in the 1940s such as droughts, forest fires and a locust attack were additional hardships that undermined Colonia Finlandesa.

While a lot has been written about excessive alcohol usage at the Finnish colony, there is empirical information from the 1950s that per capita consumption was 4-5 times higher than in Finland during the same decade. Even though it is unlikely that the settlers started to drink from the 1950s, it suggests that alcohol did play an important role and was widespread from the colony’s founding in 1906. My field notes, oral histories and historic observations by writers such as Paavolainen support this claim.

Since there were different norms on what was considered responsible and irresponsible drinking, it shows that Colonia Finlandesa was a disorganised community. If we look at Douglas’ theory on how dirt creates order, we can cite two factors that some families considered marginal, powerful and dangerous: alcohol and dark-skinned *Criollos*, especially Paraguayans. While these two factors were perceived as a threat to order, it was not uniform.

Like in any society, drinking was done socially and its role was to fortify the group and create many boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Even though drinking may have been seen as a widespread “problem” at Colonia Finlandesa, there were also clear norms, albeit little to no enforcement on a communal level of what was considered responsible and irresponsible drinking. Some considered

responsible drinkers people who drank only on weekends, while irresponsible drinkers drank all the time. Some of the settlers did not drink even on the weekends. Since there were no overriding norms that regulated alcohol consumption on a community level, it was up to the family and individual to regulate norms on drinking.

The role of systematic cleanliness-tidiness also played an important role at some homes to create order. Apart from strengthening the bonds of the family and create unity of experience as Douglas points out, it had two important functions: distinguishing some families from the anomics of the community as well as those from other ethnic and national groups. Apart from helping some colonists reorder their environment in a foreign land, the main function of cleanliness was not only creating order but also upholding Finnish values at homes.

The anomics of Colonia Finlandesa are pictured in the oral histories as colonists that fell into poverty due to factors such as personal tragedies, loss of crops, being swindled by greedy businessmen to sell their farms for a pittance, hit by overproduction and rock-bottom crop price. At the homes of what some families classified as marginal people, alcohol always played a role. The non-anomics, on the other hand, were colonists who, despite their hardships, maintained symbolic systems of order through activities such as housecleaning and stricter norms on drinking. Even though it is impossible to say whether the anomics or the non-anomics were the majority at Colonia Finlandesa, we can conclude that both groups were well represented. Since the colony was an economic failure that did not offer a future for many of the settlers, anomie started to spread with greater strength when the colony lost its vitality and when more colonists dispersed to other parts of the country. By 1977, however, when I visited the colony for the first time, the anomics were the majority. Most of the colonists' energies went into surviving day to day with little hope that their lives would improve.

Finnish culture was always in threat from outside encroachment at Colonia Finlandesa and one way that colonists defended their Finnish way of life was with the help of ethnocentrism and old-fashioned racism. While some Finns used cleanliness as a barometer to classify other ethnic and national groups, its main role was defensive and to classify what they considered marginal.

## 5.2 Implications for future research

One suggestion for future research would be to arrive at an even more precise figure on how many Finns actually settled Colonia Finlandesa during the first years of its founding as well as attempt to determine the population of the colony in the following decades.

Another important research topic is studying why Thesleff's group sailed on two ships instead of one. Did the 88 colonists board the Cap Verde because it was the first ship that left Bremen, Germany?

While "poor land" is commonly cited by the settlers as a factor that caused Colonia Finlandesa not to prosper economically, there are no empirical studies to prove this. Although this must have played an important role in the economic demise of the colony, it would be interesting to carry out geological studies at the colony determine how poor the land was compared with other parts of Misiones.

With a fairly good understanding of the roles of alcohol and racial stereotypes at Colonia Finlandesa among the first- and second-generation colonists, it would be interesting to study if these two factors continued to play a role among third-, fourth- and fifth-generation Finnish Argentineans, or those that still acknowledge their Finnish ancestry. Even though we know that racial attitudes changed from generation to generation, there is some evidence that suggests that alcohol continued to be a problem among some third-generation Finnish Argentineans.

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<b>Name</b>	<b>Residence</b>	<b>Year</b>
Alicia Valeria Druckmann	Caa-Yari, Misiones	2007
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Viljo Niskanen	Colonia Guaraní, Misiones	2007
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Aune Saarinen	Oberá, Misiones	2007
Kalevi Saarinen	Oberá, Misiones	2007
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Roberto Smeraldi	São Paulo, Brazil	2008
Ari Venäläinen	Helsinki	2007
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