

Article

Impressions of Hermann Bruno Otto Blumenau and Travelers on the Climate in Southern Brazil in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries

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ABSTRACT

The influence of climate on geography and history has been crucial over time, shaping the development of societies. This study seeks to analyze the accounts of figures such as Hermann Bruno Otto Blumenau, founder of the Blumenau Colony, as well as Robert Avé-lallemant, Johann Tschudi, Robert Gernhard, Wilhelm Lacmann, John Luccock, and Willi Ule, regarding the climate and its influence on European settlers in southern Brazil during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Using historical-descriptive documentary and bibliographic sources, the research addresses a period in which such accounts viewed the Brazilian climate as favorable and beneficial for colonization, while also highlighting the challenges of the acclimatization process. Blumenau vehemently challenges the defamation of the Brazilian climate in Europe, emphasizing its advantages compared to other regions of the world. His approach includes a comparison of the Brazilian regional climate, particularly in the South, emphasizing its suitability for German immigration and agricultural development. The positive perceptions of the Brazilian climate, expressed in the accounts of travelers and Blumenau, played a significant role in stimulating the flow of migration and driving the region's economic development.

Keywords: regional economic development; climate; immigration.

Introduction

The arrival of European settlers in southern Brazil in the 19th century marked a period of unique transition and adaptation, not only in terms of new economic opportunities but also regarding the challenge of acclimating to a geographical environment hitherto unknown to many. This article proposes to analyze the documented impressions of Hermann Bruno Otto Blumenau, alongside accounts by contemporary travelers, regarding the climate and its influence on European settlers in southern Brazil. Addressing the issue of climate and European immigration involves discussing the processes of acclimatization and adaptation as manifested in historical documents.

Hermann Bruno Otto Blumenau, a prominent figure in this context, not only witnessed but also contributed significantly to the colonization of the region. His meticulous observations of the climate, the seasons, and the adaptability of European settlers offer a valuable and detailed perspective on the process of acclimatization and adaptation faced by those who ventured into this new world. The analysis of these impressions is complemented by the accounts of foreign travelers who traversed the region during the same period. Their observations offer a multifaceted and enriching panorama, providing different perspectives on the climate, natural conditions, and the impact of these elements on the well-being and adaptation of European settlers.

By gathering and meticulously examining these accounts, this study aims not only to provide a deeper understanding of the climatic environment faced by the first European settlers in southern Brazil, but also to offer insights into the challenges and adaptation strategies adopted by these pioneers on their journey to a new land. This article is structured to investigate, analyze, and contextualize the perceptions of Blumenau and the



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travelers, aiming to contribute to a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the acclimatization process of European settlers in southern Brazil during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The relevance of this debate transcends purely historiographical interest and fits into the contemporary global climate agenda. In a climate emergency scenario, discussed in forums such as COP 30, understanding how past societies interpreted and interacted with climate variations offers keys to interpreting current extreme events. Thus, this article asks: how was the discourse on a favorable and healthy climate constructed and instrumentalized to enable a project of colonization and regional development in southern Brazil?

This study adopts a descriptive and qualitative historical approach, grounded in the Environmental Humanities paradigm, aiming to investigate the perceptions of Hermann Bruno Otto Blumenau and travelers regarding the climate and the acclimatization of European settlers in southern Brazil in the 19th century. The research is based on documentary and bibliographic sources available in historical archives, regional libraries, and online resources. The material examined includes records found in diaries, reports, publications, and historiographical studies related to the climate and European settlers in southern Brazil.

The main focus is on the accounts of Hermann Bruno Otto Blumenau, due to his detailed and comparative analysis of the Brazilian climate, which culminated in the founding of the Blumenau Colony in the Itajaí-açu Valley in 1850, located in the state of Santa Catarina. Previous publications and research addressing the climate and natural features described by Blumenau and travelers in southern Brazil and the Itajaí Valley in the 19th century were consulted, including works by Santos (2011), Ferreira (2022a, b, 2000), and Silva (2022). However, this study seeks to deepen the discussion through a more detailed analysis of the accounts and descriptions of the climate, as well as its influence on European immigrants in the region.

It is important to note that this study acknowledges the limitations inherent in the selection of sources, prioritizing certain accounts and documents. The exclusion of certain sources, such as letters from immigrants and periodicals of the time, is due to publication restrictions and does not reflect their irrelevance for future research. In the dossier “Environmental Histories of Climate and Low Temperatures: Perspectives on the Anthropocene” edited by Relly and Klanovicz (2022), the authors state that research in Brazil has been highly successful in many areas of Environmental History; however, climate-related studies do not appear to generate the same volume of scientific output. The methodology adopted in this descriptive and qualitative historical study seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of the perceptions of climate held by European settlers in southern Brazil in the 19th century, based on a focus on the contributions of Hermann Bruno Otto Blumenau and travelers of the time.

Currently, climate change ranks among the most pressing concerns in academia and global society. Climate is linked to changes in land use that reduce habitats. These changes are affecting biodiversity and the balance of ecosystems. The regional development of the Brazilian economy depends heavily on the climate, and the challenges are significant due to shifts in climate patterns. Climate events are becoming more intense and frequent, impacting infrastructure, agriculture, and the health and daily lives of the population. Brazil’s distinct biomes are “[...] facing distinct challenges due to changes in climate patterns (Artaxo, 2025, p. 3); even the Atlantic Forest, which encompasses the study area, has been historically exploited, and its native cover significantly reduced. According to the author, one of the immediate actions is to halt the deforestation of tropical forests.

The Influence of Climate on Brazilian History: European Immigration in the 19th Century

Climate has been a fundamental element in the discussion of the history and historiography of peoples in different spatial and temporal contexts due to its influence on the entire course of human history (Barbato 2015). In Brazil, the influence of the environment and the issue of acclimatization began to be discussed in the late 19th century, driven by European immigration policies. This context includes the colonization and adaptation of European immigrants in southern Brazil in the 19th century, as recorded in historical documents. These immigrants faced difficulties with “language, climate, and customs; all of these were elements of strangeness and signaled the need for fundamental and painful learning” (Relly 2020, p. 2).

Regarding the climate, this involved adapting to the new and distinct environmental conditions encountered by European immigrants. To avoid the terminological imprecision noted in climate historiography, we distinguish here between acclimatization and adaptation. The former refers to the biological and natural process of the organism’s adaptation to a new environment. Acclimatization, on the other hand, encompasses the set of cultural strategies, hygienic procedures, and medical interventions deliberately adopted to help the



settlers find balance in their new environment (Rebello, 2007). In the context under study, acclimatization was viewed as a necessary technique to overcome the supposed hostility of the tropics.

In the 19th century, acclimatization was the subject of study in medical geography due to its relationship with hygiene. Travelers visiting regions far from Europe “[...] believed in the idea that the hot and humid climate was extremely harmful to the physical and moral health of European men (Morais, 2013, p. 38). Medical reports from the visited regions provided relevant information “[...] to the European colonial administration regarding the sanitary conditions of the places visited. There was a commitment to the utilitarian aspect.” (Morais, 2013, p. 40).

Studies in climatology, a branch of geography, attribute the first records of atmospheric phenomena to the Greeks. Hippocrates of Kos (5th century B.C.) established the influence of the environment on human society, stating that “[...] all human beings are equal in essence, with environmental forces—the air, water, and places—being responsible for their differences, and these forces also being the causes of the diseases that afflict mankind.” The Greeks’ negative perception of the tropical climate spread and persisted until the early 20th century (Barbato 2015, p. 70).

In Europe, the elites believed in the inferiority of those born in hot regions, for “[...] the climate was responsible for numerous diseases, in addition to producing apathetic, lazy, and ignorant men.” However, at the beginning of the colonization of the Americas, the first travelers and colonizers expressed a positive image of nature and the climate, such as Pero Vaz de Caminha, Amerigo Vespucci, and Christopher Columbus (the latter sometimes revealing negative aspects of the tropical climate) (Barbato 2015, p. 72) and Fernão Cardim. This positive impression created favorable prospects for the acclimatization of Europeans in Brazil (Sant’anna Neto 2001).

Sant’anna Neto (2001) analyzes the impressions of travelers and chroniclers regarding the climate during Colonial Brazil. The first travelers shared “[...] a vision of an unknown world, of a strange and wild natural landscape, full of symbolism, myths, and fables, which permeated their first impressions and descriptions, laden with representations that reflected more their visions than the facts.” (Sant’anna Neto 2001, p. 74).

Fernão Cardim (2013), a Portuguese Jesuit who traveled through Brazilian territory in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, twice in his work “Treatises on the Land and People of Brazil” presents a narrative of a climate favorable to human habitation and a land of plenty, comparing it to Portugal. He states that “The climate of Brazil is generally temperate, with good, mild, and healthful air, where men live to be ninety, a hundred, and even more years old, and the land is full of old people; [...]” In the quoted passage, Cardim relates the quality of the climate to the longevity of the population.

Regarding temperature, he notes that “[...] there are generally no cold spells or calm periods, although from Rio de Janeiro to São Vicente there are cold spells and calm periods, but not very severe; the skies are very clear and bright, especially at night; the moon is very harmful to health and greatly corrupts things; [...]” (Cardim 2013, p. 3).

This Brazil is already another Portugal, not to mention the climate, which is much more temperate and healthy, without major calm spells or cold spells, and where people live with very few illnesses, such as colic, liver ailments, headaches, chest ailments, scabies, or other diseases found in Portugal; [...] (Cardim 2013, p. 53).

In these passages, Cardim emphasizes a temperate and healthy climate in Brazilian territory. Sant’anna Neto (2001) also transcribes part of Fernão Cardim’s impressions of the country’s climate and highlights some important observations. From the 15th to the 19th century, Europe felt the influence of the Little Ice Age, with harsh winters that affected the urban population and agricultural production. Cardim refers to the climate of Rio de Janeiro as temperate, which “in truth means more the absence of winter than mild summers.” Regarding São Paulo, Cardim describes the winter as very cold with frosts, and reports a severe drought in the Northeast in 1583 (Sant’anna Neto 2001, p. 78). Harsh winters affected Europe from 1685 to 1750, and in Paris in 1709 the temperature reached -22°C (Sant’anna Neto & Nery 2005).

Ricardo Araki’s thesis on “The Climate History of São Paulo” (2012) reconstructs the state’s climate history from the European colonization of Brazilian territory through the early 20th century. Upon consulting various historical sources, he notes that the influence of the Little Ice Age, felt between the 14th and 19th centuries mainly in the Northern Hemisphere, also affected the São Paulo region; that is, that period was colder.



The number of events involving cold weather, low temperatures, and frosts is practically on par with records of rainfall, accounting for more than 50% of the total, reinforcing the trend that the past climate in the state of São Paulo was cooler than today, which could be interpreted as a manifestation of the Little Ice Age also in the Southern Hemisphere. [...] even when combined with the frequency of storms, the recurrence of records mentioning cold weather continues to stand out, being more than double the number of records regarding heat (Araki 2012, pp. 105–106).

Regarding the first travelers to Brazil, Blumenau, in a report written in 1855, describes them as “sailors of yore” who, with a few exceptions, considered the climate of the Province of Santa Catarina “exceptional.” And as proof, “The healthy appearance and well-being of the population, especially the inhabitants of the interior, [...]” (Blumenau 2002, p. 21). The “discovery” and colonization of the New World marked the beginning of the differentiation between peoples and cultures (Rebello 2007).

Alexander von Humboldt, naturalist and traveler, contributed to partially changing the negative image of the nature of Tropical America that existed in European academic circles in the 18th and 19th centuries, attributing to it its own past and human development (Barbato 2015). Through his publication “Travels to America,” he redefined the New World by constructing “a new perception of the landscape and the inhabitants of the New World” (Dias 2020, p. 324).

In historiography, the 18th century is best known as a period that disparages the nature of the Americas. There is “[...] only a tendency toward this, mainly in Europe, for if we observe, there is an abundance of positive images of the tropical environment in the 18th century” (Barbato 2015, p. 80). In the 18th century, “savage” peoples came to be considered primitive “[...], because they were supposedly at the beginning of human genesis.” (Rebello 2007, p. 160), that is, “[...] a timid ethnocentric view begins to take shape, which will gain strength by the end of the 19th century and be widely discussed through the lens of racism.” (Ferreira 2000, p. 74).

From the 19th century onward, there was a revaluation of the nature of the tropical world, but in academia, the issue continued to be approached ambivalently, especially regarding race (Barbato 2015).

[...] The notion that tropical climates were inferior persisted strongly during the early 19th century; however, by the middle of the century, these theories—based on climatic or geographical determinism—began to lose ground, eventually being set aside or incorporated into another paradigm: the racial one (Barbato 2015, p. 83).

The nineteenth century was marked by a shift in academic circles, with geographers and historians promoting “ideas about the environment’s influence on humans, in order to meet the imperatives of a new imperial era” (Barbato 2015, p. 83). In this century, climate is used in discourse as a conditioning factor influencing European migration to the “New World” and development based on regional climatic differences within Brazilian territory. These accounts constitute a source of historical information relevant to the study of geography and environmental history. For the most part, the accounts:

[...] take the form of travel diaries and records of personal experiences, describing the author’s impressions of their experiences, the places they visited, and, often, their professional role in those experiences, avoiding the fictional or romanticized aspects of a literary work (Rocha 2005, p. 142).

Rocha (2005, p. 142) draws attention to the traveler’s perspective “[...] regarding the political, religious, military, or personal trends and influences that their accounts may reveal, and seeks to understand the context of the era in which they were written.” Travelers’ accounts represent the perspective of a different and distant culture. r travelers’ accounts must be interpreted with a critical eye, as they may contain biases and subjectivities. In this sense, [...] “travelers were embedded in an intellectual milieu, and their perspective is shaped by a multitude of references and theories, upon which they formulate their own discourse” (Rossato 2007, p.110). Travel accounts are of interest to historians because they represent:

[...] an expression of credible and partial evidence of the reasons and feelings shared by travelers and their contemporaries, translated into textual form. Their dialogue with the contours of the textual narrative delves into the intricacies of the shifting



and discontinuous power relations within the universe between history and fiction (Ferreira 2022b, p.157).

In the early 19th century, exploration and knowledge of the Portuguese colony were limited to travelers and scientists connected to the metropolis (Araki 2012). Beginning in 1808, with the opening of ports decreed by King João VI, access to Brazil for European scientists and travelers became much easier. Growing European interest in the exotic led many to choose the Americas as their destination. Travelers were also motivated by political factors related to incentives for European immigration; the economic potential of natural resources; and scientific interest in understanding nature and the existing populations (Silva 2022).

Relly (2022, p. 127) emphasizes that “Subtropical environments created opportunities [...] for economic and scientific globalization and the consequent connection of peoples, [...]” and “[...] to help globalize nature, since the subtropics are often presumed to be a global landscape unit. The instrumentalization of the subtropics ended up colonizing not only societies but also non-human actors and physical forces.”

European immigration to Brazil in the second half of the 19th century sparked discussions about the influence of the environment and acclimatization. European immigration was intended to populate lands considered uninhabited in the southern part of Brazilian territory and to replace the Black labor force following the end of the slave trade (Rebello 2007). And “The ideology of the Brazilian intellectual elite was one of the ‘progressive whitening’ of the population, even going so far as to make predictions and forecasts about how long it would take for Black people to disappear.” (Ferreira 2000, p. 77).

In the 19th century, the Province of Santa Catarina represented an opportunity for a better life for European immigrants. For the imperial government, the geographical space of the Santa Catarina territory needed to be conquered and colonized to generate civilizational progress, and for the government of the province of Santa Catarina, to drive economic development (Carola 2000). Records of travelers and immigrants from different periods of the past reveal the ethnic and natural differences between two worlds, as well as the relationship between Europeans and the peoples of the tropics. Both constitute an extremely important source for understanding the history of Brazil and the region.

Herrmann Blumenau’s Climate Philosophy and the Colonial Enterprise

When analyzing the perceptions of Herrmann Bruno Otto Blumenau, who founded the Blumenau Colony in 1850 in the Itajaí-açu River Valley, southern Brazil, one must consider that his writings are not merely impartial scientific observations. As the visionary behind a capitalist colonization venture, Blumenau employed a utilitarian narrative. His discourse on the climatic health benefits of Santa Catarina served as a tool to promote an image aimed at attracting immigrants and investors. Thus, a brief overview of his biography, academic background, and scientific knowledge will help us understand the interests related to geography, climate, and their relationship with immigration in the country during the 19th century. At the same time, it underscores the importance of recognizing that the colony’s founder frequently and extensively drew upon certain geographical characteristics of the region, such as the climate.

With degrees in pharmacy, chemistry, and philosophy, in the 1840s, events in Blumenau’s life influenced his future as he traveled to France and London, which “would broaden his horizons. His encounter with Alexander von Humboldt must have opened his mind regarding America” (Fouquet 2019, p. 13). In 1845, he met the botanist Karl Friedrich Philipp von Martius, whose knowledge “[...] further expanded Blumenau’s idealism, as both shared a penchant for the natural sciences, a true idolatry of nature, and this, in relation to Brazil.” (Fouquet 2019, p. 14), and encouraged by Consul General Johann Jacob Sturz (Ferreira 2022a). Blumenau set sail for Brazil in 1846, traveling through the south of the country and Rio de Janeiro (Fouquet 2019).

The publication of “A German in the Tropics: Dr. Blumenau and Colonization Policy in Southern Brazil” (1999) brings together two books: “Southern Brazil in Relation to German Emigration and Colonization” and “Guide of Instructions for Immigrants to the Province of Santa Catarina in Southern Brazil.” Blumenau contextualizes the atmosphere in his first book, published in 1850, that is, around four years into his stay in Brazil. According to Ferreira (2022a, p. 24), it narrates “[...] the discursive practices of a traveler, drawn from his temporary experiences with the local inhabitants, highlighting everyday, social, and natural aspects, with the aim of establishing a German colony in the southern region of Brazil.”

Luccock (1942, p. 24), a merchant in the early 19th century, in “Notes on Rio de Janeiro and the Southern Parts of Brazil,” associates the beauty of Rio de Janeiro’s nature with the climate, stating that “[...] where people



of all colors and from every corner of the world come together; surrounding it is a landscape crafted with nature's finest lapis and adorned with a richness of colors that only a tropical climate can produce." He generally considers Brazil's climate to be healthy.

Those of our countrymen who arrive in Brazil in good health rarely fail to lose it before long; but the change is more in appearance than in reality. When they do fall ill, their ailments are not generally due to the climate or to the country being unhealthy. When they arrive in good health, they are at first little affected by the heat; they exert themselves more and require less rest than the natives. From the second or third year onward, they begin to share in the general lethargy, appearing then to need the afternoon rest just as much as those who have been accustomed to it since birth. The most significant effects of the change in climate seem to depend greatly on one's constitution, previous habits, and the lifestyle subsequently adopted. Despite all their precautions, however, many of them fell ill with biliary ailments that they would likely have avoided in their homeland, suffering far more than the long-time inhabitants (Luccock 1942, p. 35).

He turns to the climate to explain certain phenomena observed in society, such as the appearance of the white woman or Brazilian lady, which he associates "with premature aging [...] partly due to the climate and partly to a constitution weakened and deteriorated by inactivity, but above all by the premature, shameful, and unnatural age at which women are permitted to marry." (Luccock 1942, p. 77). On the island of Santa Catarina, s the diversity and superiority of its crops to the fact that "[...] it was colonized early and enjoys an excellent climate." (Luccock 1942, p. 160). The author uses climate as a central element for understanding nature, society, and bodies in Brazilian territory, following a deterministic view characteristic of the 19th century. His moralizing critiques are based on European standards. The adaptation of European immigrants to the tropical climate is a matter of individual habits, not of unhealthiness.

Blumenau in 1850 (1999) on "The Climate and Health" of the Brazilian territory considers it among the best. He compares Brazilian climatic regions, acknowledging that not all are suitable for the activities of most German immigrants. For them, he highlights the health benefits of the southern region's climate and points out the financial advantages of working in the northern region.

[...] Personally, I am convinced that a German who settles south of the Equator, in a healthy region, will be able to work in the countryside and in areas that are not too high above sea level. In tropical regions, it is essential for farmworkers from northern Europe to observe certain precautions; however, due to carelessness or ignorance—often driven by greed—they fail to do so, and devastating consequences frequently arise, which can lead to misery [...]. Only those artisans who work primarily to produce basic necessities rather than luxury goods can settle in Brazil's major cities, rarely exposing themselves to the sun's rays. [...]

[...] The artisan who masters his craft well and settles in northern Brazil can be well paid, but since it is a hot region, he must take greater care of his health and cannot work as much as one who settles in the south, where it is cooler. However, in the south he may earn less and need to work harder, but, in return, he suffers less physical wear and tear and does not age as quickly. For this reason, it is preferable to choose the south, even if it is not as well paid as in the north, since this region is more populated and better developed (Blumenau 1999, p. 49).

Blumenau recommends that emigrants who wish to work in agriculture avoid tropical Brazil, and notes that in large cities, clothing is not suited to the climate. Given the regional climatic differences, he associates and generalizes Brazilians with tropical peoples and highlights their indolent character, which is more noticeable near the equator.

Brazilians, being a mixture of races, display in their character a great deal of indolence, laziness, and sensuality; they are prone to impetuous passion and irascibility—traits characteristic of people from tropical countries—and they are just as fond of cheating in business as Americans, possessing a great deal of talent for



this art. The further north and the hotter the climate, the more noticeable these characteristics are (Blumenau 1999, p. 53).

Ferreira (2002a, p. 30) also refers to the passage from Blumenau's text cited above, which reveals a racial mindset prevalent in the 19th century, that of "[...] a European steeped in the discussions that permeated the civilizational ideology of the Old Continent." Subsequently, Blumenau extols various virtues of the Brazilian people, such as being hospitable, friendly, and polite. He compares them to Americans, whom he considers haughty.

But the Brazilian also demonstrates a sharp and sensitive mind, generally quick to understand, is very talented, hospitable, friendly, and sociable toward strangers, as well as very charitable—a trait that certain German immigrants, who do not like to work, have abused, which I consider a shame. I still remember today, with pleasure, some attentive Brazilians with whom I have spent time.

In contrast, the repugnant and exaggerated arrogance of the American toward his country and himself is something that does not exist in the Brazilian; for, even though he is proud of his country, he is not unpleasant toward foreigners; however, in the United States it is practically impossible to escape this misfortune. The intelligent, active, and honest foreigner is recognized and valued by Brazilians, who often place more trust in him than in their own compatriots, [...].

The behavior of Brazilians of both sexes, often even of Black people, demonstrates a refinement and dignity that contrasts favorably with the vulgar conduct of many of our settlers and artisans. And manners in the upper classes often result in excessive praise, turning into an awkward formality (Blumenau 1999, p. 53).

He attributes this to the mild climate and the fertility of the soil, which are favorable for cattle raising, but it is practiced in an irrational manner. Brazilian flora is very rich, and the south of the country produces "the finest and most wonderful [...]" products (Blumenau 1999, p. 63). He highlights the climate of Santa Catarina, whose mild nights provide pleasant sensations for most of the year.

A moonlit stroll along a clear, calm river on a mild summer night is fascinating. In Santa Catarina, contrary to what is reported about most hot countries, I found the nights, for most of the year, to be mild and rarely cold or humid. This experience leaves an indelible impression and sensation, which compensates for the annoyance of mosquito bites, the screeching of parrots, and the croaking of frogs (Blumenau 1999, p. 69).

While pointing out the advantages for German colonization in the south of the country, he acknowledges that factors such as prejudice and "the talk about the climate" (Blumenau 1999, p. 89)—considered unhealthy—hinder the process. The climate of the south is "generally the most stable, mild, and healthy on Earth." He criticizes the generalizations attributed to the Brazilian climate of a country with vast territorial expanse, for "those who argue against Brazil resort to tricks and do not speak of the climate of the southern part of the country, but only of the climate of the immense Empire." The healthiness of the climate, which is good in every respect, compares favorably to countries that receive German migrants and surpasses that of many U.S. states. Epidemics are rare, and "The longevity of immigrants is no less than in other countries, and people aged 70 or older are not uncommon." (Blumenau 1999, p. 105), once again highlighting the possibility of a long life in the south of the country.

Blumenau provides further details and advantages of southern Brazil's climate when comparing it to other countries, such as agricultural practices and the heat index. And "If we put everything together and compare it, the health conditions in southern Brazil are better than, or at least equal to, those of the privileged states in the United States and Australia, and are also on par with southern Chile." (Blumenau 1999, p. 107). It presents the advantages of the southern climate for agriculture by comparing it with other countries along the European immigration route.



Due to the mild, constant, and pleasant climate, the land is productive, and consequently, the distribution of agricultural work is more uniform. If we compare the beauty of the sky, which provides a sense of well-being and enhances the joy of living, perhaps southern Brazil comes close to western Texas. However, the states further north in Texas have a dreary winter and gray skies, while those in the south have an unhealthy summer and scorching heat, just like in Australia—perhaps with an even more blistering summer—which is why they fall short of the climate of southern Brazil. Even southern Chile could offer no other advantage, except perhaps a colder winter and, for some individuals, a more pleasant one, as they find this preferable to a constant climate (Blumenau 1999, p. 107).

Blumenau (1999, p. 107) highlights other geographical advantages in southern Brazil, such as the absence of violent storms, typhoons, and earthquakes. He describes the summer by comparing it to Germany to provide a better understanding of the climatic conditions, and again outlines the advantages relative to those same countries. Regarding this season, he states that thunderstorms are common and intense, forming within a few hours to briefly cloud the sky and “discharge without cooling the air much.” At this time, there is a drop in temperature, but it does not become unpleasant.

Gray, rainy days with a completely overcast sky are rarer here than in Germany and occur no more than 25 days, at most 30, spread throughout the year in Santa Catarina; in Rio Grande do Sul, perhaps half as many of these days, unlike in North America, where storms and hurricanes are more frequent and not infrequently cause great devastation. In southern Chile, near the Andean volcanoes, earthquakes occur frequently, while Australia seems to be spared this scourge, but in all these countries there are violent thunderstorms (Blumenau 1999, p. 107).

Blumenau also highlights the advantage of winter in southern Brazil when comparing it to the northern states of the United States, which “[...] does not interrupt the work of the craftsman or the farmworker, who spends less on clothing and other factors that increase the cost of living.” (Blumenau 1999, p. 113). In addition to the climate, Blumenau highlights other advantageous elements in southern Brazil and points out disadvantages. Blumenau describes the seasonal climate of the country’s south based on a stay of only four years in the country, which implies a certain degree of generalization given the spatiotemporal variability of climatic elements.

In “Endnotes,” Blumenau (1999, p. 139) reiterates his criticism of the defamation of colonization in Brazilian territory based on climatic conditions, and recommends “to those who consider themselves qualified to indoctrinate readers that, before speaking publicly on subjects about which they understand little, they should improve and update their insufficient knowledge of geography and climatology.” The spread of the notion that Brazil’s climate is unsuitable for European colonization is perpetuated by laypeople interested in redirecting the flow of migration to other countries.

Some well-meaning people, though completely uninformed, may compensate for their lack of preparation through sheer volume, filling page after page, especially those “*noble souls*” who have an interest in keeping the flow of emigrants on the usual paths and reject anything not called North America, California, or Australia. They did everything to defame colonization in Brazil, arguing that the climate is hot and inhospitable; however, many of them lack geographical knowledge about their own country, even those belonging to the so-called educated class (Blumenau 1999, p. 139).

To demonstrate the viability of settling in Brazil, Blumenau persistently compares the climate to other territories located “at the same geographical latitude, [...]” considering it “[...] very healthy, perhaps the healthiest in the world.” He details and cites examples of diseases that have affected various regions, such as the Gulf of Mexico and the southern coast of the United States, which “is ravaged by yellow fever; [...]” In the East, the plague, and “in South and Southeast Asia, cholera.” In Africa, malaria and maritime fever, and in “much of the much-praised United States there is bloody dysentery, bilious fever, and intermittent fever, which claim victims every summer and fall.” For those who intend to emigrate with “weakened lungs” to North America, “they will



pay the price in the scorching summer, and in the freezing winter, they will be cut down by tuberculosis.” (Blumenau 1999, p. 141).

He asserts that although the Brazilian coast has few cases of fevers, its image is slandered by the interests of emigration agents. In Rio de Janeiro, which, due to its very location, does not have the aforementioned diseases, epidemics are uncommon. In this sense, Blumenau once again restores the image of Brazilian territory by highlighting advantages for European emigration through comparisons with other regions.

Along the 980 geographical miles of the Brazilian coast, there are few places with endemic, intermittent, and malignant fevers that might be caused by the presence of swamps; yet Brazil is still so maligned by emigration agents in favor of North America. Rio de Janeiro has conditions that favor endemic diseases, as it lies within the Tropic of Cancer and is situated at the same latitude as Havana; to the west, it is bordered by pestilent swamps and surrounded by high mountains, which limit ventilation in homes and public squares—which are dirty and foul-smelling, especially during the suffocating summer heat—yet none of the diseases mentioned above are known to exist there, and it is rarely ravaged by epidemics.

In 1834, the cholera that ravaged the world spared Brazil, whereas Havana, the low, undulating region of southern Texas, and almost all localities along the Gulf of Mexico experience epidemics every summer and fall that decimate the population.

In Rio de Janeiro, during the summer, one can safely consume pineapple, melon, and other refreshing fruits. In contrast, in the West Indies, the consumption of these fruits during this season almost always causes yellow fever in foreigners unaccustomed to the climate (Blumenau 1999, p. 141).

The Brazilian states of the Northeast and North, even though they are hotter than the southern regions of Brazil, according to Blumenau (1999, p. 141), are milder and healthier compared to certain regions of the planet. In Bahia, “the mildest climate on Earth reigns, which is not surpassed even by the consistency of the climate in Lima and the South Sea Islands.” Also in the Northeast, Pernambuco, and in the northern states of Maranhão and Pará—the latter two being situated in “[...] humid and low-lying areas—enjoy healthy conditions unmatched by other coastal locations such as Batavia, Madras, Pondicherry, Chagres, Panama, Guayaquil, or even Singapore and Manila, [...]” These Brazilian regions have lower average temperatures, and “the hot season is milder and the cold season warmer than in other places at the same latitude.”

Blumenau (1999, p. 141) links sanitary conditions in the country’s interior to the topography, generally considering them to be good. The exception is in the “low-lying regions and valleys” because the air does not circulate freely. And “Especially in tropical countries, just as in the rest of the world, there are fevers that claim victims, but high-altitude areas are spared this scourge.” He specifies the high-altitude regions for German colonization as having a healthier climate. This strip extends from “the plateau of the southern regions of Brazil, starting from the Serra do Grão Mogol (Lat. ¹⁶⁻¹⁷S) in the Province of Minas Gerais to the western border of the Province of Rio Grande do Sul [...]”. It includes “the entire Province of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina [...]” as having a climate “suitable for Germans, with the exception of one or two river mouths with mangroves and some places in dry valleys.” He mentions that “Even the climate of the coastal strip of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo loses its inhospitability as soon as one reaches the mountain slopes, which are between 2 and 10 leagues from the coast, and in this region live many German families whose health leaves nothing to be desired.”

Like Humboldt, Blumenau’s narratives cite geographical coordinates, employing similar methods to describe nature by providing information on climate and altitude (Ferreira 2022a). According to the author (2022a, p. 36), when drawing comparisons between regions, “[...] Herrmann Blumenau articulated the distinct factors that influenced the natural composition of the area he analyzed, giving readers a more specific and precise understanding of the place described.” And contact with travelers and scientists, particularly Humboldt, encouraged Blumenau to value studies regarding nature.

Blumenau (1999, p. 141) takes care to highlight that higher-altitude regions with a healthy climate are also conducive to agricultural activities, such as rice, sugarcane, and coffee “on a large scale, and this may cause concern among people who have read about the cultivation of these plants by slaves, only in the warmer regions of the earth.” When comparing with other regions of the planet, he notes that “in southern Brazil, ‘mountain rice’ is cultivated, which can be planted in any dry, fertile soil in the same way as in the cold, mountainous



regions of southern China, along with tea, which constitutes its main crop.” There has been successful and extensive cultivation of sugarcane for 250 years in Sicily (southern France), which does not have a tropical climate. Sugarcane is also grown in the Canary Islands and southern Rio Grande do Sul at “Lat. 31 to 3²S., subject to frost throughout the winter and sometimes a little ice.”

It illustrates and compares coffee production in other regions where it can be grown under cooler climatic conditions. A hot climate is not necessary to produce flavorful coffee. In the country of origin of coffee, Abyssinia, “it is grown on the plateaus with a mild climate and not on the torrid plains. In the Mocca region, coffee is grown on the plateau, where, in winter, the low temperature reaches the freezing point.” In Brazil “[...] in São Leopoldo, at 29° to 30° S latitude, coffee is grown on a small scale, but the plants must be sheltered from frost.” (Blumenau 1999, p. 141).

Blumenau recounts his experiences and impressions in Brazil following his stay in the two southernmost states of Rio de Janeiro. Drawing on travelers’ accounts, he emphasizes the geographical conditions favorable to colonization.

If, however, conditions were as favorable to German emigrants everywhere as they are in southern Brazil—due to the climate and health conditions—our masses of emigrants would abandon the current trend toward the much-praised North American region, including Texas, with only the Banda Oriental and southern Chile able to compete with it (Blumenau 1999, p. 141).

The manner of portraying and disseminating information about Brazil’s climate reveals a spirit of nonconformity, suggesting the consultation of travelers’ accounts to support his observations—an image distorted by the interests of emigration agents.

I recommend to these and others interested in further information that they read the accounts of travelers from past and present times, such as: Langsdorff, Eschwege, Spix, Martius, Sellow, Auguste de St. Hilaire, Arsène, Isabelle, Mawe, and others. These travelers could not have imagined that 20 or 30 years after their accounts, a debate would arise regarding the suitability of the lands for large-scale colonization; therefore, I hope that more credit is given to them than to the mendacious writings of certain American and British agents, paid handsomely (Blumenau 1999, p. 143).

The opening passage of the text above, according to Ferreira (2022a), reveals Blumenau’s intention to gain credibility for his information regarding the regions he visited. His familiarity with the works of the aforementioned authors (travelers and naturalists) indicates meticulous reading and prior contact with politicians and scientists in Europe. In Europe, Blumenau disseminated printed reports, as “Hermann Blumenau and his publisher were interested in publishing practical topics, highlighting the peculiarities of the tropical climate, considered a source of ‘beneficial effects for the German immigrant’s health.’” The colony’s founder highlights other advantages “[...] that revealed a special focus on privileged information regarding the country’s image in relation to the reception of immigrants.” (Ferreira 2022a, p. 45).

There are negative factors caused by certain economic activities that make the air smell bad, such as slaughterhouses, but which do not cause disease (State of Rio Grande do Sul). Blumenau (1999, p. 143) states that “‘Between latitudes 34⁰ – 28⁰ S. Br. [...]’, a range that corresponds to Rio Grande do Sul and southern Santa Catarina, the climate is unpleasant on the coast and in the interior, as “there are many lagoons and wetlands with low banks [...]”. The climatic conditions “are similar to those of other countries located at the same latitude, particularly those in North America; however, in Brazil, only sporadic cases—never epidemics—of malignant intermittent fever have occurred.”

Blumenau associates the idea that wetland areas with low banks are susceptible to fever, and in the case of the Itajaí Valley, which is situated near the latitude, the wetlands are on high banks that facilitate the channeling and drainage of water and subsequent agricultural use of the soil.

In several rivers of the Province of Santa Catarina, including the Itajaí River, which I know well because my settlement is located there, the banks are high and followed by extensive wetlands, which can be drained through ditches, making the land arable and very fertile, as they are situated 15 to 20 feet above the river level. The wetlands are 200 paces from the homes of German families (20 to 30), Belgian families (15 to



20), and indigenous families. I give my word of honor that during my stay, both in summer and winter, I was not aware of a single case of fever, with the exception of two Black men, from Rio de Janeiro, who suffered from malignant fever (Blumenau 1999, p. 143).

When mentioning the Province of Santa Catarina, Blumenau (1999, p. 143) again emphasizes the healthiness of the climate. He acknowledges the existence of diseases in the country, but “sometimes epidemics arise, which are proven to come from abroad.” He cites examples such as the ‘Polkafieber’ flu that affected Brazil in 1846–1847, rarely fatal, which arrived on slave ships from the African coast. Smallpox appears sporadically and mainly affects Blacks and people of mixed race. And “The German settlers who came via Dunkirk on overcrowded ships were malnourished and brought typhus, but this disease did not spread.”

An endemic disease in Brazil is elephantiasis, rare in the southern highlands, and scrotal swelling, which is usually more frequent; yet generally disappears with the use of suspenders and constant washing; however, in stubborn cases, a simple surgical intervention is necessary (pulling a braid of hair, or removal of the sebaceous sheath) (Blumenau 1999, p. 143).

Blumenau cites numerous diseases, and in Brazil, particularly in the southern region, rheumatic and respiratory ailments are linked to significant temperature fluctuations at certain times of the year. The discomforts immigrants experience before acclimatization include:

[...] weakness, mild skin rashes, and sweat pustules, which subside as long as an appropriate diet is followed for two to three weeks; moreover, they affect only a few people and are imperceptible in some. Others experience headaches and fatigue for a few weeks, and treatment consists of rest and recuperation. Abscesses on the ankles, which plague immigrants for years in all hot countries, according to Vict. Bracht (Texas – 1844, p. 18), do not spare a single immigrant in Texas; however, in southern Brazil I have observed only a few cases, which rarely occur, perhaps due to the habit of washing one’s feet with warm water at night. The climate of Texas is very similar to that of the Province of Rio Grande do Sul; however, jaundice and bloody diarrhea are almost unknown here, unlike there, where they are frequent (Blumenau 1999, p. 145).

One advantage of countries with warmer climates is that one can work year-round and achieve the same results in half the time, whereas in colder climates, the working season is reduced to 6 to 7 months. Another advantage of the heat is “the growth of plants throughout the year, without harming health . There is also no need for hay or other winter fodder; barns are unnecessary, and instead of one, there are three harvests: corn, beans, and potatoes” (Blumenau 1999, p. 149).

Mal da Terra is “a disease of acclimatization.” It represents a “painless wasting away, reduced muscle strength, and, in severe cases, fever accompanied by great weakness.” Blumenau does not attribute the disease to “the hot climate, since sometimes Black people from the African coast are also affected, despite being accustomed to a hotter climate.” Using the expression “seems to” to justify the cause of the disease creates uncertainty: “It seems to be caused by depression, overwork, and especially homesickness, affecting weak and low-energy individuals, such as certain African tribes with a pronounced melancholic disposition.” Treating the disease consists of administering “[...] emetics, with a laxative effect, as is usually done in the case of mild fevers, and the illness will soon pass without requiring special care, thus eliminating the causative agents; for if there is no adequate treatment, a fever with fatal consequences may arise.” Deaths are rare, “although the first German settlers in southern Brazil had to struggle against every possible adversity, being forced to live for half a year in a miserable shed” (Blumenau 1999, p. 145).

Immigrants who are not acclimated and who work for long periods in deforestation may be affected by intermittent fever, “especially when they sleep where they work, [...]” To avoid the fever, one must “[...] seek a higher, well-ventilated place to rest, or find lodging on a neighboring property, as the fumes from the cleared forest are harmful.” The fever does not return after the forest is burned, “however, the best prevention for those who work in the woods would be to lead a healthy lifestyle” (Blumenau 1999, p. 145).



Blumenau does not attribute “mal da terra” directly to the hot climate, unlike Avé-llemant. One of the symptoms is fever; however, the founder of the Blumenau Colony asserts that “mal da terra” is an acclimatization disease, and that in the context of deforestation, it manifests itself in those who have not acclimatized. Avé-llemant, a German physician, in 1858 (1953, p. 215) during his journey to southern Brazil links the disease “mal-da-terra, *intertropical chlorosis*” to the tropics and its effects on the health of German settlers.

It is an “illness, not only of the land, due to its nearly tropical latitude, but of the soil, due to its evaporation.” The name of the disease is suggestive, and the author explains the cause and development of the disease, which he associates with the processes of changes in nature and land use by the settlers.

In hot and humid regions—and the northern half of Santa Catarina is hot and humid—where the soil, once untouched, with its virgin jungle as a fertile source of nourishment, is violently ravaged and forced to yield various agricultural products—the land, hitherto unprofaned, takes its revenge and exhales miasmas that attack and poison the blood of man, when he does not seek to defend himself with appropriate measures.

This poisoning or disturbance of healthy blood affects everyone—men and children—more than women, precisely because they are more exposed to these miasmas, whereas, outside the tropical zone, chlorosis appears more frequently among women and young ladies.

The rapid clearing of a swamp forest, which is then left under an almost vertical sun, fully exposed to Hyperion, must be the main cause of chlorosis. Thus, the process of plant decomposition and evaporation by day and the precipitation of impure dew on cold nights is endless, all the more so when, in these depressions surrounded by forests and practically enclosed by nearby mountains, no large-scale wind— —and no air current of considerable extent and depth carries away the impurities.

In this process of infection that the settler himself causes, he aids nature in taking its revenge. He does not always consider that, when he can build his house a few feet higher than the depression in the ground, he is taking a precaution for his health; he sees no pathogenic matter, smells it not, nor tastes it, and consequently it does not exist. Furthermore, he does not keep the floor of his small house dry and smooth, but leaves it as nature formed it, soiling it with all manner of moisture and keeping it in a state of natural fermentation. Every settler, when building his house in the woods, who cannot immediately lay a floor, must first of all prepare a sound foundation, clear the ground before building the house, level it as much as possible, tamp it down, and then light a fire on it as large as possible for a few days, taking care afterward to keep it from getting wet.

Food prepared carelessly and hastily is also a cause of chlorosis. I particularly suspect that the aforementioned aroids, when poorly cooked, hinder proper hematopoiesis. They must be cooked until they split open and then removed from the water, so that they dry with their own heat. Many fruits can also be harmful: sour oranges, bananas, peaches, soursops, and other imperfectly ripe myrtle family fruits, and certainly a lack of meat and animal fats in the diet, for it is precisely where livestock farming lags far behind agriculture that chlorosis appears most frequently (Avé-llemant 1953, pp. 215–216).

Blumenau and Avé-llemant’s recommendations for preventing mal da terra are similar. Avé-llemant (1953, p. 217) points out other factors that contribute to the disease, such as the custom of walking barefoot, washing one’s feet with cold water at dusk, and sleeping on the floor on a palm-leaf mat. Other factors affect the settler that are “apparently insignificant, and those of weaker constitution suffer from them and fall ill with mal-da-terra.” He details mal-da-terra in the settler’s life, its symptoms, and the processes of cure and acclimatization. The doctor represents the best form of treatment for mal-da-terra, which is a temporary ailment.

They feel unwell, sluggish, tired, with less body heat, though they sweat easily, turn pale, eventually reaching a deathly pallor, and experience palpitations. It may precede or follow a true intermittent fever. If it precedes, it is generally tertian; if it appears



afterward, then it is diurnal and later less intermittent, rather remittent and symptomatic. European chloroses are so similar to this mal-da-terra that here the symptomatology is interrupted. If nothing is done, the cardiac neurosis that accompanies it transforms into true atrophy with dilation. Diarrhea, edema in the feet, and dropsy appear, and many young settlers have already died from the “land sickness.” However, there are frequent cases in which, without any treatment or hygienic care, the illness disappeared on its own, and the pale young men and women returned to being fit and robust settlers. A process of acclimatization was observed in them.

The elimination of causal factors that are easy to see but difficult to remove may well be the main process of healing: a different residence, a different job, a different diet. As a medication, iron is recommended without restriction. Iron oxide and iron filings boiled in orange juice constitute a wonderful preparation, which is very easily digested [...].

[...] With well-maintained roads, and once cleanliness, order, morality, and discipline are established once and for all in a colony, the “earth sickness” disappears and health remains unscathed (Avé-lallemant 1953, p. 217).

The positive descriptions of nature and the population presented by Blumenau of the southern provinces of Brazil to European emigrants reveal a narrative with “utilitarian and pedagogical aims,” driven by the abundance of natural resources as catalysts for potential new ventures in the region. “His goal was the strategic promotion of southern Brazil as an immigration destination capable of preserving the essence of the Germanic spirit for the ‘New Germany’ in southern Brazil.” (Ferreira 2022a, p. 34). Blumenau’s accounts clearly highlight the climate as a natural element highly favorable to European immigration. According to Ferreira (2022a, p. 38), by frequently emphasizing the healthy and wholesome climate of southern Brazil, Blumenau sought to convince European migrants still undecided about their destination, which contributed to “[...] fictionalizing his narrative [...].”

For Blumenau’s venture to advance economically and attract immigrants, the founder’s discourses needed to demystify the hot and humid climate that had been portrayed negatively in Europe. These discourses became fundamental to promoting and consolidating the German colonization project in the Itajaí Valley, conceived as part of a political strategy within the 19th-century context. Blumenau emphasizes the healthful qualities of the climate and the region’s natural advantages to minimize the difficulties to be faced by the settlers, such as adaptation and disease. These do not constitute a neutral description, but rather an optimistic portrayal of the climate and the possibilities for the region’s economic development.

In the Province of Santa Catarina, the doctor highlights the German immigrant communities and compares Brazil to 19th-century Germany, that is, “[...] the traveler carried with him the ideal of civilization that originated in Europe [...]” (Ferreira 2022b, p. 165). In the Dona Francisca Colony, particularly Joinville, the “earth sickness” no longer has a significant influence on its development. At the beginning of the settlement, the flat terrain “and the penetration of the tide as far as the Cachoeira River caused serious illnesses. And today Joinville is a healthy and cheerful place, where the fearful sanitary theories are entirely silenced in the face of experience and the magnificent growth of children and adolescents.” (Avé-lallemant 1953, p. 217-218).

Tschudi (1988), who held degrees in natural sciences and medicine, traveled through the colonies of Santa Catarina in 1861. His work “Reisen durch Süd-Amerika” consists of five volumes. The third volume, published in 1867, includes the chapter “The Colonies in the Province of Santa Catarina” (Piazza 1988). He compares the climate of the Da. Francisca Colony, describing it as “[...] completely favorable for European settlers and more temperate than that of the Province of Espírito Santo, where the daytime heat is less intense than the nighttime temperature.” (Tschudi 1988, p. 28). The traveler states that endemic fevers were common in Joinville and have almost completely disappeared in recent years. Endemic fever likely represents a symptom associated with the “sickness of the land” described three years earlier by Avé-lallemant, who noted that the disease no longer seriously affected the region.

He cites three immigrant families who report difficulties with the local climate, but tends to attribute their physical appearance to dietary issues.

It strikes me that three families, so-called compatriots, from Switzerland complained that the climate in the Colony would please them less than the harsh climate of



Switzerland, where in the summer they could roam the forests; in the winter, however, they had to spend their time in abandoned huts, cold and hungry. Most of them looked pale and sick, yet, most certainly, far less due to climatic influences than to their meager diet, for in their innate desire to migrate they cannot accustom themselves to a sedentary way of life and earn their frugal livelihood by weaving baskets and begging for alms (Tschudi 1988, pp. 28–29).

In the Blumenau Colony, the climate “[...] is healthy and suitable for German immigrants.” and “Frosts cause less damage than in the Da. Francisca, although here in Blumenau, too, they have already made themselves felt,” but he points out the floods responsible for much damage to the colonies located on the riverbanks (Tschudi 1988, p. 51). He mentions the floods in the years 1852, 1855, and 1863. He also compares the climate of the two colonies to that of Germany, where crops suffer more damage in winter due to frost and hail. The traveler visits the colonies of Santa Isabel and Vargem Grande, describing an excellent climate that is “quite favorable” for Germans (Tschudi 1988, p. 71). In Desterro, he specifies the conditions that make the climate healthy.

The climate of Santa Catarina is wonderful and proverbial throughout Brazil. Indeed, there should be no other place that could offer those suffering from lung disease (tuberculosis) a more suitable stay than this island of “eternal spring.” Only a few coastal areas—and among them, precisely the capital, due to its swampy terrain—are afflicted by malaria (Tschudi 1988, p. 81).

Tschudi briefly describes the climate of the colonies of Santa Catarina but considers them suitable for European immigrants. Like other travelers, Tschudi systematized the knowledge of the regions he visited and their utilitarian value (Silva 2022). According to the author (p. 82), “[...], the Swiss traveler’s accounts of the province of Santa Catarina connect with broader trends regarding reports of journeys through Brazil in the 19th century, [...] resulting from colonization policies and incentives for European immigration.”

Gernhard, a reporter for the Reform newspaper in Joinville, recounts his experiences in the colonies of “Dona Francisca, Hansa, and Blumenau” in 1900. He highlights the prosperity of German immigration in Brazilian territory, pointing to the southern region as a destination where “In the blessed land of southern Brazil, the Southern Cross shines at night with its magical enchantment, and by day the subtropical sun shines. But there is no shortage of shadows; I have no intention of concealing them—they appear where they must appear, yet they do not cloud the overall picture.” (Gernhard 1998, p. 48). The author describes the geography of the country’s regions with the aim of informing immigrants, of “providing simple, truthful, and accurate accounts to familiarize the German people with regions that in the future may offer them conditions to live, preserve their customs and traditions, acquire property, and through diligent work achieve a certain prosperity.” In this context, “There is no place in the country, apart from southern Brazil, that can offer better geographical conditions than the states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, and Paraná. Among these, we must pay special attention to Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina.” (Gernhard 1998, p. 49–50).

In other passages, he emphasizes the attributes of the southern region of the country for European immigration, for “The subtropical region, with its healthy climate and lack of subalpine mountains, offers conditions conducive to colonization. To wealthy tourists, I recommend a recreational trip to Paraná, Santa Catarina, or Rio Grande do Sul. The journey on a steamship is exciting, [...], storms are rare [...].” (Gernhard 1998, p. 51). Like Blumenau, he recognizes the topographical and climatic differences in Brazil, whereas in Germany they did not bother to distinguish between the northern and southern regions. Regarding the climatic difference between the extremes of Brazilian territory, he makes observations similar to Blumenau’s by pointing out the influence on human development.

In northern Brazil, the tropical climate causes physical and mental exhaustion, and slave labor is a necessity because the physical constitution of white people cannot withstand the heavy labor of agriculture.

In the south, under a subtropical climate, a strong population has developed, and there is room to accommodate millions of inhabitants.

The central government recognized these differences and applied them in the granting of land to German settlers.



Germany should have recognized and abolished the barriers to immigration to southern Brazil, whereas a ban on immigration to the north is justified (Gernhard 1998, pp. 52–53).

Gernhard mentions the difficulties faced by the settlers, such as the diseases that “In the early days, there were cases of intermittent fever and acclimatization problems, which for some disappeared quickly, while others suffered for many years” (Gernhard 1998, p. 55). In the early 20th century, Lacmann (1997, p. 18) in “Cavalgadas e impressões no sul do Brasil” (1906) also addresses environmental conditions as one of the factors influencing human appearance, noting that “Throughout the Brazilian population, particularly in the northern region, there is physical degeneration, likely resulting from the influence of the climate and the marked prevalence of tuberculosis and syphilis.” He associates this phenomenon with the great diversity of the population’s origins.

Lacmann expresses “his belief in geographical determinism, which was also a basic premise for many 19th-century intellectuals” (Ferreira 2000, p. 76), a belief shared by Gernhard. Ule (2008), a specialist in maritime sciences, visited the Itajaí Valley in 1925. He describes the difficulties faced by the young settler, who “At first he suffers from the hot climate and at the same time is tormented by swarms of mosquitoes, foot lice, ticks, moths, and mites. One must acclimate, not so much to the climate, but to develop a certain degree of insensitivity to the aforementioned pests.” (Ule 2008, p. 27).

Final Considerations

Considering the implications of the results and discussions presented, it is evident that Blumenau’s contributions were significant for understanding and promoting the climate of southern Brazil as an environment favorable to European colonization, especially German colonization. His account, though based on personal observations and experiences, emphatically highlighted the climatic advantages, particularly in the South, emphasizing the healthiness, pleasantness, and favorable sanitary conditions, albeit with reservations regarding low-lying wetland areas. The direct comparison with countries such as Germany, North America, and Australia reinforced the superiority of the southern Brazilian climate for agriculture, highlighting crops such as rice, sugarcane, and coffee. Blumenau’s impressions reflected not only his experiences but also his interest in promoting German colonization, driven by contacts and knowledge acquired in Europe.

However, the limitations of his research—particularly the descriptive and subjective bias of the travel report, as well as the short duration of his stay in Brazil—suggest constraints in fully understanding the southern climate. Nevertheless, his work remains relevant for understanding his motivations and perceptions regarding the local climate, as well as his role in attracting German immigrants to the region. Throughout his explanations, Blumenau not only highlights the advantages of the climate but also seeks to demystify the negative associations with illnesses and discomforts attributed to the hot Brazilian climate, emphasizing the temporary nature of certain ailments and attributing epidemics to external sources. His approach, while contributing to stimulating immigration and regional economic development, also reveals the initial difficulties European migrants faced in acclimatization and adaptation.

The accounts of Blumenau and travelers, despite their limitations, remain an important milestone for understanding not only the climate of southern Brazil but also the perceptions and efforts to promote German colonization in the region, shaping the country’s historical and migratory landscape.

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